

Palms

A Play in Two Acts
By John Fisher

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Cast of Characters

<u>Baldwin:</u>	Playwright-Director-Actor. 36 years old.
<u>Kipling:</u>	Brother of Baldwin. Aspiring Writer. 32.
<u>Davis:</u>	Actor. 30.
<u>Ashton:</u>	Film Producer. 34.
<u>Kristen:</u>	Actress. 26.

Offstage voices of Chuck, Margaret, Officer, Second Officer and Mavis.

Scene

KIPLING's courtyard apartment in Palms, a neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Time

The Present.

ACT IScene 1

Scene: A tiny apartment in the Palms neighborhood of LA. The whole space is literally 10' x 12'. There are two beds, two desks with computers and phones, a microscopic kitchen and a million shelves that rise up to a height of 12' loaded with books, clothes, etc. Off right is the door to a tiny bathroom.

At rise: BLADWIN and KIPLING – those are first names – are asleep in separate beds. They are brothers, thirty-six and thirty-two respectively. They are dead asleep, tired guys. KIPLING's alarm goes off. He does not respond. It is loud and annoying. After five seconds it gets louder, obviously as part of a wake-up program. He does not respond. After another five seconds it goes into a different mode, like a car horn. KIPLING is out. BALDWIN sits bolt up right when the horn starts. He gets up, runs to the thing, tries to turn it off, bangs on it, and then rips the cord out of the wall. Wrong cord. He tries another one. It goes off. He hits KIPLING and tells him to: "Get the fuck up!" Then he stumbles back to bed. KIPLING is up. He removes earplugs. He picks up his phone and listens to messages as he dresses quickly and efficiently. In such a small apartment, everything goes up on pulleys, so there are a series of ropes visible dangling from the ceiling. KIPLING lowers one of dress shirts and ties, removes a set, puts them on and then raises the rest. He lowers another, takes off two piece suit and belt, puts it all on and raises the rest. Lowers a third, takes off socks and shoes, puts them on and then raises the rest. He exits to bathroom. BALDWIN rises in bed and yanks on pants and sweatshirt. He listens to cell phone. No messages. He shakes it. No power. He plugs it into the wall. KIPLING emerges finishing up an electric shave. His hair is greased back.)

BALDWIN

How do you look so good, you don't shower in the morning?

KIPLING

I'm a driver. All they see is the back of my head.

BALDWIN

Then why do you shave?

KIPLING

I go profile sometimes. (He demonstrates.) But only briefly. (His phone buzzes. He answers.) Good morning, Mr. Hopper. Yes, Mr. Hopper. I shall, Mr. Hopper. Good day. (He hangs up.)

BALDWIN

What's he like?

KIPLING

Insane. How did rehearsal go?

BALDWIN

Sucks. Davis is playing it super gay. I need to calm him down.

KIPLING

He's playing a gay character.

BALDWIN

Yes, a gay character not a super gay character. He makes Boy George look butch.

KIPLING

You get the lumber picked up?

BALDWIN

(Going on laptop)

No, I'll check on-line, see if Davis got it last night.

KIPLING

Where you gonna build the set?

BALDWIN

Don't know. Can we build here?

KIPLING

Here?

BALDWIN

In your yard.

KIPLING

(Pointing towards window)

That? That's a quad, an entrance quad, it's not a yard.

BALDWIN

Ok, in your quad-

KIPLING

There's a flowerbed and a fountain in the way.

BALDWIN

We can build on the pathways.

KIPLING

Where will people walk?

BALDWIN

They can go around.

KIPLING

Do you see Margaret going around?

BALDWIN

Jesus, that bitch bite runs this place.

KIPLING

Give her a break. She's an eighty-year old nun.

BALDWIN

She should give me a break. She calls every night when I get home. Says I make too much noise coming in.

KIPLING

She's a light sleeper.

BALDWIN

Aren't nuns supposed to live in convents?

KIPLING

They sold her convent.

BALDWIN

They sold her convent?

KIPLING

To pay settlements.

BALDWIN

Are nuns supposed to be out in the real world where they are prey to temptation?

KIPLING

She's eighty years old, what temptation is she prey to?

BALDWIN

Excessive use of the phone. Late night badgering of neighbors.

KIPLING

Is this the artistic temperament?

BALDWIN

Yes, it is.

KIPLING

It's self-indulgent.

BALDWIN

No, it's exhaustion. Artists are exhausted because they work late nights and then get badgered by nuns.

KIPLING

Before you arrived Margaret and I had a good relationship.

BALDWIN

She hates me because I'm gay.

KIPLING

No, she hates you because you're noisy.

BALDWIN

I'm noisy because I'm gay. I was singing. I was in a good mood.

KIPLING

I thought rehearsal sucked.

BALDWIN

I was trying to put a good face on it.

KIPLING

For whom?

BALDWIN

For me. And Margaret. She needs to see gay people are happy. In spite of her efforts.

KIPLING

She doesn't even know you're gay.

BALDWIN

How could she not know I'm gay?

KIPLING

Because you're only gay, not super gay.

BALDWIN

You're defending her because she leaves you apple juice.

KIPLING

She used to leave me apple juice and frozen chicken tetrazzini.

BALDWIN

Where does she get that shit?

