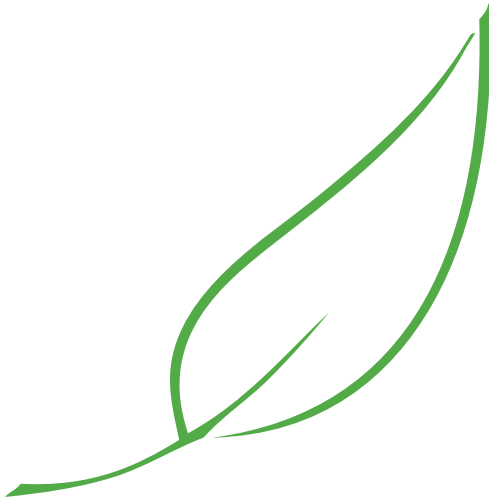


Hurry Hurry

by Philip Vassallo



GREEN ROOM PRESS

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HURRY HURRY*Dramatic and Comedic Sketches***By Philip Vassallo**

SYNOPSIS: Issues of art, pop culture, creating, travel, theology, betrayal, loyalty, loneliness, and friendship are at the center of this 12-sketch, 30-role production of 6 comedies and 6 dramas with minimal staging requirements. The play is structured for as few as 3 female and 2 male parts or as many as 18 female and 12 male parts.

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CHARACTER DISTRIBUTION

TIME: 1 hour 55 minutes, including ten 1-minute breaks between sketches and one 15-minute intermission.

ROLES: 30 roles (18 female, 12 male), minimum 5 actors (3 female, 2 male), or 6 parts per actor, but the number of actors is at the director's discretion. A suggested distribution of parts follows. The distribution is designed so that each actor appears in no more than two consecutive sketches:

Sketch	Time	Female 1	Female 2	Female 3	Male 1	Male 2
The American Film Institute's Top Ten Movie Quotes (In No Particular Order)	:02	Toto			DeMille	
The Legacy Poems	:17	Anne	Caroline			Ted
Take Me to the Darkest Light	:03		Beggar	Woman		Man
The Head's Up	:06				Tourist	
Waiting	:03	Woman				Man
The Meaning of the Blues	:12		Emily	Frida	Edward	

INTERMISSION						
The Five Stages of Grief	:03	Boss	Girlfriend	Prompter	Boyfriend	Employee
Who, What, Where, When, Why, How	:06		Artist			Runner
This Is Your Life	:16		T	V		
Hooked Up	:07	Gloria		Aurora		
What If I Said	:10				Man	Shadow
Writer’s Blockhead	:05	Left Brain		Writer	Right Brain	

DEDICATION

To Agnese Micallef Young,
For all you’ve shared and will.

1. THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE'S TOP TEN MOVIE QUOTES (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 male, 1 female)

DEMILLE (m) Dressed in a suit. (5 lines)

TOTO (f)..... Dressed in a skirt. (5 lines)

DURATION: 2 minutes

SCENE: A car

TIME: Now.

PROPS

DEMILLE – folding chair, \$100 bill

TOTO – folding chair, purse, mobile phone, driver's license, car registration

SOUND EFFECTS

- ☐ Accelerating Car Engine
- ☐ Screeching Brakes
- ☐ Police Siren

SETTING: *Two metal folding chairs DOWN CENTER, representing a car.*

AT RISE: *TOTO is in the driver's seat holding a mobile phone in her right hand and the steering wheel in another. To her right sits DEMILLE. They look out the windshield and their respective side window appearing lost.*

DEMILLE: Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

TOTO: *(With steely resolve, presses the pedal to the metal.)* Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy night.

DEMILLE: *(Indicating she should be off the phone, nodding disapprovingly.)* You talking to me?

TOTO: *(Nods yes, puts the phone in her pocketbook. Murmuring.)* Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

DEMILLE: *(Apologetically.)* Here's looking at you, kid.

TOTO: *(Turns to him, amorously.)* Go ahead, make my day.

DEMILLE: *(Points her to the road, covers eyes in panic.)* May the Force be with you!

Police siren increases in volume.

TOTO: *(Looks at rear-view mirror, slams the brakes. Frustrated.)* You don't understand! I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I could've been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am.

DEMILLE: I'm going to make him an offer he can't refuse.

He pulls from his pocket a \$100 bill and hands it to her. She pulls from her purse her driver's license and car registration, and hikes up her skirt. DEMILLE can't keep his eyes off TOTO's legs. Smiling flirtatiously, she turns to the driver-side window to hand over the license, registration, and bill to the phantom police officer. The bill may slip from her hand to the ground to represent the exchange. She smiles the police officer away and breathes a sigh of relief and turns to DEMILLE as if to thank him. Catching his lustful stare, she takes charge of the moment.

TOTO: *(Seductively.)* All right, Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my close up.

*This perusal script is for reading purposes only.
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They kiss passionately.

THE END

2. THE LEGACY POEMS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 female, 1 male)

TED (m)	Poet, forties, dressed casually, testy. <i>(101 lines)</i>
CAROLINE (f)	Editorial assistant of White Cross Publications, twenties, confident, dressed Bohemian style with long flowing dress, barefoot leather sandals, long earrings, nose ring, piercings on her chin and eyebrow, and a tattoo. <i>(80 lines)</i>
NANCY (f)	Publisher of White Cross, forties, dressed business formal, direct. <i>(32 lines)</i>

DURATION: 17 minutes

SCENE: An office

TIME: Now

PROPS

- ☐ table
- ☐ three chairs
- ☐ manuscript
- ☐ pen

SETTING: At CENTER are a table with three chairs, with two at LEFT and one at RIGHT.

AT RISE: CAROLINE, holding a hundred-page manuscript, enters with TED. They take a chair at opposite sides, he on the single-chair side.

CAROLINE: I read your poetry through high school and college. They were the poems that defined my life. If you don't mind my saying so, *Goliath* is your best work.

