

MOTHER COW
by Alina Jacobs

A BRIEF NOTE ON CONTEXT

You may or may not remember the 2001 anthrax attacks, that hardly matters. To say that this play is about that incident is good for promotional purposes, if necessary, as it is a Legitimate Topic for a Play to be About and is technically true. However, I would rather you think of this topic as one of many caught in a web, each existing to contextualize each other.

The other main two historical incidences depicted herein are Operation Sea Spray, where in 1950 the US Navy sprayed San Francisco with bacterial agents to simulate what a deliberate biological attack on a city would look like (later admitted to in 1977) and the usage of germ warfare by the US military in the Korean Peninsula between 1950-53 (largely suspected, never admitted to).

The audience does not need to be told any of this, I highly suspect that, individually and collectively, they will subconsciously form connections while sitting in their seats, possibly even entirely new connections, perspectives and conclusions.

A NOTE ON THE “SWIMSUIT GIRL”

The character of the Swimsuit Girl, regardless of her costume (she has a few), does not speak in her ‘own’ voice until specifically noted. She can act as conduit for other voices, this is her primary characteristic for much of the play.

The Stage is covered in brown paper. There are movable pieces, such as chairs, but mentions of other set items can be taken as suggestions rather than demands. Scenes generally flow right into one another in a jarring, nonrealistic manner. Certain scenes can even occur simultaneously for optimal effect. Do not worry about creating a ‘strong sense of place,’ we are where we are, which is here!

Sections in brackets [] should either be spoken as written or swapped with a correlating word/phrase as appropriate per iteration of the performance.

Please be extra nice to the audience as they come in, give them ample time to use the bathroom as there will not be an intermission.

part one:

TAKE PENECILIN NOW!

one

An unidentifiable facility of some kind, the public-private partnership no one asked for (of course).

Silence. Darkness.

A spotlight on the scientist, slumped in a cheap swivel chair. He is wearing a collared shirt under a red sweater. He sweats.

THE SCIENTIST

Oh mother cow, who is there but not there to me,
facing away in my dreams always obscured.

And your grants—your pants—ridiculous—they were around his knees—flopping it around—
doing it for attention like an idiot child—syphilis sores—although maybe they were added after
the fact by my imagination

Though I would like to think about it as little as possible, here I am, thinking about it.

It is not so far, it does not take it so far.

It is waiting to be dug up. It may wait another 25 years.
It might be premature.

He sweats, he nearly faints, he drinks water.

There is no shortage of funds. And if there were we could just imagine them! Which would be
just as good.

Put a little imaginary cream in your coffee, tastes as good.

Ah, I can taste it too. Sour as it has become.

two

Flashes of white light. Silence. More flashes of white light.

Sound of children playing, baby noises.

Fish in a tank

Birds chirping

Cries and moans

A slicing machine

Heavy breathing

A printer

Sounds of swirling.

*Voices sounding as spoken through a broken radio, distorted and
unintelligible.*

Silence

Very dim light. It might be snowing. Two small children run around on stage. They are accompanied by a voiceover.

CHILD (V.O.)

Don't touch that, it's dangerous.
It fell from the sky.

three

Lights reveal the rest of the stage. It is covered in brown paper. There are choice objects and furniture items. Enter Bev, 27, a woman with a shaved head. She paces around anxiously. She sits in the swivel chair. She sits in a rocking chair. She self-soothes by rubbing her forearms. Micro screams. Tiny and less than 1 second.

BEV

It's perfect.

A long silence, she clenches.

BEV

But if only I had a window. Another means of egress. (Pause.)
And a set of clouds for counting like sheep.

four

San Francisco, 1950. Lights are dim. HENRY crouched somewhere in the corner. Heavy breathing. Lights pop on a bit brighter. A humble living room. Enter MILLICENT, a robust woman in a career dress, hat and gloves. She is brimming with enthusiasm.

MILLICENT

Honey!!

Honey I'm hole.

(Laughs)

Get it? I'm in the hole now.

Sometimes you've got to laugh at your own... If no one else will...

I want to tell you,

My first day

They're going to let me have a whole typewriter to myself

With oiled keys

And no one is allowed to touch it but me!

And Paul I guess

(gossipy)

He always comes to work half drunk

or half hungover

Honey?

Where are you?
What was that?
Honey?
Baby??
Henry???
God damn
What happened to you??
Say something.

HENRY
I just shat blood.

five

Mid day. MARIANA and RANDY sitting in a café. They used to love it, and now it is a sick reminder of better times. But they are still there. Empty cups and a stack of papers on the table. RANDY has long hair.

MARIANA
You hate it.

RANDY
I haven't even—

MARIANA
You can't bear it.

RANDY
Let me finish—shit, let me begin!

MARIANA
Okay...

RANDY
I don't hate it.

MARIANA
But?

RANDY
But I kind of can't—

MARIANA
Can't stand it. It repulses you.

RANDY
Well, so far—

MARIANA
So far?

RANDY
I told you, I just finished part three—

MARIANA
I figured you wouldn't like it.

RANDY
I'm going to reserve final judgement until I actually complete what you sent me. And even then, I mean, there are always so many steps involved...
People who think they can just ace it in three drafts are usually deluding themselves. *(Pause.)*
Did you see the new Terrence Malick movie?

MARIANA
Don't change the subject.

RANDY
Everyone says it's the thing to—

MARIANA
You really hate it.
You feel it in your bowels.

RANDY
Pretty sure it's just the coffee. Have you come up with a title?

MARIANA
I have some in mind.

RANDY
Something about the moo-cow perhaps?

MARIANA
Excuse me?

RANDY
Anthrax comes from cows. Right?

MARIANA
Right.

RANDY
Never mind.

An awkward silence. RANDY shuffles through the papers.

MARIANA
Don't read in front of me, it's rude.

RANDY
I wasn't, I was just referring.

MARIANA
I know that face, the face of the kid that doesn't do the reading. But needs to make up participation points.

RANDY
Can you relax?

MARIANA
(not relaxed)
I'm buttery. I'm margarine. I'm seed oil.

RANDY
(looking through the papers)
Okay.

MARIANA
Half of them are borderline illiterate anyway.

RANDY
Of course. But you've got to have some empathy, or at least sound like it.

MARIANA
I live a dissolute life.

RANDY
To be sure.

MARIANA
I fucked a student.

RANDY
Peaches. Do you need a lawyer?

MARIANA
I was kidding.

RANDY
Oh?

MARIANA
I don't fuck I only make myself increasingly amenable
and only with the TAs.

RANDY
Offer still stands, I know a guy. He's from Queens, lot of vitality. Not one of the geriatrics.
You never know when you'll need one.

MARIANA
I'll keep it in mind.

RANDY
How dissolute *are* we talking?

MARIANA
It's none of your business.

RANDY
You brought it up.

MARIANA
It's none of your business. You've never stopped being possessive.

RANDY
I possess nothing. All I have are my subscriptions and my debts.
I don't even want to possess anything, sounds incredibly stressful.

MARIANA
You're a modern man.

RANDY
Existing out of time. Wind in my fucking balls.

A moment of silence. RANDY laughs.

MARIANA
What?
What?
Don't read in front of me.

RANDY

Trust me I'm not even reading it, to be totally honest I was just letting my eyes sort of glaze over the words...

I remembered something...

(Laughs) Didn't you say—

Didn't you say you, like always used to say that you needed something really bad to happen to you in order to I don't know give you some sort of—

MARIANA

I'm leaving. *(Doesn't move. A moment.)*

RANDY

And?

MARIANA

What?

RANDY

You said you were leaving?

MARIANA

Your hair has grown quite long.

Slight pause. No one moves.

RANDY

Time doing its thing.

You want an affogato?

MARIANA

I don't think I could handle one.

RANDY

Pity.

RANDY stands and briefly exits. He returns.

MARIANA

Can you get me a biscotti?

RANDY

Go get it yourself.

Mariana does not move.

RANDY

Let's start at chapter one. *(Silence.)* Acetaminophen toxicity. The liver as the janitor of the body.

Mariana bolts up and exits. A moment. She re-enters with a biscotti, she is gnawing on it like a dog.

RANDY
Are you ok?

Mariana places the biscotti on the table, licks her lips sheepishly.

RANDY
You seem bitter about something.

MARIANA
My shame is—

RANDY
Unremitting?

MARIANA
Don't presume—

RANDY
Oh now I'm—

MARIANA
Don't—

RANDY
I'm the one who—

LYLE
(off stage)
OH hey guys.

A moment.
Enter LYLE, short hair, sheepish. Mariana and Randy look at him as though he were covered in ash.

RANDY
Oh.

MARIANA
Oh.

LYLE
It's been// forever.

MARIANA

//A while!

RANDY

Yeah...

LYLE

Are you guys still—

MARIANA

No, ha, no more of that—

LYLE

At the university?

MARIANA

Oh. Yes. Unfortunately.

RANDY

She's on sabby.

LYLE

Congratulations.

MARIANA

Thanks.

RANDY

She's the youngest person to ever take a sabby.

LYLE

Not necessarily, but then again they call it something else.

Awkward laughter.

MARIANA

We hadn't heard from you, during Minnesota... We all thought—

Randy abruptly exits.

LYLE

He looks like he's got a lot on his mind.

MARIANA

He's not so lucky to be blank and empty like us.

Randy returns, with the affogato.

RANDY

Lyle, can I get you something?

LYLE

No, no I was just popping in. It's good to see you two.

MARIANA

It's good to see you as well.

RANDY

It's really no problem, the coffee here is actually good, not battery water.

LYLE

I'm off the stuff currently.

RANDY

A glass of milk?

LYLE

Off that too.

RANDY

Well suit yourself. Is your phone number still the same?

MARIANA

Where are you living?

RANDY

Does your mother still have the house in Yonkers?

LYLE

It's beautiful today.

MARIANA

We wouldn't know.

RANDY

(laughing)

We really wouldn't.

LYLE

I'll call you. *(Pause.)* The 9 train is back in Manhattan.

He exits. Mariana and Randy look at each other. A moment.

MARIANA
I thought he—

RANDY
Was dead?

MARIANA
Yes.

RANDY
Me too.

MARIANA
The 9 train is back in Manhattan?

RANDY
I wouldn't know.

six

POLLY DITHER, a young (nearly a rookie) public high school teacher, addresses the audience. Metallic pings and pangs of video conferencing applications in the background.