KIPLING

She works at a day care center.

BALDWIN

So she steels.

KIPLING

No, it's all old. After a certain date they can't give it to the kids so they give it to her.

BALDWIN

So she's feeding you spoiled food and that makes her your friend.

KIPLING

She's not my friend.

BALDWIN

Then why do you defend her?

KIPLING

I don't. I'm just pointing out that if you didn't make so much noise-

BALDWIN

Yeah, yeah, yeah, quack, quack, quack.

KIPLING

I hate it when you do that.

BALDWIN

Disagree with you?

KIPLING

Make animal noises. You've done that since you were three.

BALDWIN

You weren't around when-

KIPLING

Mom, told me. It pisses everybody off. It's not-

BALDWIN

Bung, bung, bung.

KIPLING

That doesn't sound like a whale.

BALDWIN

Does to me. Our experience of Margaret is Modern Catholicism in a nutshell: wayward priests, thieving nuns, food relief gone astray-

KIPLING

What does any of that have to do with Catholicism?

BALDWIN

What do you care if I traduce Catholics?

KIPLING

Don't start on that.

BALDWIN

Start on what?

KIPLING

You know what I'm talking about.

BALDWIN

Eeeee. Eeeee. Eeeee.

KIPLING

Doesn't sound like an egret.

BALDWIN

You knew it was an egret.

KIPLING

I know how your mind works.

BALDWIN

So it was effective.

KIPLING

You think egrets make that sound because they're called egrets.

BALDWIN

Stands to reason.

KIPLING

That's just stupid. (Pause.) How's Janet doing?

BALDWIN

Great. She's always the best thing in the show. Was in New York, will be here.

KIPLING

And Kristen?

BALDWIN

All right, you know Kristen. Cute to look at but boring.

KIPLING

I like her.

BALDWIN

You would, you're nominally straight.

KIPLING

We should give her a real part next time.

BALDWIN

We? Who's this we?

KIPLING

We. We the producers.

BALDWIN

You're only a producer because you let me live here for free.

KIPLING

I'm saving you thousands in rent.

BALDWIN

This place? You're saving me about fifty bucks.

KIPLING

You get a check yet?

BALDWIN

You'll get your money.

KIPLING

You said Monday. I said I'd front you to Monday.

BALDWIN

Davis is talking with Ashton today. And Chuck's money is only a phone call away.

KIPLING

Well, make it please. You're like a confidence man ordering the lumber on the phone then suddenly realizing you don't have enough in the account-

BALDWIN

Jesus, sorry, you said it was all right.

KIPLING

Reluctantly.

BALDWIN

You didn't say-

KIPLING

I said it was all right reluctantly.

BALDWIN

I never heard the word "reluctantly."

KIPLING

It was in my-

BALDWIN

It can't be understood as "reluctantly" when you didn't say the word-

KIPLING

I had a reluctant tone.

BALDWIN

I didn't hear a reluctant tone-

KIPLING

I had a reluctant tone in my voice.

BALDWIN

We'll I'm not so sophisticated an avatar that I can discern tonal-

KIPLING

You're not using that word right-

BALDWIN

What?

KIPLING

"Avatar" doesn't mean "listener."

BALDWIN

Yes it does.

KIPLING

You want "auditor" or "arbiter."

BALDWIN

I'm a writer, I know what I want.

KIPLING

Or "listener."

BALDWIN

I'm a writer, I can use it as I please.

KIPLING

As you please correctly.

BALDWIN

You don't know what you're talking about.

KIPLING

They're making a billion dollar movie called *Avatar*, you should know what it-

BALDWIN

I abjure popular culture-

KIPLING

You listen to Disney Radio.

BALDWIN

I'm a writer. I command language, it doesn't command me.

KIPLING

You're also a producer, you should command money.

BALDWIN

Jesus, I'll have it for you tonight. Either Chuck will kick in his ten or Ashton will kick in his five, it's promised.

KIPLING

Thank you.

BALDWIN

How the lines coming?

KIPLING

Good. I'm cool.

BALDWIN

What do you mean you're cool?

KIPLING

I'm ready. You get sick, I go on.

BALDWIN

Pretty confident for someone who hasn't acted since high school.

KIPLING

You play yourself in the show. You I can understudy. Easy.

BALDWIN

What do you mean I play myself?

KIPLING

You play a dick. (Pause.) Sorry. I'm exhausted too.

(Pause.)

BALDWIN

You driving Hopper today?

KIPLING

No, Lionel Ritchie's ex, then my Texas Billionaire and then tonight I have Don Ho and Bob Newhart.

BALDWIN

Don Ho's dead.

KIPLING

Missy Elliot and Bob Newhart, I get them confused.

BLADWIN

How do you confuse dead Don Ho for living Missy-

KIPLING

When I get upset I get confused. I am upset. You've got me upset, all the time. Living here with you is like living in a... something, something combustible, something explosive, words fail me, you are the living personification of disorganization and panic. If confusion had an embodiment, a physical manifestation, an... an...

BALDWIN

Avatar.

KIPLING

That's you. It would be you.

BALDWIN

Missy Elliot is still a long way from Don Ho. Except that they're both minorities.

KIPLING

They're also both singers.