TED: I know, I know. My first book, and then it was all downhill from there, eh?

CAROLINE: That's not what I meant at all. I loved *Rowing to Heaven*. And I have your *Dreamlife Collection* almost entirely memorized.

TED: Now why would you want to do a thing like that?

CAROLINE: The cadence. The lyricality. The imagery. I've plenty of reasons.

TED: Well, then, thank you.

CAROLINE: No, thank you. For your great work. For entrusting us with your manuscript, Ted.

TED: My pleasure.

CAROLINE: And now your work is the subject of my thesis.

TED: (*Feigning interest.*) Really?

CAROLINE: Yes, it's a comparative analysis between your collected work and the work of John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton.

TED: What could you possibly be comparing?

CAROLINE: You know.

TED: I don't.

CAROLINE: The poetry itself, for one. All four of you are deeply, personally felt. The influences on all your work.

TED: Berryman, Plath, and Sexton were confessional poets.

CAROLINE: I know.

TED: So what are you comparing?

CAROLINE: I just said.

TED: Well I'm not a confessional poet.

CAROLINE: You wouldn't characterize yourself as one?

TED: Of course not. Berryman wrote dense but rhythmic gibberish intelligible only to himself. Plath was all about anger and blood and death. And Sexton was into adultery, masturbation, and more death. I've never even used those words in my poetry.

CAROLINE: Sadly.

TED: Excuse me?

CAROLINE: That's not the focus of my thesis.

TED: And all three were suicides. I'm not crazy.

CAROLINE: Crazy?

TED: Yes. One jumped off a bridge and the others self-asphyxiated. I'd call that crazy, wouldn't you?

CAROLINE: I would call them great poets.

TED: Beside the point. As for the influences on our lives, how would you know mine? Perhaps you can get something from Berryman, Plath, and Sexton from their literary biographers and critics, but nothing worth a hill of beans has been written about me.

CAROLINE: There's the *New York Times* interview.

TED: Why don't you go to the source to learn about influences?

CAROLINE: May I interview you?

TED: Not today. I have a workshop to lead in an hour.

CAROLINE: I understand. After publishing three collections of poetry with White Cross ...

TED: Four. I've published five volumes with you. This is my fifth.

CAROLINE: Oh, I'm so sorry.

TED: That's quite all right. (*They sit.*) That's a beautiful dress.

CAROLINE: Thank you.

TED: It brings back memories.

CAROLINE: I bought it in ...

TED: When I first started writing poetry in college. That was thirty years ago. It just started pouring out. The Muse would never leave me. She would speak, and I would write. It was like a force outside myself urging me to write, and I couldn't deny it anymore than I could deny myself a daily meal, a night's rest, or the company of someone I loved. I was nothing more than a stenographer capturing the Muse's every word.

CAROLINE: And now?

TED: The Muse lives on. But I'm not so eager to listen to her anymore. I've begun wondering why I'm doing it. Who's reading it? A thousand or two lonely souls? Some sad creature holed up in the cocoon of a rented attic in Ithaca, New York? The ultimate reward: a poem in *The New Yorker*. An occasional reading in a college classroom before an SRO crowd of fifty.

Pause.

CAROLINE: Nancy is deeply touched that you dedicated this collection to her.

TED: Well, she's been my publisher for twenty years. She's done so much for my career.

CAROLINE: She's done amazing things for American poetry.

TED: She's an extraordinary woman.

CAROLINE: She's an extraordinary *publisher*.

TED picks up on her not-so-subtle correction of his word choice. She flips through the manuscript.

Before Nancy comes in, I thought we might go over four points in your manuscript.

TED: You thought?

CAROLINE: As a time saver.

TED: Why before she comes in?

CAROLINE: They're minor issues.

TED: Issues?

CAROLINE: Well, three are mistakes, and one is a problem.

TED: Really?

CAROLINE: I already reviewed them with Nancy.

TED: Did you?

CAROLINE: But if you'd rather wait for her, she'll be just a minute.

TED: No, please. Go ahead. Be my guest.

CAROLINE: (*Turns manuscript to him.*) Very well. On this third line is a grammatical error. You mean *stand*, not *stands*. (*Reads.*) At my bedroom door *stand* my mother and father. (*Pause.*) The sentence has a copulative, so the compound subject at the end of the sentence...

TED: Requires a plural verb. Yes. I know. Thanks for the grammar lesson.

CAROLINE: So I can change it?

TED: May.

CAROLINE: I'm sorry?

TED: May I change it. Since you're an editor, you might as well get your diction straight.

CAROLINE: Yes. May I change it?

TED: Of course. We wouldn't want a mistake.

She makes a note on the manuscript and hands him the pen.

CAROLINE: Would you initial here?

TED: How long are you working here?

CAROLINE: A little over a month.

TED: Why?

CAROLINE: I'm sorry?

TED: Do you need my signature?

CAROLINE: We need proof of your approval.

TED: Since when?

CAROLINE: That's our editorial procedure.

TED: I've never had to sign corrections.

CAROLINE: Maybe we've never had to correct you.

Pause. He signs the paper. She turns to another page, points to error.

Over here you have a period. You meant a comma.

TED: Oh did I? (*Reads.*) You know, at first I had a period. Because I wanted the emphasis. Then I thought it was overly dramatic, so I went with the comma ...

CAROLINE: But forgot to change it.

TED: Yes.

CAROLINE: (*Pointing to manuscript.*) Sign, please. (*He begins to sign.*) Right next to the correction. (*He does. She flips to another page.*) This one is just a typo.

TED: (*Reads, chuckles.*) *The morality of Atlantic tomcod.* What a silly mistake. *Mortality.* Can you imagine those immoral tomcod swimming around Sandy Hook engaged in lewd and unusual conduct? How funny is that?

Stone-faced, she points to the manuscript. He signs. She turns the page and points to her spot.

CAROLINE: This one is a bit trickier.

TED: You think?

CAROLINE: This line is technically correct, but I thought the suggested rewrite in the margin might be better.