POLLY
I'm laughing!
I am, you can't see it, but I am!
At this point, what else can you do?
They are little shits
Not all of them
Well a good amount
When you meet their parents it all clicks—
The lines of thinking—
And you see yourself as a tiny fennel seed in the tossed vomit salad of their young lives.
Every summer though, I do miss them.
I would very much like to play that joke, the classic teacher joke. And I really do look young, for my age, young enough—you pretend you're a student waiting for the class to start, then five minutes past the hour, you pop in the front of the class and start lecturing like no problem! Gets their heart rates going.
Then they know everything you say has an implicit double meaning.
At least.
(shouting into the aether)
HELLO CLASS!

Four students enter and form a semi-circle around Polly, their facial expressions are a mix of lethargic and overstimulated.

STUDENTS

(some exhausted, some hyper)

HELLO.

POLLY

How was everyone's weekend?

STUDENT 2

Terrible.

My cat died.

STUDENT 1

(automatic, but genuine)

We belong to God and to Him we return.

POLLY

I'm so sorry to hear that. Losing a pet is a genuine trauma, one that we tend to dismiss as we are made to compare these personal traumas with the great historical traumas that we contend with on a daily basis.

STUDENT 4

(smug)

You're cheapening trauma.

STUDENT 3

Shut up Larry.

POLLY

Anyone else? *(No.)*

Does anyone remember where we left off last week?

STUDENT 4

Isn't that your job?

POLLY

I know, I'm just testing y'all.

STUDENT 3

(aside)

Is she allowed to say y'all?

STUDENT 1

Obviously, she just said it.

STUDENT 4

I wanna see a certificate.

POLLY

Well do you remember or not?

STUDENT 2

Take penicillin now!

STUDENT 1

Fourth grade, Greendale school.

STUDENT 3

Death to Israel!

STUDENT 4

Death to America!

The Students are whipped into a cathartic “death to America” frenzy, because, well, it really is quite fun to say...

seven

The facility. The Scientist sits upright in a swivel chair beside a dying companion stretched between two swivel chairs. Beeps and clicks of medical machinery.

ONE OF US

(dying)

One day you can tell them
all the things that happened

You can ascribe it to me

As much of it as you want

Except... *(Pause.)*

There were people above me, just because they were hard to see sometimes doesn't mean they weren't above us.

You can say it to your family, to mine

But not to Ada...

Nothing personal

Though I never liked her

But don't filthy me in front of her

You can tell her the truth or nothing at all

A long pause. The hum and beeping of machines.

ONE OF US

You were one of us.
 And you still are
 You're stuck with the things you've done
 Even if it's gone from the news, from your life
 It's still there
 And it's moving closer
 And the closer it is the harder it is to see it.

eight

An image: Harsh spotlight on the SWIMSUIT GIRL, however here she is wearing a tracksuit. She runs laps around the audience. Her face morphs into a ragged elder face imposed on the young athletic body, which seems to be about to 4 and a half feet tall.

nine

Bev is still rocking in the chair, eyes closed. There is a pillow on her lap, which she squeezes intermittently.

BEV

Sometimes I think I hallucinated you
 Out of animal bits of skin and bones
 And jagged flesh parts
 And when we lived in that sweet purgatory
 It all seemed possible
 Of course it wasn't it just seemed like that.

Lights change. Bev becomes BEVERLY MONA, her seventeen year old self. Enter OWEN. He presents her with a piece of milk chocolate. She bites into it.

BEVERLY MONA

Wow

Wow

Wow

Wow

It really does taste like vomit.

ten

An image: The swimsuit girl is dressed in a modest swimsuit (think 1920's bathing outfit). Loud voiceover in German discussing flight safety procedures. She acts them out accordingly. She tries to speak but does not. She is strangled with the oxygen mask cord. She un-strangles herself. A moment. The voiceover instructs us to adjust our own oxygen mask before helping anyone else. The instruction repeats over and over.

eleven

Randy and Mariana, many years earlier. She has a stack of papers that she appears to be doodling on. He is lying sideways.

RANDY

We never go anywhere.

MARIANA

That's not true, we went to Dinkelsbühl.

RANDY

When we moved here you said we'll go everywhere, we'll fish and camp and rent a car, we'll take the sleeper trains, but it's been three years and we never leave the neighborhood.

When we lived in Paris you said, we'll go everywhere.

But we never left Paris, we just sat around and didn't look at each other.

And Dinkelsbühl was terrible I might as well get drunk in my living room.

MARIANA

Well that's your problem, sweetie. I suggest anything to you, and you say it's not worth the energy, you might as well just get DRUNK in your living room. And not make eye contact!
(Pause.)

Was it really so terrible? We stayed in that guest house

We drank out of those funny looking vessels.

RANDY

It was pretty empty.

MARIANA

Yes, I suppose it was.

Where would you like to go?

Hmm?

RANDY

Ah forget it.

twelve

Bev and THE FRIEND are watching a movie on an unseen television.

Voices and sound effects from the TV

FRIEND

I haven't had a shit in three days.

Long pause, Bev does not display interest.

FRIEND

I said—

BEV

It's not so bad.

FRIEND

No I mean—Not like a good shit, but NOTHING.

BEV

Not so unusual I mean. It's all relative, you know. Everyone's on a different schedule.

FRIEND

I keep thinking about Elvis

How he died

Yards of shit in his intestines

The intestinal tract is like a marathon, like 26 miles or something when you stretch it all out. Did you know that? (*Silence.*) Did you know that?

BEV

I'm thinking.

Yes I suppose I remember it from somewhere.

FRIEND

I want to be suspended from the ceiling, limbs tied in webs of junk.

BEV

I want to watch the movie.

FRIEND

Oh. Right.

(*Pause.*)

Sometimes I think I'm too fucking debased too dirty to ever get it back and be clean or resemble clean—

BEV

(*gesturing to the tv screen*)

Please.

FRIEND

It's so boring!

BEV

It's Lana Turner!

FRIEND

Oh I thought that was
 You know
 Some other blonde.....

BEV
 No more channels no DVDs
 Just an avenue of choices.

FRIEND
 Oh I remember choice
 O...

thirteen

*An image: A large object obscuring our view, such as a pillar.
 Sound of trains going by, we see hands covered in rubber
 dishwashing gloves poke out momentarily.
 A head peering.
 Darkness.*

fourteen

STUDENT 3
 Get a load of this guy.

Student 3 points a deriding finger at Student 4.

STUDENT 3
 Apparently everything that has happened throughout history was totally inevitable because—?
 Fate?
 And the thoughts in your head— are like—

STUDENT 4
(boldly cutting in)
 What you perceive as “thoughts,” my child, are just little chemicals in your brain manifesting in
 pre-programmed ways!

STUDENT 3
 Yeah, but who does the programming dingus??

STUDENT 1
 I’m sorry, I must not—

STUDENT 3
 Have done the reading?

STUDENT 1

Oh my goddddd, I did the reading, get off my dick!

POLLY

Civility, friends.

No need to let things spiral right now.

STUDENT 1

Are you saying that a bunch of old white bozos who can't get an erection without drugs and shit are planning the very nature of our reality?? That the news tomorrow is their board meeting yesterday??

STUDENT 3

Straw-manning!

STUDENT 4

(to Student 3)

Debate club flunky!

STUDENT 2

(to Student 1)

You think everything is random?

Dice being cast but like, without hands?

So we just sit around and wait?

STUDENT 1

I didn't—

STUDENT 4

(smug)

That's exactly what I said.

POLLY

I think everyone has made a very good point.

Clearly you can see evidence of all these things,

so what lies in the middle?

What shape is drawn by the crisscrossed shadows?

What can be done without rehearsal?

How has our environment been built around us?

fifteen

An image: The Swimsuit Girl eats (slurps?) a spoonful of yogurt. Very pained expression. Sounds of overwhelming whimpering.

sixteen

Bev is rocking in the chair. She is wearing the uniform of an ice cream chain store. A long sigh.

Light and sound, distant voices. Bev regresses to her teen self. A telephone rings. She army crawls across the floor and places the telephone to her ear and hums. A voice from the phone:

VOICE

I am so glad you made it.
 Tomorrow we can have a picnic, wouldn't that be nice?
 I'll make potato salad. And we'll drink apple juice.
 Oh I know, I know what with the toxic rains...
 Maybe the day after that then.
 Nothing wrong with being cautious and patient.
 Why don't you go look at your rocks?
 What have they said to you today?

*Trailing, repeating...
 Beverly Mona lies on the floor, she draws patterns in the air with
 her finger.
 Enter the Friend. Bev snaps into the present.*

FRIEND

I don't think it's going to work.

BEV

Why?

FRIEND

Well it's...
 Ok, well,
 You've always liked to celebrate things.

BEV

Not always...
 But sure, why not?

FRIEND

It's a little incongruent with your—
 I mean, you have a point, why not?
 That outfit it's just—
 It's *a lot*.
 Why yellow?

BEV

It was on sale—and I like it.

FRIEND

I'm sorry.

I don't think I can handle it right now.
 I mean
 I don't think I can be in front of others right now...
 So...

Bev starts to breathe heavily, she is trapped swinging between ages.

FRIEND
 Don't cry
 Umm
 Ummm

The Friend starts to pace, rubbing their hands uncomfortably, clearly more anxious than Bev right now.

BEV
 Comfort me.

FRIEND
(snapping somewhat)
 It sends the wrong message! It's not what I was taught!

An uncomfortable silence. They look at each other for real this time.

FRIEND
 What's wrong?
 Are you having a memory??
(Pause.)
 Say something
 Say something please say something to me
 I care about you a lot.

seventeen

Many years earlier. Randy, Lyle and Mariana are sitting on the floor, looking up at the sky.

MARIANA
 I would like if something really bad were to happen to me
 Because I could give my life this encompassing narrative, this before-after split effect, like—
 Where's MY unspeakable tragedy??
 I want to lie in bed for days and utterly lose track of time
 Have large sections of my brain reduced to soft grey
 Because I do that already, but have no excuse for any of it.

RANDY
Shut up shut up shut up.

MARIANA
What??

RANDY
Like what the ever-lunching FUCK is your problem?
Your parents' 401k too secure?
Jesus.

LYLE
I don't understand...