BALDWIN

What's Bob Newhart like?

KIPLING

Don't try and smooth this over. I am so agitated right now... We need to talk.

BALDWIN

We're talking.

KIPLING

No, we're doing this thing... this thing we do.

BALDWIN

What?

KIPLING

This needling thing we do, this contrivance...

BALDWIN

If you were a writer you would command words rather than phrases.

KIPLING

If I was calm I'd command words.

BALDWIN

Take a pill.

KIPLING

I don't take pills.

BALDWIN

Have an enema.

(KIPLING's phone buzzes. He looks at it.)

KIPLING

(Heading for door)

See ya.

BALDWIN

(Looking at laptop screen)

Shit, shit, shit.

KIPLING

What?

BALDWIN

No one picked up the lumber. Shit.

(As he talks BALDWIN puts in a call.)

KIPLING

Ok, I'm out of here.

BALDWIN

Wait a minute.

KIPLING

Gotta go.

BALDWIN

Wait. My car's not big enough for lumber, can you pick it up?

KIPLING

I have a limo.

BALDWIN

It has a trunk.

KIPLING

No way.

BALDWIN

Oh, come on, if we don't get the set built this weekend...
(Pause while he's listening.) Davis isn't answering.

KIPLING

(Punching up a number)

I'll call someone to cover me.

BALDWIN

Shit, shit, shit. I'll make some calls in case you-

(The following overlaps as much as possible.)

BALDWIN

(Into his phone)

Davis, you hetero shit, it's Baldwin. You fucked up, pussy lick! Call me the second you hear this message! Start dialing! Now, call me now! Stop listening to this message and call! Do it, clit snip! Do it! (Enters a new number.)

KIPLING

(Into phone)

Filo! I have to pick up Mrs. Ritchie in forty minutes, can you cover me? No, the old Mrs. Ritchie, we don't drive the new one. Well, yes we do drive the second one but not the new one. We drive the first two and the daughter from the first one. No, that's the daughter of the second one, this one's in Hancock Park.

BALDWIN

(Into phone)

Hey, Clarisse, you awake? You awake? Well, wake up. You awake? Call me when you're awake. (Hangs up, punches in a new number.)

KIPLING

(Into phone)

She needs to run errands, about three hours. You can do the first hour and half? Ok, tell me where you drop her off at

the ninety-minute mark and I'll slip in there and pick her up. No, she'll never notice. If she does she'll think it's her antihistamine.

(During the following KIPLING tries to get BALDWIN's attention but BALDWIN deliberately ignores him. Finally, KIPLING gives up and makes a new call.)

BALDWIN

(Into phone)

Hey, Delco, how big is your car? Huh? Where is it? Where are you? You're in Fontana? Why's your car in Santa Monica? Really? Can I borrow it? Hold on. (Puts caller on hold, takes an in-coming call.) Hey, you awake? You don't sound awake. Hold on. (Hold and back to first caller.) Hey. What? Shit. Hold. (Back to second call.) You awake? Wake up. (Back to first caller.) So can I get keys for it? Geez. Hold on. (Hold. To another caller.) Hi, why are you calling me?

KIPLING

(Into phone)

Because you won't look at me, look at me. (BALDWIN looks at KIPLING.) I got us a vehicle.

BALDWIN

How long?

KIPLING

Two hours.

BALDWIN

We'll need at least three. (Back to phone) You awake? Sorry. Keys. Your mother? Where's she?

KIPLING

(Into phone)

Ok, I'll take her from ninety minutes to the two hour stop but you'll have to pick her up after the two hour stop so I can take off. I'll phone you.

BALDWIN

(Into phone)

Bushton? I don't know where that is. Ventura County? Is that still in the state? Hold on. (Hold. Takes a new call.) Hey. You awake? Ok. Car. Now. My place. Can you? Ok. Listen- (Sees KIPLING waving his hand. Into phone) Hold on.

KIPLING

Ok, you can have me for two hours, then again half an hour after that.

BALDWIN

Too complicated.

KIPLING

What do you mean-

BALDWIN

Can we keep the stuff in the car while you-

KIPLING

No, Mrs. Ritchie might not be too smart but she'll notice lumber out-

BALDWIN

Then it's too complicated. Hold on. (Into phone) Ok, get over here. Right now. Just git. (Closes phone.)

KIPLING

(Into phone, after putting in number)

Hey. Forget it, forget it all. What do you mean you were counting on it? Ten minutes ago you didn't even know you were doing it. That's bullshit. No. No, you're not stealing my gig. She is. Don't do this. Well I can be there in ten minutes. Five. Five. You fuck. (He shuts off phone and dashes for door.)

BALDWIN

Don't leave.

KIPLING

I have to. He's hustling over to grab my drive.

KIPLING

I need you here.

BALDWIN

Why?

BALDWIN

For insurance. Clarisse is a flake. She's half asleep.

KIPLING

Forget it.

BALDWIN

Please don't go. Please. She flakes there's no Hope Depot, there's no set. It's important.

KIPLING

Home Depot. Not Hope Depot.

BALDWIN

Hope Depot sounds better.

KIPLING

I sounds-

BALDWIN

Quack, quack, quack.