TED: (*Incredulously.*) Are you serious? Change *cow* to *dolphin*? Add *sleep*? What is this?

CAROLINE: "A woman sleeps like a dolphin." Its cadence and imagery are more poetic.

TED: That's literally what my father said: A woman is like a cow, with one eye closed and one eye open.

CAROLINE: I appreciate that, but it's demeaning to women. Dolphins are at least a more intelligent creature.

TED: Dolphins sleep? This line talks about what women do in their waking life from my father's perspective. This poem is about him and me. Did you read it?

CAROLINE: It's sexist. Misogynistic, actually.

TED: Is that right? Who are you to tell me to change it?

CAROLINE: (*Correcting.*) I'm *asking* you.

TED: Miss Editorial Assistant to White Cross more-years-in-the-red-than-the-Communist-Party-Press? I won't change it.

CAROLINE: As a woman, I can assure you ...

TED: Woman? You?

CAROLINE: (*Withdraws manuscript.*) Very well. But you do not have to insult me.

TED: Who's insulting whom? You're rewriting my poems. Distorting the truth of that moment. The whole point of this collection is in its title: *Legacy Poems*. These are sayings that my father passed on to me—wise or foolish, lucid or paranoid, optimistic or sarcastic, loving or sexist though they might be.

CAROLINE: I meant what I said about how much I've loved your poetry.

TED: That's also beside the point.

CAROLINE: I'm sorry you don't like me.

TED: Like you? That too has nothing to do with it.

CAROLINE: Because if you feel the way I'm doing my job is inappropriate ...

TED: It is.

CAROLINE: Am I doing anything right?

TED: No. (*Pause.*) I'm sorry. I've been anxious lately. About my writing, my teaching ...

CAROLINE: You don't have to make excuses for your conduct.

Pause.

TED: Let's wait till Nancy comes. (*A beat.*) I really like your dress.

CAROLINE: Thank you.

TED: It's beautiful. It looks exactly like one I bought for my wife twenty years ago before we were married.

CAROLINE: Your ex-wife. It was her dress. I bought it from her consignment shop on Saint Mark's Place. When I told her how much I loved your work, she thought I would like it. And I do. I'm glad you still like it.

TED is speechless. She counts on her fingers.

Are you sure it's five volumes? *Goliath*, *Rowing to Heaven*, *The Dreamlife Collection*, and this one. That's four.

TED: And *Collected Poems*.

CAROLINE: Oh, I wasn't counting that one because it's just a compilation.

TED: Just?

CAROLINE: You know. Nothing original. Just a collection of the first three books.

TED: What about the dozen new poems in the beginning.

CAROLINE: Nine. That's hardly enough to make a new book.

NANCY enters.

NANCY: Teddy! How are you?

He rises, she crosses to him and they exchange hugs, hers more vigorous than his,

CAROLINE: Good morning, Nancy.

TED: Annie.

CAROLINE: Annie?

TED: My pet name for her.

CAROLINE: Pet name?

NANCY: Hi, Caroline.

CAROLINE: So, you put together another fine collection, Teddy. Your dad would have loved to see this tribute to him.

TED: I suppose. As I said in my email, this is his legacy to me. But just as much, it's my legacy. I said I'd never worry about that, didn't I?

NANCY: You did. Many times.

TED: Well, times have changed. I've changed. My legacy is lingering there in front me with every workshop lecture, hovering over my head when I'm in front of the computer.

NANCY: My. Are we getting to that age?

TED: That's probably it, Annie.

NANCY: Did Caroline go over everything with you?

TED: It depends on what you mean by everything.

CAROLINE: I did.

NANCY: *(Sits beside CAROLINE. TED sits, stone faced.)* Good. So are we... are you okay, Teddy?

TED: Yes.

NANCY: So we're good to go with the changes?

TED: I didn't say that.

NANCY: But you just said you're okay.

TED: Look, I want to talk about the line change.

NANCY: No problem.

TED: Can we talk alone?

NANCY: Caroline can stay.

TED: She can?

NANCY: She's reviewed the changes with me.

TED: All of them?

NANCY: Yes.

TED: Including that silliness about the dolphin?

NANCY: I thought her idea was a good contribution. Don't you?

TED: So, is that what you call it? A contribution?

NANCY: You don't?

TED: Annie, since when have you or anyone else contributed to my poetic expression?

NANCY: Teddy, you realize that our readership is diminishing with each passing year, along with our sales of your books ...

TED: So I'm the problem that White Cross is tanking.

NANCY: We're not tanking. But we're facing new challenges, as is the entire publishing industry. And our readership is changing. Women now comprise the majority of our customer base for the first time in our history.

TED: We call them the customer base now, do we?

NANCY: Teddy, these are the realities we're facing ...

TED: Wasn't it you who said, "The day I begin looking for customers before looking for readers, I know White Cross is finished."

NANCY: Yes. I did, at the National Booksellers Conference. When? Twelve years ago. I remember it well. But I received the wakeup call: White Cross as we know it is finished. We're going after more women poets, more contemporary urban themes, a more inclusive definition of verse.

TED: Inclusive! What are we now, the politically correct provost office at U Cal Berkeley?

NANCY: If that's how you see it.

TED: I still don't see what any of this has to do with changing a line of my poetry from an aphorism by a farmer from the old country to the image of Flipper.

CAROLINE: You said it yourself. Old country.

TED: (*To NANCY, enraged.*) Who is this twit?

NANCY: Listen, Teddy. We have a contractual obligation to publish your book, and we will. So if you don't want to change the line, we will honor that. It was a suggestion.

TED: A bad one.

NANCY: Nothing more than a suggestion. But we'll have to revisit this issue when writing the contract for your next collection.

TED: There won't be a next collection for me here. I'm a man, remember? I have artistic integrity?

NANCY: I know this all sounds new to you, so why don't you give it some time. I've always hoped that our publishing relationship would last a lifetime.