MARIANA
(sarcastic)
You're supposed to be offended?

RANDY
I need a beer.

LYLE
(oblivious)
I need a hundred dollars.

eighteen

The classroom. The Students are on their break, Student 2 and Polly conference privately.

STUDENT 2
I keep thinking about her.

POLLY
What was her name?

STUDENT 2
Mimi.

POLLY
Oh Mimi, poor Mimi, like *La Bohème*?

STUDENT 2
Uh...

POLLY
She was old?

STUDENT 2
Seventeen.

POLLY
Older than you!

STUDENT 2
Yeah.
Sometimes when I'm lying in bed I hear scratch scratching on the door
But it's just my imagination
Or maybe it's rats.

POLLY
Death is hard to make sense of
It never gets easier
Except maybe when you're really old and everyone you grew up with is dead
Hard to say.

A bell dings, the Students reluctantly re-convene.

POLLY
Hope everyone had a good break!!
We were just having a little chat about death actually
It sneaks up on you—can anyone tell me the first stage of grief?

STUDENT 4
(smug)
It's not just a river in Egypt.

STUDENT 3
Larry I hate your guts, you—

POLLY
Now now...
Indeed...
The tendency to dismiss the bad news as not real
She's just sleeping, et cetera
Maybe there aren't only five stages, just like there are way more than five senses.
Where am I going with this?

The students are thinking.

POLLY
Interpreting individual deaths as symbols, questions, patterns, plausibilities....
The heart attack gun!

STUDENT 3

It's not real.

STUDENT 4

Looks who's in the Nile now...

STUDENT 3

Larry you rat bastard motherfuck—

POLLY

Kids!

Ok, we don't know, no one knows. Not the point.

Can anyone attest in their own words to...

The non-assassination assassination?

STUDENT 1

Well... When someone commits [shzzzide] and you don't always know, like was it that, you know?

STUDENT 2

Like shooting oneself in the head times two.

STUDENT 1

Especially when it comes at an uhh inconvenient time.

And all the cops and uh feds are breaking into their apartment tapping their phones those kind of shenanigans...

then who can really say...

nineteen

*The Swimsuit Girl pushes around a stuffed animal in a toy stroller.
She talks on the phone, it is a voice that does not 'belong' to her:*

SWIMSUIT GIRL

Oh god that's disgusting.

She and her friends are so disgusting I bet they've got worms,
like like like they don't believe in meds, they're abusing those kids depriving them of Adderall
they'll never make honor roll, they'll never write a good college essay.

She shakes the little stuffed animal.

And little Mandy she sits so good watching her videos she never touches the boils on her throat,
pays the other kids no mind whatsoever.

She is still scared of doggies after the incident in June, we'll have to keep working on that.

twenty

Around the same time as the café scene. Mariana and the VISITOR in the kitchen of her messy Brooklyn apartment. There is no table, all eating or drinking must be done standing up at the kitchen counter. Sound of water boiling.

MARIANA

Here's where I gentrify [South Slope].

VISITOR

Oh darling.

Oh sweetheart.

These floors...

You're getting a good deal?

MARIANA

Pretty good.

It came with a microwave.

VISITOR

Oh, yes.

MARIANA

How was Zimbabwe?

VISITOR

Zimbabwe, oh yes, Zimbabwe.

Well it's very close to Mozambique.

The edges of the Limpopo river basin.

But let me try to tell you something you don't know.

MARIANA

Black or green?

VISITOR

Green.

MARIANA

I also have rooibos.

VISITOR

Green is fine.

Mariana pours the water into two mugs, real tacky gift-baggie relics, probably from a conference, you would not buy them for yourself even at the thrift store. She hands one to the Visitor.

MARIANA

I'd offer you some food to go with it, but I have nothing at the moment.

VISITOR

Sweet Mari.

MARIANA

I like your jacket. Very timeless.

VISITOR

I wanted to talk to you about something—

MARIANA

Zimbabwe? Mozam—

VISITOR

Your book—

MARIANA

(in disappointment, dread, etc.)

Oh! It's not finished quite yet—

VISITOR

I don't think it will give you as much pleasure as you think.

MARIANA

(a small laugh)

I don't expect any. That's not the point. The only pleasure at this juncture is being DONE with it not having to do it any more...

VISITOR

Let me rephrase

I think you'll be happier leaving it in the drafts

Or giving it a posthumous release

In many many many many years, obviously.

MARIANA

I spent my whole sabbatical on it. I haven't been thinking about anything else for months am I just supposed to let all of that go to waste?

VISITOR

Think of it long-term.

MARIANA

Okay?

VISITOR

They will pigeonhole you, for one thing.

You won't be allowed to write anything else besides the little thali plate of choices set out for you.

Do you want to be the conspiracy lady? The cranky witch or otherwise witchy crank who sees three letter agencies behind every cupboard hinge?

Even when you're old and grey?

(Pause.)

You want revenge. I get it—

On your colleagues that talk about you in the hallways, for instance, or on us because we thought so little of you back in the day.

But it's not the revenge one purchases like a commodity

But an ongoing process of feeling

Like self-actualization you are always and only striving, just striving and striving, you can never quite reach it.

MARIANA

Like orgasm.

VISITOR

Uh, sure...

MARIANA

I'm kidding!

Look I'm kidding.

Dramatic gesture with the tea, dumping it somewhere inappropriate.

MARIANA

(red it the face, losing control)

I'm so clumsy!!

twenty-one

POLLY

Can anyone tell me, what is a limited hangout?

The students start to scramble, as though they haven't done the reading.

POLLY

In your own words.

STUDENT 3

When we go get sodas and 'forget' to invite Larry for being such a piece of—

STUDENT 4

When I go to your mom's house for some homemade cookies and video streaming and I go for the panty grab—

POLLY

With seriousness!

STUDENT 1

Is metaphor allowed?

STUDENT 4

(mocking)

Is metaphor allowed?

POLLY

Tasteful metaphors, sure.

STUDENT 1

Ok ok.

It's when you have all these balls in your hands.

STUDENT 3

Hehe.

POLLY

Shhhh.

STUDENT 1

And you can only keep adding so many balls before the situation gets out of control and you end up dropping all of them.

But you can't just stop adding new balls for some reason.

Like a weird compulsion thing.

So you let a few of them go.

But mostly the ones you stopped liking anyway.

Though maybe you never liked any of them?

But you toss the unwanted ones.

And by the time they've hit the floor you've got like three new ones.

twenty-two

*San Francisco, 1977, Henry and Millicent are middle aged now.
The sit in silence, open newspapers on their laps.*

MILLICENT

But you didn't die.

And they never took your sample

So I don't know.

HENRY

It's all there, the pink lines, everything.

MILLICENT

But you can't know for sure.

HENRY

Did I make it up??

MILLICENT

It was twenty seven years ago.

HENRY

I could forget all about it, and then it would be gone for good.

But...

If only there was some kind of proof...

What about when they do it again?

MILLICENT

Don't be ridiculous, why would they do it again?

HENRY

Only one person died the first time.

That's practically nobody.

They need more evidence.

MILLICENT

Go back to bed.

You'll have good dreams now.

twenty-three

The Scientist and a NEW RECRUIT are seated in the cafeteria, sounds of cash transactions, hoots, hollers, animal squealing. The New Recruit eats a hearty item, but nothing too gross that will traumatize the actor who will have to consume for this scene. The Scientist does not eat, he attempts to take a sip from a paper carton of chocolate milk. The New Recruit looks at him with disgust.

NEW RECRUIT

Man, I'm disavowed—

THE SCIENTIST

Excuse me?

NEW RECRUIT
Huh?

THE SCIENTIST
You were saying...

NEW RECRUIT
Yeah.
I am disavowed of whatever's in your arteries right now?
But we're cool? Yeah?

THE SCIENTIST
Why would you say that?

The New Recruit shrugs, eats.

THE SCIENTIST
Yeah, we're cool cool.

NEW RECRUIT
Cool.
Yeah I said cool.

THE SCIENTIST
Is this what the Ivies are these days?

NEW RECRUIT
I'm not that young, gramps.
But back in your day the OSS was still around, huh?

THE SCIENTIST
What's that?

NEW RECRUIT
Indeed.
They scooped you from some dump abroad?
Scooped you up with a paper clip and tongs?

THE SCIENTIST
I can be just as WASPy as any Yale honeyboy.
I love coffee from Seven Eleven, for instance.
I just love it.

NEW RECRUIT
Ahh.
I just thought,

because how you dress,
and your first name.
And your last name.

THE SCIENTIST

In a better life we might have been tied, you know.
Arm to fist, ankle to ankle
So think of it as a reprieve
Until the next go around.

NEW RECRUIT

(gesturing towards an offstage individual)
Oh my god!
Is she eating quail eggs??

The Scientist turns around, he sees something in this distance. He stands and squints, he cannot tell exactly what it is.

part 2: flat world

twenty-four

Tears, muffled whimpering. The makeup smeared face of the Swimsuit Girl. She walks amongst the audience, she drapes herself in a very large pale pink bathrobe over her modest swimsuit. She becomes an ELDERLY PERSON and addresses various individual audience members.

SWIMSUIT GIRL *(as an Elderly Person)*

Don't cry. Don't cry.
It's already half past two.
(Pause.)
They'll be looking for you soon if they haven't already.
You're caught in the image now.
But don't worry.
These things always burn themselves out, that is
Actors stronger than us play out their roles and we just have to wait.
Sometimes it's a long time.
And what an embassy they have over there,
I'm sure all that energy radiating off of it is just our imaginations playing tricks on us.
I'm sure if you lifted it up nothing would come out, it would be totally empty inside,
Except for maybe a young man playing Mine-Craft, I wouldn't want to disturb him,
He's building his house, he's building his little slice of paradise.
And the particles in the water downstream? They must also be our imagination.
Or a consequence of our own backwardness,
Of our inability to pray.
Pray

Pray...

twenty-five

Mid-1950s. Henry and Millicent are young again. Millicent is clearing dishes from the table.

MILLICENT

I know you don't like her, but...

HENRY

I never said I didn't like her.

MILLICENT

Well it's fine if you don't,
You know in the old times a group of sisters would be married to a group of brothers,
not from the same family obviously,
So you're lucky you're not married to both of us.

HENRY

Oh boy. Oh boy.