KIPLING

(Into phone after putting in number)

Hey. Yeah, look, don't call me that. Would you just listen a second. Would you... Ok, I'm a farthole, listen a second. I'm not going, she's yours, all day. No, I'm not trying to put you off the... This isn't bullshit. Ok, fine, be paranoid.

BALDWIN

(Into phone)

Where are you? Are you out of bed? Well get out of bed. Well, leave him. What are you doing sleeping with a guy you don't trust? You trust him with your crotch but not with your Mac Pro, that makes sense.

KIPLING

(Into phone)

Listen, she likes a Starbuck's. Big tip if you show up with Starbucks. No, I am not trying to slow you down. Ok, fine, burn rubber, get a ticket. Is that a siren I hear? Hey, you're not supposed to be talking on your cell in the car, you ever hear of that law, Farthole? I won't be there when you arrive cause the gig is yours. Oh, fart off. (Hangs up.)

BALDWIN

(Into phone)

Have him come with. We could use the muscle. (Hangs up.)

KIPLING

That was very stressful.

BALDWIN

It's supposed to be stressful. That's business.

KIPLING

How long have you been living this way?

BALDWIN

You heard of over night success? It's always twenty years in the making.

KIPLING

You learn that at Trump University?

BALDWIN

Every phone call, every text, every Tweet is another rung on the ladder of success.

KIPLING

That from the Pacbell Website?

BALDWIN

Get up earlier, stay up later, that's the spirit that beat the Japanese.

KIPLING

Don't lecture me.

BALDWIN

I don't lecture, I prime.

KIPLING

You are one of the most pretent-

BALDWIN

How long have you been out here?

KIPLING

Don't start this again.

BALDWIN

How long?

KIPLING

Ok, sorry I mentioned it.

BALDWIN

Please answer the-

KIPLING

Eight years, eight.

BALDWIN

And what have you achieved?

KIPLING

A lot, I have this place, I have my job-

BALDWIN

What have you achieved?

KIPLING

I have my friends, I have-

BALDWIN

What have you achieved?

KIPLING

You know, you're like Dad. All this attorney shit, badgering till you get not an answer but the answer you want.

BALDWIN

I'm not badgering.

KIPLING

You are, you're-

BALDWIN

I am not badgering.

KIPLING

You sound like him on the phone.

BALDWIN

You wouldn't have to talk to him on the phone if you didn't take his money

KIPLING

I don't take money from-

BALDWIN

What have you achieved? In the business, in the industry?
What have you achieved?

KIPLING

I have an agent.

BADLWIN

Oh, you do. Can you get him on the phone? Can you? Call him. If he answers, if he returns your call in four hours I will concede that you have an agent. Exactly. This is an opportunity. An introduction. We get this play up and running, people come to it, they see we can write, they call us, we get jobs as writers, you have a career, that simple.

KIPLING

I didn't write this show, you did.

BALDWIN

It's about us.

KIPLING

That doesn't mean I wrote it.

BALDWIN

No, but you're my brother. I get hauled up I'll throw the ladder back down.

KIPLING

This thing could be a huge flop. I'm losing money by not driving today.

BALDWIN

"The insusciance of a young Woody Allen."

KIPLING

Yeah, I read the reviews.

BALDWIN

"Gags so good you gasp with gratitude."

KIPLING

Yeah, you sent me that one too.

BALDWIN

Ten months at the Sullivan Street Playhouse. Three months at the SoHo Garage. Four months at the Tompkins Square Hippodrome.

KIPLING

So why are you throwing together an LA production if it has so much heft?

BALDWIN

I'm not throwing it together. We have Chuck Soloman, you know who he represents? We have Ashton Isaacs, you know who's in his picture?

KIPLING

So why are we-

BALDWIN

Why are we? Why are we? Is that all you can ask? We do it ourselves because we want all the glory. I let the Taper do it, I let Actor's Gang - they screw it up, hire a lame director, they blame me, I go back to New York, you go back to driving cars.

KIPLING

I am driving cars.

BALDWIN

Why are you being this way?

KIPLING

I'm sick of you in my tiny apartment, I'm sick of this drama, I'm sick of missing my gig with the first Mrs. Lionel Ritchie because your choreographer is in a heroine stupor when she's supposed to be picking you up to buy lumber. I'm sick of you fleecing me out of six hundred bucks for that lumber. I'm sick of you pissing off my neighbors and then insulting them on religious grounds. I'm sick of it.

BALDWIN

(Standing and starting to pack things)

Ok, I'm out of here. I'll leave tonight. Where's my cable?

KIPLING

No.

BALDWIN

No, that's fine. (Grabbing things and throwing them in suitcase) I'll take my pasta and my coffee beans and my Clorox-

(DAVIS knocks and enters.)

DAVIS

Hey.

BALDWIN

Oh, hi. Davis. What are you-

DAVIS

The lumber. This morning. We planned to go pick it up.
(Holding up I-Phone) I have it here in my-

KIPLING

(Leaving)

I'm out of here.

BALDWIN

Sorry. Sorry, Kip. Kip!

DAVIS

He all right?

BALDWIN

Why didn't you take my call?