TED: Well it ends today.

CAROLINE: You have a contract.

TED: You've breached it. My contract says that you can't change even a comma without my approval.

NANCY: *(To CAROLINE.)* Haven't we honored that?

CAROLINE: Yes. He initialed the first three changes.

TED: I did? *(TED slowly crosses to the manuscript, flips through it, collects the three pages he signed, rips them, and stuffs them in his pocket.)* No I didn't. *(He crosses to exit.)*

NANCY: Teddy, is there anything I can do to get you to sit back down?

TED: *(Pause. He turns to them.)* Yes. Fire her.

NANCY: Excuse me?

TED: You're not excused. I cannot stand the sight of a body-pierced, tattooed, slovenly dressed waif with all the pretense of a queen in Greenwich Village on Halloween pontificating to me about what's insensitive to humanity. From the moment I walked in the door! The liberties you've taken! Calling me Ted! Finishing my thoughts in mid-sentence! Marginalizing my *Collected Poems* as if it weren't even a published book! And then when I challenged you in the slightest way, you pull that hurt-girlie attitude, and I have to cave in. Please! I go through my manuscripts scrupulously, *kid*. I neither need nor want your editorial contributions.

CAROLINE: Are you finished?

TED: Not yet.

CAROLINE: Well I say you are. Teddy. How dare you! Deride your readers! I'm one of those thousand lonely souls holed up in an Ithaca attic who have established your reputation! Mock the audience of fifty appreciative listeners at a poetry reading? I'm one of them! You think you can say whatever you want with impunity, but people are listening to you. People who care about what you have to say! And then you spit on us with such venom!

TED: (*To NANCY.*) See what I mean? I don't have to hear this.

CAROLINE: Oh yes you do. Otherwise you would have left a long time ago. And one more thing: You do not go through your manuscripts scrupulously, *sir*. In fact, you make careless mistakes for one of two reasons: you want to humiliate the editorial assistant who catches them, or you relish the thought of being disciplined by a woman young enough to be your daughter.

TED: Fire her.

NANCY: I can't do it.

TED: Fire her.

NANCY: I won't.

CAROLINE: Do you still want to dedicate the book to Nancy? That's her name! Pet name! She's not your pet. She's your life source. And one more point: You see no similarity between Berryman, Plath, Sexton, and yourself because they've been running circles around your mind for the past thirty years. The titles of your books! *The Dreamlife Collection* sounds to me like a clone of Berryman's *Seventy-seven Dream Songs*. *Goliath*? Sure seems like a close relative of Plath's *Colossus*. And if *Rowing to Heaven* isn't a downright rip off of Sexton's *The Awful Rowing Toward God*, then I don't know what is.

TED: If you were a man, you wouldn't have the nerve to say that. But you're ...

CAROLINE: And you're a misogynist.

TED: Yes, you made that clear.

CAROLINE: I thought I did.

TED: (*To NANCY.*) Are you hearing this? And remaining silent?

NANCY: Teddy, we want to publish the book.

TED: Tell my lawyer that. (*Turns to exit, hesitates, turns to CAROLINE.*) Give me the dress.

CAROLINE: No.

NANCY: What?

TED: Give it to me. Or I'll rip it right off your feeble body.

CAROLINE: It's mine, Teddy.

TED: No it's not.

NANCY: What's this all about?

CAROLINE: You seem to have lost your sense of what a contract is.

TED: What about your far more important contract with people regarding their privacy? Visiting my ex-wife to get sordid details about my life for your thesis?

CAROLINE: You are a public figure whose work is fair game for critical analysis and whose life is fair game for biography.

TED: For slander?

CAROLINE: You haven't read a word of my thesis, so how would you know? Just like you probably haven't read a word of Berryman, Plath, or Sexton but the titles of their books. You have a contract, Teddy!

TED: I will not let a passive-aggressive, twisted intellectual stalker dictate to me what a contract is. And that's my ex-wife's dress. Give it to me!

He lunges toward her, ripping her sleeve as he tries to rip off her dress. CAROLINE screams in pain.

NANCY: Teddy! Stop!

TED: *(Madly triumphant.)* You see! Hurt girlie! *(Realizes his offense. To CAROLINE.)* What have you done to me? *(To NANCY.)* What have you done to me?

NANCY: Can we just get down to business and agree on the *Legacy Poems*?

CAROLINE: *(Grasping her dress.)* I'm afraid it's too late, Nancy. This is his legacy.

They freeze. Lights fade.

THE END

3. TAKE ME TO THE DARKEST LIGHT

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 female, 1 male)

BEGGAR (f)	Middle-aged, disheveled, shabbily dressed.
WOMAN (f).....	Young, attractive, intelligent, dressed in a sharp business suit. <i>(10 lines)</i>
MAN (m)	Young, blind, clothing reveals nothing of his economic, educational, or professional status. <i>(13 lines)</i>

DURATION: 3 minutes

SCENE: Times Square subway station, The A Train platform

TIME: Now

PROPS

BEGGAR – a bowl filled with coins

WOMAN – a briefcase

MAN – sunglasses, cane, wallet, five bills of different currencies

SOUND EFFECTS

- ☐ Loudspeaker Making Train Announcement
- ☐ Train in Motion

SETTING: *Empty stage.*

AT RISE: *BEGGAR stands DOWN CENTER with her collection bowl at her feet and her hand out in begging pose. She is motionless, her face contorted in utter despair as she repeats, "Help, please" in a dreadful moan. WOMAN stands DOWN RIGHT, tightly holding her briefcase. She awaits her train by staring into the tunnel. We hear over a loudspeaker the announcement "There is an uptown A train at Penn Station." MAN, tapping his cane on the ground, enters from UP LEFT, crosses to DOWN LEFT, and across stage until he stops walking and tapping directly in front of BEGGAR. He places his cane on her outstretched hand and feels his way toward WOMAN, stops in front of her.*

MAN: *(Removes wallet from pocket and pulls out a bill. To WOMAN.)*

What's this? (She does not respond.) Huh?