MILLICENT

Are you feeling well?
Barbara says things she doesn't mean sometimes.
I hope it didn't upset you.

HENRY

I'm fine.
(Pause.)
You never got them?

MILLICENT

No.

HENRY

They were nice to me.
I was freezing my fingers off and I could barely move.
They gave me paper and pens.
I don't remember what I wrote.
But I'm sorry you didn't get them.

MILLICENT

They were evil.

HENRY

I don't know.

I don't know my head from my ass
I don't know shit from shinola.

MILLICENT
Henry—

HENRY
Barbara is evil, she cheated on Tim.

MILLICENT
It was a dark time, we were all very nervous.
And she's especially weak and suggestible.
(*Gossipy*) And a bit of a flirt!
She never lost her tangy sentiment.

twenty-six

The Scientist is recording a lecture.

THE SCIENTIST
At first it was really not so different at all from Model UN, remember Model UN??
How we had missed those simpler times, I suppose...
And what was the point of those conferences anyway if not future research modes?
Not getting laid that's for sure.

He stops recording. Selects the recorded audio on the computer, deletes it. Hits 'record' again.

THE SCIENTIST
The pamphlets of scripts, that's how it used to be done, traditionally, act out the models.
Quite literal.
But now we do not even need this, we can run 200, 300 sims like that (*snaps fingers*) because we replaced those bowtie virgins with computers running script, we don't even have to buy them lunch.
Thousands of models, it's almost a beautiful thing.
Of course there's *some* human work involved, someone has to sum it up into a [powerpoint] presentation, for instance.

twenty-seven

Mariana lays her head in Randy's lap. It is another time, maybe five or so years ago.

MARIANA
Because I couldn't walk.

RANDY
I guess you had food poisoning.

MARIANA

I guess.

RANDY

We were eating out all the time, is how I remember it, I mean.

MARIANA

We were. Yeah. I didn't know how to—I was locked in the go-to pasta pendulum
Swinging between rotini and rotelli.

Which tires out very fast.

So we did eat out a lot.

Things were cheaper back then, in that neighborhood.

But the point is....

It was 7 am and you led me into the kitchen.

RANDY

Sure...

MARIANA

And I didn't want to get involved.

RANDY

But he was out of control, you have to admit—

MARIANA

He's *your* friend and I didn't want to get involved.

RANDY

He's both our—

MARIANA

So I said I had to throw up.

And I did.

And when the police came I pretended I was asleep.

twenty-eight

The class, as before.

POLLY

Why don't you think they would want to admit to something like that?

STUDENT 1

Looks bad, makes you look like a bad guy.

POLLY

Sure, but what else? What other reasons?

STUDENT 2

Maybe they were embarrassed...

POLLY

And what makes you feel embarrassed? I won't say ashamed, we have abolished shame have we not?

STUDENT 2

Spilling milk.

STUDENT 3

Singing flat.

STUDENT 4

Crying in public.

STUDENT 1

Calling the bus driver mommy. By accident of course.

POLLY

None of those things are worth it.

In fact I can only think of one thing that is properly embarrassing.

STUDENT 3

Don't say it's when you don't—

POLLY

When you don't do the reading yes! Correct! While pretending you did.

All jokes aside, I get embarrassed about plenty of things

I am embarrassed by how life has become a syndicated rerun of the worst kind

I'm embarrassed to be at times, as cowardly and weak as the people I resent and disdain.

Letting one's feelings escort you to that Negative Place and just lingering there.

STUDENT 2

Ms. Dither?

POLLY

Yes?

STUDENT 2

Congress does the whole song, the whole dance, you know, to approve everything terrible the rich do. Even though they don't even have to.

They exist for the illusion of the process?

POLLY

Sure, you could call them relatively high-paid actors.
But they still have blood on their hands.
Real blood, not stage blood.

STUDENT 2

I hate that.

STUDENT 1

Me too.

STUDENT 3

I miss the days when they were afraid to go to their mailbox.
A much simpler time.

STUDENT 4

Now the worst thing they get is pictures of horse genitalia emailed to them from behind a VPN
Or they fall for a phishing scam and get their swingers website profile leaked.

STUDENT 1

Which is like hardly even a stigma anymore!!

POLLY

All of these things are true...
But let's go deeper...

twenty-nine

An image: The Swimsuit Girl (in bathrobe) carries a plastic bucket labeled [spontaneity] filled with flower petals. Pastoral music. She tosses small handfuls of the petals into the air and lets them float to the ground.

thirty

Bev and the Friend sit on a sad little couch or floor mattress.

BEV

And they put you on things.

FRIEND

Well sure.

None of it makes sense really, take you off some to put you on more.

I was in a hallway that seemed to be endless. I drove through a cloud. And then I was retching out everything,

I thought my throat tube had borne all these little holes in it and then I slept for I think seventy two hours.

BEV

You've studied it?

FRIEND

Not like that.

I mean, they think of the electrochemical brain or whatever as the center of all problems, I just think of it as, I don't know, refrigerator mothers and long parallel metaphors and fate.

BEV

Oh.

They made me do these kind of acting exercises I think they were, some kind of improv.

FRIEND

And you gave them their right answers.

BEV

They said there were none. No wrong ones either.

But yes.

And they made me play all the characters in hypothetical situations.

FRIEND

I bet you were really good at it.

BEV

Do you remember that time at the store.

And we were all out of pistachio ice cream?

And all of them were breaking down the door it felt like

Crazy for pistachio.

And you said—"they're zombies"

And you pretended to shoot them.

FRIEND

Just warning shots!

From an imaginary gun!

Though zombies don't really get warnings I guess.

Maybe it's good they fired me.

The Friend puts their hand on Bev's shoulder.

FRIEND

They want to put a little mechanical monkey in your brain

They're gonna 3D print it or something so it fits right in there

And when your thoughts take you to a Bad Place

the Monkey goes like this:

They clap their hands like Monkey Cymbals in Bev's face. Bev smiles.

thirty-one

Mariana's tiny South Slope kitchen. The OLD PROFESSOR sits on a chair or stool because he is just too old not to. He barely speaks, just looks at the floor.

OLD PROFESSOR

(a whisper)

Tenure... track...

MARIANA

What?

I can't hear you.

You'll have to SPEAK UP.

Anyway, I am swamped right now between everything and everything

I can't pay attention. So you, you might as well...

The R train leaves every ten minutes.

(Pause.)

Should I call Kathleen and get her to pick you up??

Because I can't be babysitting you.

The Old Professor shakes his head.

MARIANA

Sometimes I think our beloved institution is well, to be trite, becoming more and more pondlike

And I'm a big fat pregnant fish

With a suddenly insatiable appetite.

Nothing wrong with the pond I guess.

Just always a lot of scum and garbage

and people who stick around forever.

thirty-two

Small pool of light on the edge of the stage. FLORA, middle-aged with a tired face, dressed in prisoner's garb wearing handcuffs, holds a landline phone.

FLORA

Pickuppickup pickup pick—up...

Simultaneously onstage, Bev sleeps next to the Friend, they are just handholding distance from each other. The phone rings, Bev stays asleep. The phone rings again. Bev lifts her head and sees the phone. She lies back down and pretends to sleep.

thirty-three

The Scientist opens a closet. VHS tapes spill out, most of them are outside of their sleeves.

THE SCIENTIST
What??

The VHS tapes keep falling in an absurd quantity, The Scientist attempts to shove them back in the closet.

THE SCIENTIST
Oh come on.

The New Recruit walks by. Laughs and moves on.

a VISION (dark winter round 1)

Paralyzed by temporary embarrassment, the Scientist can only sit passively, like us. We start ‘watching’ the VHS tapes through a whimsical projector.

PLAYER A (*voice over*)
Whose turn is it anyway? Heating up the—

PLAYER B (*voice over*)
Chili Oil?

PLAYER A (*voice over*)
—Chili oil under the feet of the, umm...

PLAYER C (*voice over*)
Spicy spicy.

PLAYER D (*voice over*)
It’s talcum and laffy taffy.

PLAYER A (*voice over*)
It’s pixie dust and confectioner’s sugar...

PLAYER B (*voice over*)
Oh oh I’m waving it around

PLAYER C (*voice over*)
Victimhood!

PLAYER D (*voice over*)
Well! So!
Whose turn is it??

PLAYER A (*voice over*)
You'll see...

PLAYER C (*voice over*)
We'll tell you later...

PLAYER D (*voice over*)
Oh come on.

PLAYER B (*voice over*)
Quit jumping the gun!

PLAYER A (*voice over*)
Sykes and Picot were just doodlin'
sketching pretty pictures...
Like so—

*We swirl upwards, dizzying.
Maybe we are revealed to be dealing with talking animals
Or maybe humans in animal costumes
The animal costume is really distracting: you say, a bunch of
animals are telling me things, and somehow the content of what
they're saying becomes secondary...*

*The VHS rolls on, but it is static.
The Swimsuit girl enters from behind the image, still in her
wretched bathrobe. She waves a shaming finger, or, perhaps, a
slipper or some other item.*

SWIMSUIT GIRL
DON'T ASK
DON'T ASK
DON'T ASK
Now if you'll excuse me, I've got some papers to stack.

Flames. Sounds of swirling.

thirty-four

*An "alternative rock song" plays. It is the 90s. Mariana, Randy
and Lyle are in their late teens/early 20s. They are dressed in the
style of those times and are 'hanging out.'*

MARIANA

(with a spacey, youthful affect)

I would like if something really bad were to happen to me
 Because I could give my life this encompassing narrative, this before-after split effect, like—
 Where's MY unspeakable tragedy??
 I want to lie in bed for days and utterly lose track of time
 Have large sections of my brain reduced to soft grey...

RANDY

Oh brother.

(to Lyle)

Don't mind her...

LYLE

('high' on 'drugs')

I'm so far away my brother,
 I don't "mind"...
(a moment, music changes)
 Can't you feel it?

MARIANA

What?

LYLE

The souring of the milk.
 But like
 Global,
 man...