DAVIS

(As he listens on phone)

I was talking to Ashton. Oh, there you are. (BALDWIN starts putting away his stuff.) I learned that monologue. I have it down. Listen: (Doing the monologue) "Hey, I'm gay. I mean really gay, not just experimenting or fallen off the straight wagon or bi- or some kind of metrosexual impotency case that needs the tightness of an asshole to get his rocks off when he's drunk-"

BALDWIN

Thanks, good, it sounds good.

DAVIS

Is something wrong?

BALDWIN

Davis, I know you're married-

DAVIS

What's that got to do with it?

BALDWIN

It's just that...

DAVIS

What?

BALDWIN
Well, don't *play* gay, just *be* gay.

DAVIS
What does that mean?

BALDWIN
Do I seem gay to you?

DAVIS
No.

BALDWIN
Well, there you go. Be like me.

DAVIS
How so?

BALDWIN
Gay but not gay.

DAVIS
Gay lite?

BALDWIN
No, not gay lite, gay nothing. Just be normal but gay.

DAVIS
I was.

BALDWIN
No, you were acting all gay.

DAVIS
You make it sound like I was lisping.

BALWIN
You weren't lisping, but you were subtly gay.

DAVIS
Subtly gay?

BALDWIN
Subtextually you were lisping.

DAVIS
It's the words.

BALDWIN
Hey, I wrote the words, I know how-

DAVIS
It's the text.

BLADWIN
I know how gay the text is.

DAVIS
(Trying to be less gay)
"Hey, I'm gay, I mean really-"

BLADWIN
I'm sorry, but you're swishing, you are.

DAVIS
What-

BALDWIN
You've got that whole aggressive New York stand-up thing going and it's too confident, too aggressive-

DAVIS
You think New York stand-ups are gay?

BALDWIN
No, but gay guys do it to act straight.

DAVIS
I don't need to act straight, I am straight.

BALDWIN
Yeah, you're telegraphing it.

DAVIS
You need to be real-

BALDWIN
No, you're telegraphing straight. "Hey, look at me, I'm playing gay but I'm really straight."

DAVIS
I'm not doing that.

BALDWIN
You are. It's offensive. To gay people.

I know that. DAVIS

So double listen to me. BALDWIN

Fine. DAVIS

Because I know of what I speak. BALDWIN

Fine. DAVIS

(Pause.)

Lose the confidence. BALDWIN

Lose the confidence. DAVIS

Over-confidence is very gay. BALDWIN

Ok. (Again) "Hey, I'm gay, I mean-" DAVIS

That's it! BALDWIN

It is? DAVIS

Yes. BALDWIN

That was simple. DAVIS

Good direction usually is. BALDWIN

That was like lightning simple. DAVIS

BALDWIN
You don't think I'm a good director?

DAVIS
I do.

BALDWIN
Then why are you surprised?

DAVIS
Forget it.

BALDWIN
Do you think I'm a good director?

DAVIS
I said-

BALDWIN
Do you think I'm a good director?

DAVIS
Sometimes you can-

BALDWIN
Do you think I'm a good director?

DAVIS
Yes, yes I do.

BALDWIN
Thank you.

DAVIS
But.

BALDWIN
But what?

DAVIS
Peter quit.

BALDWIN
The fuck.

DAVIS
Yeah.

BALDWIN
The little greasy fuck.

DAIVS
Yeah.

BALDWIN
I had no idea.

DAVIS
You pissed him off.

BALDWIN
I don't want-

DAVIS
You made him feel-

BALDWIN
Please.

DAVIS
He said-

BALDWIN
I don't want to hear what he said. It will sap my confidence. I have to protect myself, ok? That's my first priority, before growth, before truth, before anything, protect myself as artist. (Pause.) What did he say?

DAVIS
He said you were a terrific writer but an awful director. He said he couldn't work with you.

BALDWIN
Who is he Matt Damon? He couldn't work with me? Who is he to say that? (He makes a call on cell.) I knew he wouldn't answer, I knew it. Listen to this. (Into phone) Peter. It's Baldwin. Sorry you left the project. I just want you to know I think you're a good actor, I do. I know the role was difficult but with a lot of hard work I'm confident you could have been adequate in it. It would have been a tough road to hoe so I think you made the right decision. Don't despair. Some people take longer finding their acting chops than others. Hang in there, one day you'll be able to work with a director. Thank you for your kind words about the script. I like that kind of supportive feedback. And I know it's scary to embark on a role you admire so much. But one

distant day, Peter, even you will be able to play roles like this. You might be too old by then to play this particular role, but more and more writers are creating older, mature characters. One day you might even do Shakespeare. You're what twenty-five? Well, when you're ready all those great parts will be there waiting for you: Lear, Polonius, John of Guant, dammit Gielgud did Prospero when he was ninety-one. Buck up! Not everyone can be ready for Hamlet. Cheers and good luck.

DAVIS

What was the point of that?

BALDWIN

I wanted him to know there were no hard feelings.

DAVIS

I see what you mean by over-confidence, New York aggressive.

BALDWIN

Yes, you see. Even you are growing as an actor.

DAVIS

Ashton is going to swing by.

BALDWIN

When?

DAVIS

When I'm on the way to get the lumber.

BALDWIN

I have to go with you-

DAVIS

No, you stay here and talk to Ashton. It's about the money.