WOMAN: *(Looks at bill in his hand. Anxiously.)* Fifty Chinese yuan.

MAN: *(Removes another bill.)* What about this?

WOMAN: A hundred Indian rupees.

MAN: *(Removes wallet from pocket and pulls out a bill.)* And this?

WOMAN: Sir, I ...

MAN: *(Shakes the bill.)* This!

WOMAN: *(Points to BEGGAR.)* Ask her.

MAN: Who?

WOMAN: *(Looks for help.)* I'm waiting for my train.

MAN: Thanks for sharing that bit of information. Euro? Peso? Dollar?

WOMAN: Five Euro.

MAN: Then this is twenty Mexican pesos—right?

WOMAN: Yes.

MAN: Good guess. *(Empties out his last bill, hands it to her.)* Here.

WOMAN: *(Does not accept it.)* A hundred American dollars.

MAN: I know. Take it.

WOMAN: No.

MAN: *(Grabs her hand, forces it into her hand.)* Please.

WOMAN: *(Struggles with him, terrified.)* I don't want it. Somebody! Please! Help me!

MAN: *(To BEGGAR as he throws the foreign bills at her while not releasing WOMAN.)* Shut up! That's her job to say "help me." And she says it better than you!

BEGGAR stops her moan, picks up the bills, put them in her pocket, and extends his cane him. SFX: The train rumbles into the station.

WOMAN: My train!

MAN: *(Pleading to WOMAN.)* Take it.

WOMAN: Let me go! *(Frees herself, rushes away.)*

MAN: *(He grabs his cane, drops to his knees in desperation.)* Take me ... to the ... darkest light.

BEGGAR, in her original pose, says two more times, "Help me. Please." WOMAN turns to MAN. Silence.

THE END

4. THE HEAD'S UP

CAST OF CHARACTERS

TOURIST (m).....American, male, 40s, dressed in casual clothes.

DURATION: 6 minutes

SCENE: An outdoor café in Valletta, Malta

TIME: August 26, midday

PROPS

- ☐ a café table and chair
- ☐ a book
- ☐ a backpack
- ☐ a smartphone
- ☐ a notebook
- ☐ a pen

SOUND EFFECTS

- ☐ Traffic
- ☐ Pedestrian Chatter

SETTING: *DOWN CENTER* are a café table and chair. A book lies under the table on the ground. Bright light.

AT RISE: *The sound of traffic and pedestrians. TOURIST enters from UP RIGHT and crosses to DOWN CENTER, looking about in awe. He is talking on his mobile phone. He sits on the chair and places his bag on the table.*

TOURIST: The end, honey. I've done them all. All twenty-seven countries in one summer! What a whirlwind tour! You should've come along, It's so beautiful here. The people are so nice. They all speak English perfectly ... I know I know I know, but this was a once-in-a-lifetime chance ... Hey, let's not bring that up again ... Selfish? Me? Well, there's two ways of looking at it: I'm selfish for vacationing without you, or you're selfish for not wanting to leave your routine. OK OK OK. I'm about to sit down for lunch. I'm in an outdoor café in Valletta, the Maltese capital. If you think I'm going to let you kill my last day of vacation ... Katie? Hello?

Hangs up in frustration, takes a picture with his smartphone, removes notebook and pen from backpack, thumbs through notebook, checks off notes, and tape records comments on his smartphone.

August twenty-sixth, Valletta, Malta. After landing in Dublin on June 6, eighty days ago, I have been on a nonstop journey through the European Union countries.

Stops recording. To a waiter.

Good afternoon, sir. May I have a menu?

To himself.

Did he hear me?

Continues recording and checking off his notebook.

On the first leg of the journey: Dublin. It rained all three days, but long after I forget the weather there I'll still remember that woman who walked her monkey on a leash in that bookstore—what's its name? London was surprisingly sunny, but discount theater tickets were non-existent. It was only the second leg, so I didn't want to pay full price for anything, even food. I suppose the side benefit to that decision is having lost fifteen pounds on this trip. Paris: too bad never made it to Notre Dame or the Eiffel Tower. Up to Brussels: Women sweeping their front stoops and those narrow streets. Really clean. Amsterdam: Never did figure out why Netherlands also goes by the name Holland. The Dutch speak the best English. Farther north to Copenhagen: nice statues. Found a bakery where I was able to get a hundred fifty grams of cheese, a loaf of bread, and half-liter bottle of decent Bordeaux for only five euro. I never expected that. Then I got up to Stockholm and Helsinki—and I wonder, why isn't Norway in the EU? I would have loved to go there too.

Stops recording. To waiter.

Sir? May I have some service?

To himself.

How rude!

Continues recording and checking off in his notebook, but now with an intensity edging on anger.

Then came Tallinn, Riga, Vilnius, Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava, Ljubljana, Budapest, Sofia, and Bucharest. All those former Iron Curtain countries. To tell the truth, these countries began running one into the other. I began losing track. I should have given them more time than just a day each because the Europeans talk about their unique history, breathtaking landscapes, cultured cities, genuine people, and fine cuisine. At least I could say, "Been there, done that." Wanted to learn "hello" in every EU language, but never did. No need to. Everyone knows "hello" in English.

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Pause.

It makes me sad.

Notices the book on the ground, picks it up. To an unseen diner.

Excuse me, is this your book?

Stands, waving the book. To us.

Hey, did anyone lose a book? I found it here. Under the table.

Sits down, embarrassed, and places the book on the table. After staring at the book a moment, he takes a picture of it. Finally, he opens to a random page and reads.

How did it get to this point? One race: homo sapiens, which despite perpetuating itself to its present population of seven billion people, has cunningly separated itself from its fellow species by creating two hundred nations, six thousand languages, and four thousand religions. For not a single minute in human history has there been worldwide peace. War always was, war always is, and war always will be. Is this three-letter word the true human God? Is this progress?