RANDY

Aren't you lactose intolerant?

thirty-five

POLLY

I cannot sum up everything we've learned this semester,
 the real learning happens out in the world, on the streets,
 the space between your words, teeth and tongues,
 in your sleep.
 The *real* learning comes in teaching others.
 So now it's your turn!
 I hope you'll invite your families...

thirty-six

A truly dilapidated (one could say prolapsed) apartment. The windows are shuttered. Every recognizable item is either covered

in brown wrapping paper or bulky clear plastic. Trash bags with unknown items inside. Coins litter the floor. Enter 17 year-old Beverly Mona, her hair and fingernails are overgrown and her skin is especially pale. She wears stretchy gray pants, a long sleeved shirt and fuzzy socks. She puts on a pair of boots and a bicycle helmet. She goes to the window, with much difficulty she opens it. She sticks one leg out. Doorbell, followed by three knocks in short succession. She closes the window with much effort and throws the helmet asunder. We hear it bumping against the floor. Beverly Mona opens the door. Enter the FATHER. He is hunched, bearded and mostly bald, though strands of gray hair still cling to his head.

BEVERLY MONA

I forgot the birthday dress, excuse me.

She exits. She returns without the boots, wearing a short sleeved child's dress over her clothes. It does not fit, of course, but her body does not show physical discomfort.

FATHER

Happy birthday.

BEVERLY MONA

Thank you, papa.

They hug.

FATHER

My sparrowlike Beverly Mona, no, my lizardlike Beverly Mona, no—which would you like to be in this eighteenth year of yours?

BEVERLY MONA

For my eighteenth year I...

I would like to be the rocklike Beverly Mona.

FATHER

Okay!

Okay...

Are you sure?

At least perhaps—what about the urchinlike Beverly Mona? Sea urchin, to be sure.

BEVERLY MONA

That's nice too.

FATHER

It just seems wrong to compare a living thing to an inanimate object.

BEVERLY MONA

How are things down at the [facility]?

FATHER

Do you want your pastry?

BEVERLY MONA

Pastry oh yes.

But I can wait.

FATHER

No need to wait. It's lemon custard. Here.

He presents the pastry in a paper bag. Beverly Mona does not take it.

BEVERLY MONA

I can wait.

FATHER

Things are honestly terrible at the [facility]. But that's how it always has been, as long as we've been alive. Too much squabbling. We have our job, we *know* our jobs, but our functionaries would rather form committees and subcommittees and supercommittees than to let us do our work. Funding is the same. I hear funding will be more soon, if the news reports are real. But when has there ever been a substantial difference? You hear the new hires chirping all day about how things were different in their parents' time. But that's not even true. Not really. This pastry looks so good, do you mind if I have a bite?

BEVERLY MONA

Go ahead.

FATHER

Thanks. I didn't have time to get lunch today.

BEVERLY MONA

I read that lady's book on the anthrax attacks.

FATHER

What did you think?

BEVERLY MONA

It was okay, but I was ultimately disappointed.

FATHER

I see.

BEVERLY MONA

I thought for sure I'd see your name.

FATHER

You know these authors, they don't care about facts, at least not all the facts.

They just want to sell sell sell

and get tenure...

(takes a bite of pastry)

How's Flora?

BEVERLY MONA

(shrugging)

Usual.

She says you aren't paying her.

FATHER

Oh she just says that.

She's scattered you know, a Tuesday is a Friday to her.

Really she's quite lucky considering...

She brought you the wheat bran cereal?

BEVERLY MONA

Yes.

(Pause.)

Papa...

FATHER

My urchinlike Bev—

BEVERLY MONA

I'm a legal adult now—

FATHER

Unblemished and moon-eyed!

BEVERLY MONA

Now that I'm an adult—I should be—it should be safe for me—

I can go outside! And get a job!

Let the sun rays hit me!

FATHER

Look...

It's...

No.
 You have to stay here like I told you.
 Until I get the signal.

BEVERLY MONA
(unable to express her entire grief)
 But it's already...
 it's been so many years!

FATHER
 Beverly Mona, you don't understand, princess. Out there there's no law. There's serial killers and serial rapists and the courts do nothing, they sit around and talk and we don't get to hear a word of what they're saying. Don't trust men, they see anything pure and good and they defile it. And women are no good nowadays, no human loyalty. They will sell you for pennies, for peanuts, for social approval. For no reason at all! At least men have reasons.

BEVERLY MONA
 What are their reasons?

FATHER
 If you don't know I can't tell you.

BEVERLY MONA
 I can defend myself.

She presents a pair of scissors, strikes an 'action' pose. She chirps like an animal.

FATHER
 Oh Bevvvy. Please. You hurt me. I don't want anything to happen to you.

He grabs her wrists rather forcefully, the scissors drop to the floor.

FATHER
 If anything happened to you I would die.

BEVERLY MONA
 You'll never die. You'll go on living forever.
 You built this house.
 You made dough rise. You invented the internet.
 You're preserved, we preserved you remember? With baking soda and water. You'll live.

FATHER
 Yes, I will go on living—so long as you stay here. Promise me.

BEVERLY MONA

Yes FATHER.

(in an unearthly tone) YES FATHER, PAPA.

(Normal voice.) I heard her voice on the telephone. She wants me to go to the island. The island where they made Lyme disease.

She wants me to climb the radio tower. And when I get to the top I'm to wave over.

FATHER

You miserable lying cunt.

BEVERLY MONA

Okay. Yes. Chaucer. Quent.

I heard—

FATHER

I don't know where you learned to lie, Beverly Mona. It's not a natural state. Children can't lie, they can convince themselves of fictions, they are gullible and easily confused but deliberately lying is not in the animal nature of the homo sapiens. It is learned, it is *taught*. Who taught you?

BEVERLY MONA

I don't know how to lie!

FATHER

(crying)

I am frail, I am so frail.

She puts her fingers on top of his bald head. A 'whoosh' gesture.

BEVERLY MONA

I made a song.

(singing in a manner that is almost certainly not music)

Birds and peoples watching me

Do me like Rosemary Kennedy

Rice milk crackers grape juice

Kitchen sink and rain.

FATHER

I remember the Kennedys.

BEVERLY MONA

Me too. Ah.

thirty-seven

Snow is falling. Two children laugh at the surrendered GI.

CHILD

Why you made us sick??

HENRY (*as a GI*)
No understand.

CHILD
Why?

HENRY (*as a GI*)
(*tired, waving his arms, indicates himself*)
Surrender.

OTHER CHILD
He doesn't understand.

part 3: the inner slice

thirty-eight

A Student stands in front a closed curtain and addresses the audience. The tone of the students' performance is somewhere between classic Hollywood, Shakespearean tragedy and history class presentation. Let the personalities of the students come through in their characters. Polly exists on and offstage to help out with the transitions and shake her head when the students use inappropriate language.

STUDENT 1 (*as an adult-in-charge*)
The play will run about [15 minutes]
No intermission!
So bathroom is now or never!
No one will like this.
You're among provocateurs now, breathing their air.
Disgust and disdain are your unreturned library books, piling up.
(*Pause.*)
The library. (*Clasps hands and shakes them in what could either be menace or gratitude.*) The library (*again, embellishing each word*). Your local fucking library.

POLLY (*aside*)
They love their fucking curse words.

A curtain opens. The year 2001. Enter Two Senators, under the cover of night.

STUDENT 2 (*as Senator Patrick*)
This BILL, Tom.

STUDENT 3 (*as Senator Tom*)

I know Patrick—

STUDENT 2 (*as Senator Patrick*)

It keeps me up at night.

Indeed, it seems like we will be forever beholden to the security state, whatever that means.

It will be used to justify all kinds of arbitrary acts.

And I mean I guess I'm okay with all of that—

BUT

BUT

BUT

STUDENT 2 and 3

THIS DEADLINE???

STUDENT 3 (*as Senator Tom*)

It's RIDICULOUS.

Utterly absurd.

We're burnt out. We just re-invaded like half the world like yesterday.

What about our Columbus day weekend plans?

STUDENT 2 (*as Senator Patrick*)

I'm supposed to go to Disney with the kids...

Besides how are we supposed to read it in time?

I was diagnosed a slow reader in school, you know.

I know we don't *have* to read it... but shit, I'm up for re-election, what if I get quizzed?

STUDENT 3 (*as Senator Tom*)

Tomorrow I'm going to go down to the Senate floor and I'm gonna, I'm gonna demand that DICK Cheney extend that phony meaningless deadline.

Come with me, Patrick, we'll do it together.

They hold hands.

STUDENT 2 (*as Senator Patrick*)

Oh that is a great and witty idea, Senator Tom... but won't we get called hoaxers and playboys and communist socialist goof offs??

STUDENT 3 (*as Senator Tom*)

Never mind them, Patrick.

Let them say what they will, they won't even remember it in six months, they'll be too busy remembering us as PRAGMATIC and SENSIBLE and COMMITTED to the PROCESS.

I will see you then.

They exit to their respective offices. They are sorting through their mail:

STUDENT 2 (*as Senator Patrick*)

Ah, the elementary school children, I wonder what they have to say to me?

They open the LETTER simultaneously. In an instant, they are both enveloped in white smoke, they cough, horrified.

STUDENTS 2 and 3
UGH SPICY MAIL!

The personified form of the Letter emerges from the smoke.

STUDENT 4 (*as the Letter*)

IT IS I, THE LETTER, EDGES CUT OFF AS TO CONCEAL FINGERPRINTS,
HANDWRITING FAKED AND UNTRACEABLE.
TAKE PENECILLIN NOW!!

Senator Patrick faints.

STUDENT 3 (*as Senator Tom*)

O nastiness and bastardy!

O rotten luck!

Here I die, at the feet of the white powder of ill fortune. (*Coughs, sputters.*) Come, record my dying words, as visions of the future come to me... Saddam, baby and the bathwater, lone incel, naturally occurring cow disease, smallpox, a million billion vaccines, tears of a woman... Oh I seek to laugh, laugh at you Saddam! Just yesterday you were having tea and crumpets with Rumsfeld, and tomorrow?? I seek to laugh at all errant peoples, hanging by your throats without a moment's notice... we should all be so lucky to keep you so afraid!! But now I cannot laugh, only sleep, sleep...

Student 1 (as a Doctor) enters and checks the pulses of the two collapsed senators.

STUDENT 1 (*As a Doctor, shrugging*)

They'll be okay.

Drama queens...

A moment of transition. Sound cue of the intro to a nightly news program. The four students sit as though on a discussion panel.

STUDENT 1 (*as an Anchor*)

It's nine o'clock

Do you know where ...?