BALDWIN

He's in, right?

DAVIS

Yeah. But he wants to talk to you.

BALDWIN

Why? He's your friend.

DAVIS

He wants to get to know you.

BALDWIN

It's five grand, the guy's a millionaire.

DAVIS

Billionaire.

BALDWIN

It's five grand, the guy's a billionaire.

DAVIS

He wants to know who he's giving money to.

BALDWIN

Did you show him the DVD?

DAVIS

Yeah, he liked it but he wants to meet you.

BALDWIN

Ok.

DAVIS

Be positive.

BALDWIN

Ok.

DAVIS

Whatever happens.

BALDWIN

When am I not?

DAVIS

On the phone just now.

BALDWIN

That was positive. It's my job to instruct, to mentor young actors.

DAVIS

Ashton doesn't need mentoring. Bite your tongue. You have a tendency to freak out when things don't go your way.

BALDWIN

On what do you base that statement?

DAVIS

You alienated Peter because he wasn't delivering as fast as you wanted.

BALDWIN

And now he's gone. Bad actor problem solved.

DAVIS

Peter was cute. Very cute. His acting could afford to be a little off.

BALDWIN

He wasn't cute to me.

DAVIS

Well to gay gay men and women he was cute.

BALDWIN

Why are you nit picking me?

DAVIS

It's not nick picking. Ashton has money, there's not a bad way he can give it to us. You have to be patient.

BALDWIN

We need the money. Today.

DAVIS

He might not give it today.

BALDWIN

Then he's a dick.

DAVIS

Maybe. But you can't tell him he's a dick. Pretend I'm Ashton.

BALDWIN

Why?

DAVIS

Just pretend I'm Ashton. Go with me here.

BALDWIN

Ok. You're Ashton.

DAVIS

No, let's set this up. Make it real. Let's work up to it. Like a real improv.

BALDWIN

Ok.

DAVIS

You're you, I'm Ashton. We're just talking. I've come over to talk money and we're just talking.

BALDWIN

Ok.

DAVIS

"So, you haven't been up to the house, have you?"

BALDWIN

You're Ashton now?

DAVIS

Yeah, he always talks about his house.

BALDWIN

Ok.

DAVIS

"My knoll is right next to the Getty. The Getty's got one knoll, I got the next. Best view of LA possible. You get Downtown, you get the Pacific. Spielberg should have my view." (Pause.) You're not going to agree with me?

BALDWIN

Of course, of course, in the moment, in the real moment I would agree-

DAVIS

Pretend this is the real moment. Be real.

BALDWIN

Ok.

DAVIS

"This pool I'm putting in, an infinity pool, you know the type."

BALDWIN

"Oh, sure, infinity, love it!"

DAVIS

Not too much.

BALDWIN

"Uh, infinity, nice."

DAVIS

"It has water tinted to match the sky and the tint changes, chemically as the day progresses. Always to match the sky. True infinity."

BALDWIN

"Is that good for the environment? I mean using chemicals to dye water for your own enjoyment-"

DAVIS

Wait, wait, wait... This is what I'm talking about.

BALDWIN

Ok, yeah... "So, how does it do that, know how to tint? How does it do that, Ashton?"

DAVIS

"It's hooked up to a solar sensor, measures precipitation, wind, brightness of sun and then interfaces with a pumping/dye system like you see at paint stores to get the right level-"

BALDWIN

"That's fascinating. I wish we had something like that for the theatre, adjust the lights naturally to the altering brightnesses of the costumes so the stage is never over lit." (DAVIS nods approval.)

DAVIS

"Listen, about the money I'm kicking in."

BALDWIN

"Yes."

DAVIS

"Well, how's about you give me another week. I'm shifting funds around and another week would help me."

BALDWIN

"Sure. We can wait a week."

DAVIS

"And, what I'd like to do is make sure I'm the last one in and the first one out."

BALDWIN

"Last one in we can guarantee 'cause we're down to the last minute." (They laugh.) "But first one out is fine. We'll arrange that."

DAVIS

"And I want to do 2.5 instead of 5."

BALDWIN

"2.5?"

DAVIS

"2.5."

BALDWIN

"Million?"

(They both laugh.)

DAVIS

"No, thousand."

BALDWIN

"So, you can afford to pay for an infinity pool dye that probably leaks into the water table and kills any animal that relies on a natural water supply within a mile of your home but you can't afford to kick in a lousy—"

DAVIS

No, no, no.

BALDWIN

"Five thousand for a socially relevant but hysterically funny—"

DAVIS

Stop, stop, stop, stop.

BALDWIN

"Piece of theatre! You scum bag piece of shit!" This is why you need to be here.

DAVIS

He wants to talk to you. You.

BALDWIN

I'm no good at this.

DAVIS

You need to get good at it. (As ASHTON) "The amount. The amount you want."

BALDWIN

"Yes, five thousand."

DAVIS

"I can swing fifteen hundred right now, maybe another one in three weeks."

BALDWIN

"Three weeks. The show will be open and running in three weeks."

DAVIS

"Well..."

BALDWIN

"What kind of-" (He calms down.) "How about two now and five-hundred in three weeks."

DAVIS

"I could do one now and nothing in three weeks."

BALDWIN

"Fine."