Looks around uncomfortably, feeling he is being watched.

Europe has forty-seven countries. I should have gone to all of them, not just the EU countries. That was not an efficient way of traveling. What was the point of that?

Continues reading.

And here's the head's up to humanity. The only inhabited planet we know in all the solar system has been ruled this past century not by extraterrestrials, not by totalitarian or fundamentalist regimes, but by the government and media of the United States. The swords

were not beaten into ploughshares. Rather, the hammer and sickle has been traded in for the Wharton MBA. CNN dishes one sex and violence story after another under the guise that the public is obsessed with sex and violence. If Karl Marx were alive today, he would insert an addendum to his famous admonition: "War is the opiate of the people, and the United States is its pusher."

Drops book on table. To the restaurant patrons.

Whose book is this? Who left it here? You know what Athens is? The center of a failed civilization in the middle of a bunch of islands. That's what it is! And Nicosia—the center of half an island. Nothing more and, believe me, a lot less! Vienna? Berlin? Cut from the same fascist cloth! Luxembourg's a blip on the radar screen! A pimple! NO! YOU SHUT UP! Lisbon, Madrid, Rome: You marauding adventurers, you imperialists—America inherited your obsession for dominance. And now look at you. Third-rate powers! (*Panic stricken.*) Where am I, anyway? What is this place? OK! I'LL LEAVE! DO YOU THINK I'D STAND ANOTHER SECOND'S INSULT OF DEALING WITH YOUR HORRIBLE SERVICE? (*Picks up his things, stares at his notebook, shocked by what he sees.*) That's twenty-six! That's only twenty-six countries!

Reads rapidly, counting on his fingers, punctuating each country with a finger jab on the notebook and then at various patrons.

Ireland, England, France, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Cyprus, Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Italy. (*Slams notebook on the table several times.*) YOU PATHETIC WORLD TRAVELER! YOU USELESS TOURIST! YOU VISIT TWENTY-SEVEN COUNTRIES BUT CAN REMEMBER ONLY TWENTY SIX! ... KATIE!

Turns to an unseen patron, who has given him the answer.

Yes. Malta. The one I'm in right now. Thank you. (*Quietly sits, puts his head down on the table, looks at us, and slowly shuts his eyes.*)

BLACKOUT.

THE END

5. WAITING

CAST OF CHARACTERS

WOMAN (f)..... About to give birth. (11 lines)

MAN (m) Food shopping. (10 lines)

DURATION: 2 minutes

SCENE: WOMAN is in the labor room of a hospital; MAN is in line at the supermarket.

TIME: Now

PROPS

WOMAN – a patient wristband

MAN – shopping hand basket, assorted vegetables and spices, bottled items

SOUND EFFECTS

☐ Prerecording on Loudspeaker

SETTING: *A chair and possibly a bed DOWN RIGHT representing the labor room. A point-of purchase display DOWN LEFT representing a supermarket.*

AT RISE: *WOMAN is standing dressed in a hospital gown and socks clutching the chair or bed in intense pain. MAN is standing in line holding a hand basket overflowing with assorted vegetables, spices and bottled goods. His anxiety is equally intense.*

INTERCOM: *(Female voice.)* Dr. Kim, Nurse's station please.

INTERCOM: *(Male voice.)* Kim, Register Six please.

WOMAN: *(Looks heavenward.)* Ugh! Three more centimeters.

MAN: *(Looks ahead.)* Ugh! Three more people before me.

WOMAN: Where's the nurse?

MAN: Where's the cashier?

WOMAN: *(Following a passerby.)* Are you a doctor?

MAN: *(Following a passerby.)* Are you a manager?

WOMAN:

Can you help me?

(Disappointed.)

Figures.

(Rocks feverishly.)

Can't find help when you need it.

MAN:

Can you help me?

(Disappointed.)

Figures.

(Rocks feverishly.)

Can't find help when you need it.

WOMAN: You'd think this were a supermarket.

MAN: You'd think this were a hospital.

WOMAN:

(Relieved.)

Finally! Thank goodness you're
here.

MAN:

(Relieved.)

Finally! Thank goodness you're
here.

WOMAN: *(Disbelief.)* What do you mean I'm in the wrong room?

MAN: *(Disbelief.)* What do you mean I'm in the wrong line?

WOMAN: *(Looks to his right.)* This is the labor room, isn't it?

MAN: This is the express line, isn't it?

WOMAN: I've got a baby to bear.

MAN: I've got a meal to cook. (*Drops the basket.*) To hell with the meal. I'm never coming back here again!

WOMAN: To hell with the ... (*Catches herself in an "oops" moment.*)

MAN: (*Storms out.*) I'm never coming back here again.

WOMAN: I'm...

THE END

6. THE MEANING OF THE BLUES

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 female, 1 male)

- EMILY (f)..... Awestruck, speaks from the mind, dressed in a long, black Victorian dress and shawl. *(43 lines)*
- FRIDA (f)..... The youngest, vulnerable, speaks from the heart speaks English with a Mexican accent, dressed in a white, flowing sleeveless dress. *(39 lines)*
- EDWARD (m) The oldest, suave, speaks from the spirit, summarizes everything he hears, dressed in a snazzy suit. *(43 lines)*

DURATION: 12 minutes

SCENE: Museums of the world, or, a museum of the mind

TIME: Immaterial

PROPS

EDWARD – a rose

PRODUCTION NOTE

The characters represent Emily Dickinson, Frida Kahlo, and Duke Ellington, but the actors need not be race specific, as the roles allude to the spirit of their art, not the manifestation of their bodies.