Imagine friends, your trip to the mailbox

More dangerous than any plane ride anywhere

Postal workers dropping like flies.

You may remember this pesky bacteria,

growing in the bodies of diseased members of the heifer family
 A to the N to the THRAX
 [Ant(ic)hr(ist)ax]

STUDENT 2 (*as a Medical Expert*)

This is no ordinary poison, in fact it is comprised of tiny spores that while somewhat visible, actually get whisked into the air like smoke. We have determined it is the super slinky ultra-deadly Ames strain, seemingly coated in silica dust, which would indicate it is in fact man-made and not from sick cows.

STUDENT 1 (*as an Anchor*)

Oh but who would do such a thing??

STUDENT 3 (*as a NatSec Gentleman*)

Well, we have a number of bogeys that we haven't totally extinguished yet for some reason—
 The communists, you thought they were gone but... in tandem with their mindcontrol micro-waves, and innumerable proxies in the uh, backwater I mean developing countries...
 The Islam Extremists, ok pretty self-explanatory no need to go into that one—
 The hydraulic and petroleum despots, not my good friends in Kuwait though we're tight...
 If I can give my EXPERT OPINION—
 One of you mentioned silica?

STUDENT 2 (*as a Medical Expert*)

I don't recall.

STUDENT 3 (*as a NatSec Gentleman*)

Alright well, silica, bentonite, this and that the other thing,
 suggests WEAPONIZATION
 in a LAB
 by a ray-jeem
 maybe one of those on the uh shit list
 poo poo list
 spinning on the axis of shit
 Who are asking for 'it'
 What's 'it'??
 Well, hehehehe
 You'll see—
 (*He is slipped a notecard from offstage*)
 Oh my oh my
 But what about at home?? We've been fishing around these third world—and what about next door?
 In the supermarket? The playground? the Schools???

STUDENT 1 (*as an Anchor*)

But surely we have to DO SOMETHING
 Whatever it is...

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

Why yes of course, do something...

STUDENT 2 (*as a Medical Expert*)

(*clearing throat*)

Eh hem hem, yes, mind you that's not a cough hehehe I was just eating dried figs earlier and got one of those little stems caught in my throat.

What to do, what to do

Well, be very afraid obviously,

and listen to the experts no freaking shoot,

And stop panic buying Cipro for christ's sake!

Where is the FBI, huh?

STUDENT 3 (*as a NatSec Gentleman*)

(*petty, gossiping*)

I hear they've been sleeping this whole time

I hear they've been laughing and tying their shoes and hoarding PlayStations.

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

Ok, Ok, enough of this, I know these are times of abasement, but have some respect for the bureau.

Has everyone declared their conflicts of interest?

Students 2 and 3 tug on their collars a bit.

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

I work for the FBI, yes.

(*FBI is slipped a card from offstage*)

And we have it under control thank you very much!

Whew!

We've been preparing for the threats from the OUTSIDE and the INSIDE and the IN-OUT liminal transience, we've created a micro-nation of stay-behinds and mentally unstable boys who will listen to anyone and we can dress up as the Voice of God and make them hear us.

But yes,

Don't worry!

Do your holiday shopping,

But be VIGILANT

And

If you See Something then it is much too late, what we are working with can only be seen when it is already over.

Transition to the producing of the patsy. It is now 2002.

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

Wasting no time—

I present the pats—I mean suspect. Or—person of interest...
 Look upon him, this wretch, a scientist! The Ames strain!

STUDENT 2 (*as another FBI*)
 He's pale? (*Shrugs.*) He's pale.
 He's a person, a person, of interest...

STUDENT 3 (*as Patsy Hatfill*)
 I resent this!
 No I'm not *guilty*.
 I deny these allegations.
 I got my degree in Rhodesia
 And no there's nothing more to that!
 Sure the Anthrax outbreak during the Bush War was the biggest in history
 (No, their Bush War, not the current one!!)
 But that was due to backwards cow herders who hate modern medicine!!
 Not terrorists with stationary and stamps!!
 And not due to the counterinsurgents either that's merely a CANARD.
 Where ever did you hear that?
 Next you'll say we invented AIDS!!

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)
 What a yapper.

*Years (as projected images) number erratically across the
 projection screen.*

STUDENT 2 (*as Senator Patrick*)
 Dear Senator Tom,
 I am worried we've entered a new stage of the plane of reality.
 Who could have known all the depravities we'd embark upon!
 But if anyone asks about that day in October,
 I'll say: I don't want to talk about it, makes me feel not so good.
 You should do the same.

STUDENT 3 (*as Patsy Hatfill*)
 (*with impotent frustration*)
 You New York Times bastards still harping on my good name??
 No one has even charged me, let it be known
 You will never present to the grand jury
 Because you have only conjecture!

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)
 I see now, we need to go even deeper. But everyone is distracted with other things.

Student 4 is handed a notecard from offstage

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

But maybe—we were being led in the wrong direction, by another science creep, one who was assisting with the investigation the whole time...

A new patsy is produced. His head is perennially bent.

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

(Through a Megaphone)

WHY DID YOU MESS WITH THOSE SORORITY GIRLS BRUCE??

DIDN'T YOU KNOW THEY'RE TOO YOUNG FOR YOU BRUCE??

WHAT DID YOU THINK THAT WAS GOING TO ACHIEVE?

THERE ARE MORE WAYS TO IMPRESS A WOMAN

LIKE...

LIKE...

STUDENT 1 (*as Patsy Bruce*)

Like taking her out to...

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

LIKE TAKING HER OUT TO THE MOTHERFUCKING BALL GAME

THAT WOULD BE AN IDEA

THAT DOESN'T INVOLVE GETTING IN A BUNCH OF OOPS OOPS TROUBLE

IT'S GOING TO BE A VERY LONG YEAR AND A HALF BRUCE

IT'S GOING TO BE A LOT OF PAPERWORK

A LOT OF VERY ANNOYING LAWYERS

A LOT OF JOKES 'ROUND THE WATER COOLER

AND ON THE INTERNET!

(No megaphone)

When this whole mess started the average person hardly even used the internet. Spicy snail mail, what's the equivalent of that? You get horse porn on your hard-drive heh.

STUDENT 2 (*as a Colleague*)

I never liked him, come to think of it.

STUDENT 3 (*as another colleague*)

(with a newspaper in hand)

And look here—he was depressed, and drank too much, and was undersexed?

Goodness gracious!

I worked down the hall from to this man for years, I had no idea...

STUDENT 2 (*as a Colleague*)

A real pin guy.

Hmmm.

Pin worms...

That's an idea—write that down for later...

'Later'

STUDENT 1 (*as Patsy Bruce*)

The time has come for me to drink myself to death.

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

Or, as everyone else might call it, a Wednesday evening.

STUDENT 2 (*as Patsy Bruce's liver*)

And I, his liver

Spit bile!

Yuck!

STUDENT 1 (*as Patsy Bruce*)

To be a Patsy is to be a dead man-a-walking

No matter how long you live, the day you become a patsy you begin to die, to rot, decompose, become a memory, die as a memory, live on as a footnote, shorter and shorter in forthcoming editions.

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

(to the audience)

That's not true at all, some patsies go on to lead great and normal lives, fall in love, have kids, write a book, record a spoken word album, obtain government positions—it's happened!

STUDENT 1 (*as Patsy Bruce*)

And what more lies beyond this? Sad past and hellish future
acting like we all didn't know

Take a look behind you, maybe you'll see,

Clowns at the FBI, let anyone top them with the barrel of a gun, groping and laughing at it

Bitterness can no more preserve me

Good bye, you rats,

love without love

writhe and squirm

Goodbye my beautiful pathogens,

See you in the next life.

Unhappy paracetamol, wipe your tears on my beard.

Student 1 is showered with bottles of Tylenol.

STUDENT 2 (*as Patsy Bruce's liver*)

And I, the liver go

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

EEEEEEEEEE OH GOD EEEEEEEaaaaaa

STUDENT 4 (*as FBI*)

Sounds like a done deal, my friends.
 A lot of time saved.
 A lone nut, a sole almond,
 and not a cent more wasted on this!
 Case is like soooo closed.
 Good night!

STUDENT 1 (*as an Omniscient Narrator*)
 And now, a few rhetorical...

STUDENT 2
 Hoax letters with similar handwriting were sent to various other 'targets'; Who sent them?

STUDENT 3
 How did Otilie Lundgren of Oxford Connecticut and Kathy Nguyen of the Bronx die of Anthrax miles and miles away from any of the letters?

STUDENT 4
 Why would someone, who was a scientist, specifically a biologist, choose to kill himself with Tylenol, an extremely painful way to die?

STUDENT 2
 Why did the FBI close the case after Ivins' death even though there was never any physical evidence that linked him to the letters?

STUDENT 3
 What was "Operation Dark w—

STUDENT 1 (*as an Adult-in-Charge*)
 Well well well, we're all out of time
 There are snacks in the lobby.

part 4: out to pasture

thirty-nine (dark winter round 2)

*Loud winds. Again with the 'talking animals.' One player has dice.
 They cast. All four move their pieces. Sounds of dismay.*

PLAYER A
 Oh! Everyone is dead! The earth has been covered in bone meal dust.

PLAYER B
 It's only round two! You ended the drill too early...

PLAYER C
 Dumbass.

PLAYER D

Now we have to go back, start over...

forty

Older Mariana, streaks of grey in her hair. She is sitting at the Café with Beverly Mona who looks neither present nor absent.

MARIANA

Don't worry—
this is totally off the record
like I'm not recording us—phone's off, nothing weird in my bag or on my lapel—
I just want select quotations.

BEV

This is for the sequel?

MARIANA

Yes.

BEV

Do I have to sign an NDA?

MARIANA

No.

A long silence.

BEV

Your book was hokum.
Is that right?

MARIANA

Some things went down... You can see...

BEV

A slurry, to freeze dry a slurry.

MARIANA

What?

BEV

The quote.
That's all I have.
I don't remember as much as you think.

MARIANA

Can I get you something? A chai? A turmeric latte?

BEV

(reservedly)

Don't look at me.

I do not wish to be seen

You may not look me up on Wikipedia

You may not learn the original spelling of my name

Because being seen is terrible.

It's perverse

At least when you do it

I can't stand—I can't—

MARIANA

(false sympathy)

Well no one's forcing you honey...