DAVIS

"Fine what?"

BALDWIN

"Fine."

DAVIS

"Fine what?"

BALDWIN

"One thousand now is great and the balance whenever you're comfortable."

DAVIS

"Thank you."

BALDWIN

"And I get to fuck your wife."

DAVIS

(Annoyed)

All right.

BALDWIN

"What? She's a hot number, worth the balance of five grand on your lousy pissant 1K deposit!"

DAVIS

That's just hostile. You can't even think that shit.

BALDWIN

It's a joke. I'm gay. I'm famously gay. He would never think I wanted to bone-

DAVIS

You are not famously gay. Alan Cumming is famously-

BALDWIN

Fine, I'm infamously gay-

DAVIS

Men don't like to hear other men joke about their wives, it's-

BALDWIN

I was joking for the exercise. The exercise.

DAVIS

You're going to fuck this up.

BALDWIN

I'm not. It's good training. Thank you. I'm prepared. Because of you. Because of this improv. We ever get a replacement for Pete I'll have you direct him instead of me. You're calmer. You get results. I feel prepared. Prepared to talk to Ashton. (DAVIS just shakes his head and remains silent.) Who you going to get to help you?

DAVIS

With what?

BALDWIN

The lumber.

Day laborer.

DAVIS

That's exploitation.

BALDWIN

I'll pay him, all right?

DAVIS

Not too much.

BALDWIN

I thought you were afraid of exploitation.

DAVIS

See if he'll do it for an ad in the program.

BALDWIN

Why would he want an-

DAVIS

Day laborers need publicity, you never know.

BALDWIN

The last thing a day laborer needs is publicity.

DAVIS

Saves him standing on street corners.

BALDWIN

That's the stupidest-

DAVIS

At least ask.

BALDWIN

(ASHTON appears at the open door.)

DAVIS

Ashton.

ASHTON

Bulldog!

DAVIS

Bulldog!

ASHTON/DAVIS

Grrrrr...

ASHTON
(To BALDWIN)

You a Bulldog?

BALDWIN

No, I'm a Bear.

ASHTON
A bear? Oh, no, Bulldog's are Yale.

BALDWIN

Yeah, I'm a Bear.

ASHTON
No, we aren't talking sexual subcatagories, like drag queen or leather queen or bears, we're talking mascots. Yale's is the Bulldog.

BALDWIN
Berkeley's is the Bear.

ASHTON
Oh, I see.

BALDWIN
Aren't you straight?

ASHTON
Yes.

BALDWIN
Where'd you get all that stuff about gay sexual subcatagories?

ASHTON
History Channel.

DAVIS
I'm out of here.

BALDWIN
You know what to get?

DAVIS
Yeah.

ASHTON
Oh, you can use my carport.

DAVIS
For what?

ASHTON
Construction. Remember you asked.

DAVIS
Really?

ASHTON
Sure, it's just sitting there. Nice view for construction.

BALDWIN
You can see Downtown, the Pacific.

ASHTON
You can as a matter of fact. (BALDWIN looks at DAVIS: "See? I'll be fine.")

DAVIS
Wow, thanks Ash.

ASHTON
Grrr... Just take your shit up there and you can store it in the garage till you're ready to build.

DAVIS
Thanks a lot.

BALDWIN
Thank you.

DAVIS
Yeah.

ASHTON
Just don't park in the dirt area near the pool.

DAVIS
Ok.

ASHTON
It's a disguised septic tank. It will collapse and your car will sink in mine and CarolAnne's feces.

DAVIS

I see.

ASHTON

CarolAnne is green-green-green.

BALDWIN

Even her shit.

(ASHTON didn't like that comment. DAVIS gives BALDWIN a "stay calm" gesture behind ASHTON's back.)

DAVIS

See you guys. (Exits.)

ASHTON

Nice place.

BALDWIN

Small but good for headquarters.

ASHTON

How did you and Davis meet?

BALDWIN

He saw the show in New York, told me he wanted to play the lead, found some money, I agreed to come out and direct.

BALDWIN

You know how I know him?

ASHTON

From Yale?

BALDWIN

No, he helped build my pool house. Worked with the contractor. I didn't speak to any of them for two weeks then I overheard him talking about the Harvard-Yale game and I was like: "An Eli, here in my back yard!" Small world, isn't it?

BALDWIN

Microscopic.

ASHTON

I mean, I thought he was Mexican.

BALDWIN

You don't speak to Mexicans?

ASHTON

Not if they don't speak English. (Looking around) Can I sit?

BALDWIN

Sure, anywhere.

(ASHTON doesn't sit. He remains standing.)

ASHTON

I went by the theatre. It's nice. Good location. And I watched the promo you sent me. The new one. Funny stuff.

BALDWIN

Thanks.

ASHTON

And the budget looks solid. You guys have thought of everything.

BALDWIN

Thank you.

ASHTON

And I'll tell you why I'm not coming in on this project. Five grand is not a lot but it's real money. I mean it's a lot to you but not to me, but it's still real money. I give you that money it stops working for me, it just sits. In other words, if there was a way to give you the money and keep it working I would but there isn't so I won't. Sorry to be blunt. I know you were counting on it.

(Pause. BALDWIN swallows.)