VISUAL EFFECTS

Projections of the following eight paintings: *The Sacrifice of Isaac* by Rembrandt van Rijn captioned “The Hermitage, St. Petersburg”; *The Milkmaid* by Johannes Vermeer captioned “Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam”; *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci captioned “Louvre, Paris”; *The School of Athens* by Raphael captioned “Apostolic Palace, Rome”; *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch captioned Prado Museum, Madrid; *The Water-Lily Pond* by Claude Monet captioned “National Gallery, London”; *Cypresses* by Vincent van Gogh captioned Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York”; and *The Two Fridas* by Frida Kahlo captioned *The Two Fridas* by Frida Kahlo.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“I died for beauty” by Emily Dickinson

SETTING: *An empty stage. The play begins and ends in the dark, with the lighting slowly rising and fading, peaking at brilliant light midway through the action. Before the lights are up, we hear Duke Ellington's piano solo rendition of "In a Sentimental Mood."*

AT RISE: *EMILY stands at UP RIGHT, EDWARD at UP CENTER, and FRIDA at UP LEFT. They look admiringly at the art, slowly approaching DOWN CENTER until they converge shoulder to shoulder. Projected is The Sacrifice of Isaac by Rembrandt van Rijn captioned "The Hermitage, St. Petersburg."*

EMILY: What a long line! You'd think that they'd have more staff to get us in and figure out some means of keeping us out of the rain.

FRIDA: So many people from all over the world!

EDWARD: Mademoiselles, consider that a positive sign of an advanced civilization.

FRIDA: I hope.

They behold the painting.

EMILY: Oh my! Words are not enough.

FRIDA: It breathes.

EDWARD: One can never get enough art.

EMILY: Rembrandt shows such power in this painting, don't you think? See his barbaric left hand completely smothering Isaac's face. Yet his right hand, the one that held the dagger, is overcome by the gentle touch of a saving angel.

FRIDA: A woman can't do such violence.

EMILY: Not one in her right mind.

EDWARD: But men have the natural capacity for being sensitive and brutish simultaneously.

FRIDA: He was Sarah's boy. God's miracle. How could Abraham believe that God would want him destroyed?

EMILY: I've often wondered about that myself, Frida.

FRIDA: God is hard.

EMILY: Hard on us, maybe; but certainly hard to understand.

EDWARD: God works in mysterious ways. After he does something we don't quite get, he always seems to be saying to the human race, "None of your business."

EMILY: Indeed, Edward. And so Rembrandt implies here. (*She catches EDWARD's prolonged stare at her.*) What are you looking at?

EDWARD: How lovely you make the light look.

EMILY: Are you ever the man!

EDWARD: Have I ever a choice?

Projected is The Milkmaid by Johannes Vermeer captioned "Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam."

FRIDA: Oh the light!

EMILY: How wonderful a story Vermeer tells! Notice the commonplace items: a tablecloth, a bread basket, a jar, a lantern, a hand basket, a foot warmer—and then the pitcher and Dutch oven, transformed by a sensuous act of flowing milk as the milkmaid's bare arms bask in the daylight.

FRIDA: So warm. But it makes me sad.

EMILY: What women do for others!

EDWARD: Always serving, never being served.

FRIDA: (*Whispers to EDWARD.*) Look how closely the guard is watching us.

EDWARD: Señora, he is watching you. As I might if I were standing there and you here.

Projected is Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci captioned "Louvre, Paris."

EMILY: (*Good natured teasing.*) Is this one yours, Frida?

FRIDA: Of course not.

EMILY: But it so looks like one of your many splendid self-portraits.

EDWARD: Imitation is a gesture of great respect.

FRIDA: I am not as beautiful as she.

EMILY and EDWARD: Oh, yes you are!

FRIDA: I don't see the likeness.

EDWARD: The artist never does.

EMILY: Why would that be, Edward?

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EDWARD: We're too busy creating to notice the creators.

FRIDA: I love that woman.

EDWARD: The Mona Lisa is like... how would you say... sacred music.

EMILY: Words are not enough ...

FRIDA: Beautiful art ...

EDWARD: Beautiful women. Beyond category.

EMILY: I feel like writing a poem.

FRIDA: You write beautifully.

EDWARD: Your poems make love to life. When I see Frida's paintings, I hear a thousand-piece orchestra, and when I read your poetry, I see a thousand paintings.

EMILY: (*Laughs.*) They ask us what we mean when we compose a song, write a poem, paint an image.

EDWARD: And all we can answer is the Muse took us.

FRIDA: Yes! The Muse!

EMILY: (*To painting.*) What would I write that hasn't been written about you, my dear, sweet Lisa del Giocondo?

FRIDA: Write about how Vincenzo Peruggia kidnapped her, kept her for two years, and finally surrendered her when she would not return his love.

EDWARD: Unrequited love moves a man to do irrational things.

EMILY: Something you know nothing about, dear Edward. Ever pursued by the ladies.

Projected is The School of Athens by Raphael captioned "Apostolic Palace, Rome."

FRIDA: I'm tired.

EMILY: I thought the line for the Hermitage was long, but I've never seen a line that runs a country mile—clear across the Vatican.

EDWARD: You need to travel more so you can get used to waiting in lines and standing all day.

EMILY: I have waited my whole life to see Raphael's depiction of Western intellectual history.

FRIDA: They all look so busy!

EMILY: So who wins this argument, Frida: Plato pointing to the heavens, where he insists wisdom is to be found? Or his student Aristotle, pointing outward, where he says knowledge can be found only through observation?

FRIDA: For the artist, the answer is Plato.

EMILY: Funny. I thought you would have sided with the Aristotle's demand for real experience. At any rate, my heart goes to the man who said, "The soul never thinks without a picture." Aristotle wins. Edward, would you like to cast a vote?

EDWARD: Let's see: human aspiration or human experience? A dead heat.

EMILY: Dear! You can do better than that!

EDWARD: Standing against two radiant, intelligent women? You give me too much credit.

EMILY: Can women ever be something other than the opposite sex to you?

EDWARD: When in Rome.

FRIDA: You are a great listener.

EDWARD bows.

EMILY: I wonder if we can find a restaurant in this museum. Wouldn't it be nice for us to solve the mind-body problem by combining all this food for thought with food for the body?