BEV

(to herself, to no one)

I'm sick of all this conspiracy, you're telling me that all this misfortune can just be ascribed to some earthly, mundane features like names and email addresses?

Why would you rob us of something more beautiful?

We bear scars at the end of the day anyways.

forty-one

Drill sirens. The Swimsuit Girl, in swimsuit, bathing cap, goggles etc, conducts some kind of emergency drill with the audience. Maybe earthquake, maybe active shooter.

SWIMSUIT GIRL

(scolding, admonishing)

I thought you were listening!

I told you the damn procedures!

If this were a real emergency you would all be dead by now, you'd be smoking holes in the earth you'd be bleeding from your eyes!!

Like Like Like 'WELCOME' to FUCK CITY

(a mocking tone) Oh I'm sick of all this conspiracy, you're telling me that all this misfortune can just be ascribed to some earthly, mundane features like names and email addresses? I just want my suffering to meeeean something...!

Oh there's nothing at the bottom of that pond

No set of eyes behind these ones.

Now back on your stomachs.

She snaps, throws herself at one particular audience member, gets up in their face.

SWIMSUIT GIRL

Did you just diss-o-ci-ate
 Wonder why this all happened?
 Are you thinly spread like butter?
 Well SORRY
 SORRY...

*She produces a flashlight. She searches the playing area.
 We find BEVERLY MONA, face dirty and crouched in a corner.
 The Swimsuit Girl shines the flashlight into Beverly Mona's eyes.*

forty-two

*The facility. The Scientist is "sweating balls" in his swivel chair.
 A SUPERIOR stands behind him. This Superior has a messy habit
 of touching other people when talking to them, usually on the
 shoulder, but this tendency should be exploited, at least in the
 imagination of The Scientist.*

SUPERIOR

Some random letters and numbers?
 You aren't jumbled like that.
 I know you.
 Doesn't make any sense.

The Scientist lets out a premature sigh of relief.

SUPERIOR

So that makes me even more confused.
 If you're going to steal slides, you've put in at least a scintilla of aforethought,
 Realistically speaking.
 No?

THE SCIENTIST

I told you, I didn't—

SUPERIOR

You heard what she said.
 You saw that scrawl on the white sticky tape.
 But don't worry, my friend.
 And you are my friend.

THE SCIENTIST

I can do things for you!
 I've done so much for you!
 (*A bitter realization*)

I can do everything for you.

SUPERIOR

(a gentle laugh)

Cheer up.

Things happen.

Did you hear our department got a few extra billion from Congress?

Oh when was it—

I don't recall when exactly but recently?

Or maybe it is about to happen.

Or otherwise bound to re-occur.

THE SCIENTIST

I don't care about any of that.

SUPERIOR

I know.

That's why we're friends.

(Pause.)

Would you like a towel?

THE SCIENTIST

Yes.

(Pause.)

They ever find our bugs over there? The ones from twenty years ago?

SUPERIOR

(as though the inquiry was a joke)

No...

Because they're in those pesky mobile labs, hiding from the satellites.

Naturally.

forty-three

Somewhere outside San Francisco, less expensive and further inland. The year 2001. Henry and Millicent are elderly. They have newspapers strewn about. Henry wears glasses and tries to decipher one. Millicent flips through radio channels.

HENRY

I know it this time.

MILLICENT

What are you talking about?

She turns off the radio, Henry points to the paper.

MILLICENT

Oh that.

Those senators, they were asking for it.
Someone in that position is going to expect it—

Right?

Right?

Free love insane terror lovers.

I mean I don't like Dick Cheney either but—

HENRY

I'm exhausted.

MILLICENT

It's beyond normal, at our age...

HENRY

It's exhausting to see everything all at once.

And it wasn't the terrorists

It was me.

MILLICENT

Oh god, was Emilia right about the cognitive decline??

I hate to think it.

HENRY

No it *was* me.

In Korea, in '52.

The germ bombs.

We called them duds.

I remember.

MILLICENT

What?

You don't know shit from shinola.

Those communists got you with their brain control
gave you pills and glue and made you think you did things you didn't.

(Beat.)

Why didn't you say this before?

HENRY

(grasping)

Did I load them?

MILLICENT

It doesn't matter.

HENRY
 It doesn't.
 Because I knew and said nothing.
 So might as well have been me.

A long silence.

MILLICENT
 Henry.

HENRY
 Yes?

MILLICENT
 Henry...
 I'm...
 I'm worried you're not feeling all right.

HENRY
 I'll go back to bed.

MILLICENT
 It's only two in the afternoon...

forty-four

The Students are without their teacher. Student 4 holds a flip camcorder.

STUDENT 4
 In 3-2-1—

STUDENTS 1 2 and 3
 WE MISS YOU!!

STUDENT 3
 Even Larry misses you.

Student 4 turns the camera around and waves into it, their big teeth are massively visible.

forty-five

The dilapidated apartment. Beverly Mona is about twenty now, wearing the same grey outfit as when she was 17. Her hair and fingernails are uncomfortably long. She lies on her stomach

drawing shapes in the dust on the floor. Behind her, sitting in a chair, vaping, is OWEN, 33.

OWEN

So uh...

No [starbucks] huh?

BEVERLY MONA

I can't.

OWEN

Well you don't even have to buy anything, sometimes I just get a free cup of tap water and look at the clouds through a layer of glass and vinyl.

So you uh like uh, Voltaire?

BEVERLY MONA

Is it okay I don't look like my profile image?

OWEN

Oh, oh yeah.

I didn't expect...

I mean it's like an illustration...?

But you weren't lying, you know, about...?

BEVERLY MONA

I'm of age. (*Bitterly*) I'm of age.

OWEN

I mean SOME PEOPLE are just so puritanical these days.

Look at me, Beverly Mona.

Those neo-puritans would really like to 'call me out' for some kind of crime against—I mean not a real crime obviously

but like decry me as socially unclean or a "creepazoid" for the crime of being attracted a LEGAL ADULT just because they're not—

BEVERLY MONA

Sorry I wasn't listening.

Can you repeat that?

OWEN

Something up, babe?

BEVERLY MONA

Unlock my feet.

OWEN
What?

BEVERLY MONA
The balls of my feet are the key to my inner pearl.
You want it you have to unlock my feet.

OWEN
And how...? Does one do that?

BEVERLY MONA
(thinking)
I'm thinking.

Owen uses this as an excuse to touch her. He lies with his stomach on her back, putting his head between her shoulder blades. The doorbell rings. Beverly Mona tenses but doesn't move.

BEVERLY MONA
(whispering, under her breath)
Fuck you you made me your pearl fuck you
fuck you I'm a sea urchin
spiky

OWEN
(aroused and confused)
What was that?

BEVERLY MONA
I said you're a PRETTY CHILL DUDE.

OWEN
It's true!

The doorbell rings again, followed by three knocks in short succession.

BEVERLY MONA
(scrambling)
YOU HAVE TO GO.

OWEN
What?

BEVERLY MONA
(urgent whisper)

The window!
Please!

She is near hysterical. Owen hides somewhere onstage. Beverly Mona slowly opens the door. It is the BUILDING INSPECTOR, he is jolly and middle-aged and speaks with an accent.

BUILDING INSPECTOR
Hi! I am the building inspector.
Do you have heat and hot water?

BEVERLY MONA
(a tiny voice)
Yes.

BUILDING INSPECTOR
Everything else good?

*Beverly Mona nods.
The door closes.*

forty-six (dark winter round 3)

*Summer of 2001. A conference room at an elitist university. The students are miles away on vacation.
A bunch of boozed up individuals. The Players have shed their animal heads and are wearing traditional business casual attire.*

PLAYER A
(tipsy, chuckling)
You're not gonna guess what comes next.

PLAYER B
Can we do a recap?

The other Players give Player B a side eye look.

PLAYER A
Yea suuure, Patricia...

THE SCIENTIST
(the only one not drunk)
She always gets like this.

PLAYER B
Oh Oh Oh we've got Mister Sober over here.

PLAYER C

He's a chaste man too probably.

PLAYER D

He only looks at his wife, her knickers get him all confused.

PLAYER A

If only he had a wife...

But yes.

The recap.

First smallpox comes to Oklahoma.

PLAYER B

Why Oklahoma?

PLAYER A

Because I said so.

THE SCIENTIST

It's rather appropriate,

Considering this country was built on smallpox.

PLAYER D

Who wants coffee?

I want coffee.

PLAYER C

Me too.

PLAYER A

Later, after some real damage has been done, a letter comes to the White House,

Actually there are a bunch of letters

And it makes some ridiculous demand

Something that's obviously not gonna happen

Like take your guns outta Kuwait

Or whatever

PLAYER B

Oh Oh Oh, I remember now

Yes Yes Yes Yes

And the letter's got some uh

Well we don't know

It could be harmless household cleaning powder

PLAYER C

But could also be a lil somethin' somethin' too...

But it's pointless now!
 Everyone's dead!
 Because SOMEONE ended the drill too early.

PLAYER A

I was trying to make it realistic!

PLAYER D

(as a progenitor of the game "Tom Clancy's 'The Division'")

We did our best.

There's narrative there's plot there's a lotta potential

My uncle works at [Nintendo]

Time and space are slipping away.

THE SCIENTIST

It's true.

Doles and crates, scour the labs, the lab at home, big at birth—flight from the shelves—

Do a little of your own research off the clock—human pet under the carwash

Back to the usual porking of pork and the eye in the eye of the needle.

Little grains of salt.

Brought out to pasture,

I will see you spin and dance.

The Unthinkabel

forty-seven

FRIEND

You were gone all afternoon, you left your phone here.

BEV

It was my day off.

FRIEND

Right.

But where were you?

BEV

Nowhere I wasn't anywhere.

Just biding my time.

FRIEND

Uh ok.

BEV

Don't be paranoid.
 And don't be concerned—
 I just met with whats-her-name about her sequel.

FRIEND

Oh GOD not Miss Professor Official Story Repackaged for the Slightly Skeptical Younger Generation who Painfully Join Hands Under the Aegis of the New and Worse Official Stories Once It Is Decided What Exactly They Are??

(Pause.)

Well...
 How was she?

BEV

I'll scoop ice cream forever if it means I never turn out like that.

FRIEND

You might not have a choice in that regard.