FRIDA: There's much more to see.

EDWARD: We're almost finished.

Projected is The Garden of Earthly Delights by Hieronymus Bosch captioned "Prado Museum, Madrid." EDWARD and FRIDA wait for EMILY to react to the new painting.

EMILY: I'm not saying the first word this time.

FRIDA: (Good-naturedly.) Prude!

EDWARD: Might your reluctance to render your trenchant commentary of Mr. Bosch's magnum opus emanate from an aversion to the pervasiveness of mammillae and derriere?

FRIDA giggles.

EMILY: (*Embarrassed.*) Not at all. I just thought it would be better to hear what you two have to say for once. I did all the talking though the Hermitage, the Rijks, the Louvre, and the Vatican.

EDWARD: (*To FRIDA.*) Have you anything to say?

FRIDA: Not yet. But you do.

EDWARD: You read my mind. I find our Dutch master, Mr. Bosch, was a celebrant of all things pleasurable.

EMILY: But, my dear, the entire triptych is an allegory about the sin of excess.

FRIDA: Hieronymus knew that humans crave such excesses as eating...

EDWARD: Dancing...

FRIDA: Nudity...

EDWARD: War...

FRIDA: Love...

EDWARD: Lovemaking...

EDWARD and FRIDA: Especially lovemaking.

EMILY: Whatever inspired such a philistine interpretation? At the heart of this painting is the Bible and medieval Christian doctrine.

EDWARD: (*Throws his arms out to EMILY and slowly approaches her while FRIDA delights in his antics.*) You'll have to forgive the plebiscite in your midst, your majesty. May I show you the root of such a philistine interpretation?

EMILY: You certainly may not. Edward! (*He takes her left hand in his.*) We're in public. (*He puts his right hand on her waist.*) This is not the place.

FRIDA hums one line of Duke Ellington's "Reflections in D" to pace their dancing.

We have a lot more to see, and I'm so hungry. This is a museum, not a dance hall.

EDWARD: If any place were ever meant for dancing, it's a museum.

EMILY smiles and drops her head on his shoulder. They move slowly across stage until they encounter the next painting. Projected is The Water-Lily Pond by Claude Monet captioned "National Gallery, London." EDWARD moves EMILY to arm's length and slowly backs away. He and FRIDA look at EMILY.

EDWARD: It's all right, Emily.

FRIDA: We so love your words. Don't stop now.

EMILY: You're such good friends. *(She looks at the painting.)* Oh, Claude. Words.

EMILY weeps. FRIDA rushes to her and envelopes her in a comforting embrace.

FRIDA: I love you, Emily.

EMILY: I'll never understand why England does this to me. Ours is such a cannibalistic language. If only I were born to another language, the Spanish language, like you, Frida.

EDWARD: *(Softly.)* But what a gift you are to the English language.

EMILY: Edward. Please.

FRIDA: He's right, sweetheart. Without your words... nada.

EMILY: You're such a dancer, Edward!

EDWARD: And you such a mover.

EMILY: Not that I would know, of course. I was never the belle of the ball.

EMILY gently pushes FRIDA away. FRIDA begins to shiver.

FRIDA: It's so cold.

EMILY: Another thing England does. Here, take my shawl.

EDWARD: Allow me. *(He removes his jacket and places it around FRIDA's shoulder.)* If only you weren't a married woman.

FRIDA: I sometimes am not.

He embraces her with his arms. She surrenders completely to his chivalrous gesture. He removes a rose from the jacket inside pocket and hands it to EMILY, who accepts it with a smile.

EDWARD: A cloak for Frida, and a rose for Emily.

EMILY: (*She smiles appreciatively, gazes at the painting.*) I have stood on this footbridge many times. He brought me to this bridge and gave me color alone, but I left him with memories of the feel of the wood's splintery coarseness, the smell of the water-lily pond, the sound of the croaking toad, the taste of the morning dew.

FRIDA:

*I died for beauty, but was scarce,
Adjusted in the tomb,
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.*

EDWARD:

*He questioned softly why I failed?
"For beauty," I replied.
And I for truth,"—the two are one;
We brethren are, he said.*

FRIDA:

And so, as kinsmen met at night,

EDWARD:

We talked between the rooms.

EMILY:

*Until the moss had reached our lips,
And covered up our names.
(To the painting.) Thank you, Claude.*

EMILY: (*To EDWARD and FRIDA*) Thank you, my beloved friends.

EDWARD: Shall we continue across the bridge?

Projected is Cypresses by Vincent van Gogh captioned Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York."

FRIDA: To your country.

EDWARD: Our last stop.

EMILY: The pure fury of those cypresses. They will devour us whole if we come too close. Poor Vincent. Who could begin to see through those eyes? Who, but you, Frida?

FRIDA: He's my brother.

EDWARD: Yours too, Emily.

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EMILY: I think you are right.

During the following speech, EDWARD takes EMILY's hand and together they walk toward FRIDA. EDWARD then takes FRIDA's hand so that they are united with him between them.

FRIDA: When van Gogh was in Arles, he was in search of a community of artists. What he found were common people who wanted no part of the arts. But he wanted a part of them. Their tattered landscape. The stench of their alleyways. The ignorant swagger of the farmers. The profanity of the children running barefoot through the cobbled streets. So he mixed with the gypsies. He patronized the brothels. He drank absinthe with the locals. He wandered through the starry night swearing at the priests, staggering into lampposts, vomiting in the gutter.

EMILY: Frida, I believe you're being apocryphal.

EDWARD: I hope you're still hungry. I know a wonderful place in Harlem.

FRIDA: He had a choice: Contentment or Art. Banality or Solitude. Fame or Passion.

EDWARD: And that, my ladies, is the meaning of the blues.

Projected is The Two Fridas by Frida Kahlo captioned "The Two Fridas by Frida Kahlo." We hear Duke Ellington's piano solo rendition of his "In My Solitude."

Lights fade.

THE END



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