BEV

And yet I am feeling sorry for her.

FRIEND

They all have terrible opinions
 You'd be so annoyed if you had to be in a room with all of them..

BEV

But I'd be so sad for them,
 stuck in their little hidey holes.
(joking) a little tear would roll down my cheek
 and no one would know why.

FRIEND

I once knew someone like that—
 checked all the boxes—
 moved around a lot as a child,
 was really into planting trees—
 she'd take these girls, who were all like littler, weaker versions of herself
 and bribe them with I don't know, PDFs or something, copy machine access?
 She would give them new names, all color names,
 Violet, Mauve, Ebony, Amber
 Never really liked Amber, not sure why.
 What was her real name? It escapes me.

forty-eight

A subway platform. Sounds of trains going by. The Father leans against a pillar. He is wearing a long blue coat, he is cold. He rubs his arms.

Flora, in a long skirt, appears behind the pillar. The Father cannot see her, she has a big knife in her hand, the kind used for slicing onions. She reaches with the knife-hand, then withdraws it behind the pillar. She does this a few times. The Father is about to turn around when:

FLORA

(stabbing aggressively)

PAY ME PAY ME PAY ME PAY—ME—

She has stabbed him like maybe fifteen times by now. Silence. Stillness. Flora drops the knife, sits on the platform in a cross-legged position. Breathes. Distant rumbling, the long-discarded “9 train” coming into view—

THEN

The stage in darkness. An ‘oldie’ slowed down to an unnatural tempo.

THEN

Lights change. Flora in prisoner’s garb clutching the telephone. A distant ‘hello’ from the other side.

FLORA

Bevvy?

Something unforeseen has happened,

But I don’t regret anything

I really don’t.

(Pause)

Beverly Mona, you’re free now.

You can leave.

You can go out.

No one will melt you.

forty-nine

*Spotlight on Mariana, her hair is no longer grey, she has tears in her eyes. Paralyzing silence. She redacts some words and sentences with a black permanent marker. A pause. She robotically stacks and arranges her papers.
The pop of a flashbulb. Lights reveal a humble party of her colleagues, laughing and clapping.*

Mariana is in a state of ecstasy, hugs all around. She hugs Randy who has been standing around awkwardly.

MARIANA

(some demon speaking through her)

I couldn't have done this without you.

Randy slithers his way out of the embrace.

MARIANA

It's all over now.

I'm so glad.

fifty

Most of the stage in darkness. A pale blue light partially illuminates Lyle, he is shirtless.

LYLE

It's cold.

Guys?

(A moment)

Where did they go?

Everyone was here just a moment ago.

part 5: hell world
fifty-one¹

Unknown year. Henry is older, stacking newspapers. The Scientist gives a lecture.

HENRY

This is not mine to talk about

So why even?

Why—

In October they made us sit through this long lecture I wasn't really paying attention would have slept through it if I could—at the end they said that there was no intention of using those kind of tactics on anybody though nevertheless we should be prepared and also to never speak to any of this to anybody. In December we got about the exact same lecture, but they said we should expect it to be used against us soon and should that happen (it didn't) we would duly return it to them.

Surely it would have been very difficult to complain unless you said...

you know, what about

The normal ones

The grandfather bombs

We'd been handing out like candy

Not that anyone is allowed to complain

Who is this we?

Don't even think

They only looked like the regular ones, I didn't ever see any parachute bombs

It was new years'—we were all told to start reporting our duds, how many and where they fell, this seemed like a standard procedure and I thought nothing of it.

I didn't really do much thinking, I became completely blank, in some ways I wanted to get shot down and die, get it over with, but only the first one happened.

THE SCIENTIST

(manic, obsessive)

by dropping a bomb full of dust and germs mixed together, which will open in the air and spread the germ-laden dust with the wind

by dropping dust directly from the airplane itself, through a spraying device, by dropping a container, either a bomb that will open in the water or a paperboard box that will open by the water into reservoirs and lakes

the way of dropping insects is by dropping a bomb filled with germ-laden insects

we can selectively breed certain insects to make them less sensitive to the cold

all weapons of bacteriological warfare must, when employed be dropped from as low and altitude and at as low an airspeed as possible to avoid harm to the insects.

edge uneven and curled and hairlike

the verdicts in Khabarovsk

Credit where credit is due.

Look at it lengthwise.

The object exploded when it was about 3-4 meters above the roof of the houses producing a feeble noise and an offensive smell.

He told us to drop at Hwangju and drop our two outboard wing bombs and then drop the rest of our load as quickly as possible and come back to Kunsan. He told us to drop at 500 feet of altitude and 200 miles maximum airspeed.

We reported back and as instructed reported there were four duds and where they landed. I think they came from a medical supply source on Honshu or Kyushu island where they make the vaccines.

But you could sell me anything in the world. I'd much rather sleep.

(as if charting a path, connecting dots)
a plane

seen to throw out something—

a mass of unusual animals or objects

seasonal anomalies— zoological or geographical anomalies
other anomalies—

a plane

course plotted

brought down

(mania peaking)

Look! They're dancing! Look how beautiful they've become locked in the struggle of their own contradictions making them evolve to become more beautiful than ever.

*Flashes of white light.
The newspapers catch fire. Henry closes his eyes.*

fifty-two

*Large floating teeth, including illustrated teeth, with roots, etc.
Arcade lighting, pink and blue.
Plucking of a detuned harp.
Chickens clamoring for feed.
A serving tray, topped with a bowl of red gelatin being penetrated by a metal spoon.
The Swimsuit Girl, in full swimwear. She is frayed. At the end.
Sounds of swirling, footsteps crisscrossing, The Swimsuit Girl is coughing, choking and sputtering. Buckets of thick dark liquid being poured. Babies crying. She HATES baby sounds.*

SWIMSUIT GIRL

(speaking in her own voice, with much difficulty)

Now—it is very far away

(tears in eyes, wiping them away) Plugged into the regenerative sets, always conjuring a greater and greater—the greatest i love you

sick sick fuck you can always tell!
 the traced bikini lines sick that we can and yet CANNOT
 You can *always* tell.
 And it was supplied, had to be SUPPLIED by someone
 And there is none not shake'd down and covered in –the tip of the teeth the AAH
 The lips the teeth there is none and that's NONE not covered in bone meal dust
 Continue'd and rubbed off on me, the air, the ocean, the mist call upon you
 the structural
 I MUST HAVE IMAGINED IT
 from animal bits and bones
(other voices coming through her)
 ADJUSTMENT—yes and ASSET SHARING and loans and austerity yes
 and opening up
 and importing
 oh yes
 import everything and money rents and payday loans and those little what do you call it things,
 you scan at the restaurants?? and freedom yes freedom of what do you call it?? when you dress
 in latex and smack each other around with those little spiky balls and the splayed magazine legs
 and private chatrooms and the little green lights blinking on and off and your always fake little
 statelet your partition i recognize it sign the papers, everything, whatever, just—
(spits out thick dark liquid)
 NO bitch we weren't there when they crucified your lord, we don't give a shit about your
 elections, your currency, based on nothing.
(a prayer)
 Cordially leave us alone, please please please go home
 A very merry Christmas and a happy new year,
 ('Amen') Woe to the splish splash

She puts on her goggles and swims out.

*A QR code opens the passage to Hell.
 No one says that's where we are, but If You Know, You Know.*

*The Swimsuit Girl swims in (breaststroke).
 She points to an audience member.*

SWIMSUIT GIRL

(tired, old, about to pass on)
 Another fallen woman with no tails.
(aside to another member of the audience)
 She had tails but she sold them for crypto coin...

*The Swimsuit Girl exits her body which becomes a pile of clothes
 on the floor. She is at peace?
 Sound of chopping.
 Return of Randy, he is now a tech guy.*

RANDY (*as an app developer*)

Hwelcome!

(*pointing to something*)

This is my app, the ARIADNEapp

Unspool everything! Haha, my innovative tech solution to get out of you know...

You know...

Not for free of course—

Guys, guys?? Where are you going? I'm talking?? What??

Enter Polly, she is now a tour guide.

POLLY

I hope everyone got their audio devices.

You can use the little scrolling thing on the side to adjust the volume.

Bear with me, I'm new to this too.

So anyway, yeah, they wanted to make this place more accessible to the public

So some intelligent person said, "Let's turn it into a museum! With a twenty dollar admission fee..." After all, our cool donor friends need and I mean NEED a sweet spot to release some of their income, their (*very delicately*) wad of cash.

And then an even more intelligent person said "let's make it pay what you wish on Fridays!!"

I'm sure you get the idea.

She leads us along a hallway.

POLLY

Watch your step, we wouldn't want to send you to the... ER...

She stops at a door. Loud pulsation coming from behind it.

POLLY

Here is where we keep the loose ends

We didn't mean to create this place.

At first there was just one and we thought, well we have to put it somewhere—

Might as well Do Something et cetera et cetera—

But they just keep adding up!

And as they do it becomes harder and harder to tie up anything ever

So it just keeps getting bigger.

No, I can't open the door,

I know you want to see them but I can't, there will be very bad consequences for everyone involved...

Now maybe let's stop somewhere? Get an icee?

Enter One of Us. They lead the Scientist in on a leash.

ONE OF US

(as the Letter)

This is next—

Are you afraid?

Are you perp and body both?

Are your hands in someone else's pocket?

(teasing)

And look— in your own pockets—

What are you gonna find??

One of Us pets the Scientist's doggy belly. He loves it, he cannot help himself.

Echoes of mooing in the distance.

epilogue

Distant voices, sounds of gulls and low flying commercial air vehicles. Bev is on the beach looking out at the water.

BEV

I don't actually think I learned anything

I don't actually think trauma teaches you anything

You lived it and have to re-live it anyway.

I don't know.

The Friend runs in.

FRIEND

Bev!

They've got funnel cake!

It's like fifteen dollars.

Bev

Bev

Bev

It's the beach!

Bev and the Friend make a sandcastle.

Sound of waves, they are very loud.

They talk over the waves but we cannot hear what they are saying.

END

Note:

1—Large swaths of Henry and The Scientist’s monologues pg 71-72 are taken directly from the confession of Kenneth L. Enoch in 1952. The confession was published in *People’s China* and is included in its original handwritten form in the International Scientific Commission’s investigation report (included in the bibliography).

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