BALDWIN

Ok. Well, thank you for... considering it.

ASHTON

Thus I give you a carport to build, that must be worth something.

BALDWIN

It is. Thanks.

ASHTON

I think you'll do well in this town, clean up. So if you have anything, I mean if it opens and does business, let me know. I'd like to help you take it to the next level.

BALDWIN

Thank you. We will keep you in mind.

(Pause. Awkward.)

ASHTON

I'm excited about this film I'm co-producing. *Stallion*. Did Davis tell you about it?

BALDWIN

Yeah, he did, it sounds-

ASHTON

Denzel Washington, I can't even believe we got Denzel. And Sidney Lumet to direct. It's going to be an important film, for civil rights, for the way people think about the legal system, for African-Americans.

(Pause.)

BALDWIN

What's the budget?

ASHTON

\$40,000,000.00. I guess that sounds kind of obnoxious when I won't give you \$5,000.

(Pause.)

BALDWIN

No, it sounds reasonable.

ASHTON

I'm glad you said that. I was nervous about this, it's why I wanted to meet with you. Davis is a friend, not things you want to say to a friend. I want you both to be there at the screening, probably in about eighteen months. I'm putting you in my palm pilot. (He fiddles with palm pilot.)

BALDWIN

Thank you. I'm excited.

ASHTON

Do you validate? Some building's validate for local garages.

BALDWIN

Um, no. Do you need money?

ASHTON

Umm... (Checks wallet.) No, that's ok. I see enough.

(Pause.)

ASHTON

This was good. I'll see you. (Starts to leave.)

BALDWIN

Quack, quack.

ASHTON

What?

BALDWIN

Nothing. Duck sound.

ASHTON

(Confused)

Oh, yes, thank you.

(ASHTON leaves. BALDWIN sits on his bed. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Later that day. Lights up on BALDWIN and DAVIS.)

DAVIS

Wow.

BALDWIN

Yeah.

DAVIS

What did you-

BALDWIN

I was cool. Didn't burn any bridges. Hey, we have a place to build.

DAVIS

You're taking this well.

BALDWIN

I'm bummed. Super bummed. I take things well when I'm super bummed.

DAVIS

Baldwin, I'm sorry.

BALDWIN

No, it's cool. When we did the show in New York it was the same. People were in, then they weren't.

DAVIS

So what did you do?

BALDWIN

Put in my own money. (Pause.) Should have gone with the Taper.

DAVIS

What about Chuck?

BALDWIN

What about him?

DAVIS

Would he put in more?

BALDWIN

Doubt it.

DAVIS

Did you get-

BALDWIN

No.

DAVIS

You should call him.

BALDWIN

Ugh...

DAVIS

No, now would be a good time to call him. We're here because of his commitment-

BALDWIN

No. We're here cause you said you had Ashton's five-

DAVIS

Hey, I'm sorry, ok?

BALDWIN

Yeah.

DAVIS

Call Chuck. Go ahead. Put him on speaker, we'll both talk.

BALDWIN

Why?

DAVIS

Well, maybe you could use some help.

BALDWIN

You thinking I screwed up Ashton-

DAVIS

No, it's just... It will make you feel better to make the call with someone. Right?

BALDWIN

Yeah.

DAVIS

Do it now, do it right now.

BALDWIN

Ok.

DAVIS

Just be nice. Just ask him. Mention the budget, ease up to it.

(BALDWIN puts in a number on desk phone, which has a speaker. We hear CHUCK on the other end of the phone, a much older voice.)

CHUCK

Hello.

BALDWIN

Hi, Chuck. It's Baldwin. How are you?

CHUCK
Baldwin, my boy. How's tricks?

BALDWIN
Tricks are delicious, how are you?

CHUCK
Gas, the usual. Where are you?

BALDWIN
Well, we're here. We've got the show here. We're in town.
You remember?

CHUCK
I can't hear you!

BALDWIN
We're here. We've got the show-

CHUCK
I heard that!

BALDWIN
So what didn't you hear?

CHUCK
I'm very busy.

BALDWIN
So are we. I mean, what are you working on?

CHUCK
Don't ask me that. It's none of your business.

BALDWIN
I sent you a budget.

CHUCK
For what?

BALDWIN
The play, you asked for it.

CHUCK
Then I must have wanted it.

BALDWIN
That's why I sent-

CHUCK

I need to get off the phone.

BALDWIN

Can I just-

CHUCK

This morning's not a good-

BALDWIN

Chuck, you said you'd kick in ten if I got you a budget.

CHUCK

I had trouble following that budget.

BALDWIN

Would you like me to send you another-

CHUCK

No, no, just send me an invoice.

BALDWIN

For ten thousand-

CHUCK

There's no way I can kick in that much.

(BALDWIN looks at DAVIS. DAVIS indicates he should remain calm.)

BALDWIN

You said-

CHUCK

Ten thousand, not possible. I'd have to sell something.

BALDWIN

(In whisper to DAVIS)

Sell something? He lives in Brentwood.

CHUCK

I heard that.

BALDWIN

I thought you couldn't-

CHUCK

I can't hear you!

BALDWIN

Chuck. We've started rehearsing. We need to pay rent on the theatre, rehearsal space, lumber, marketing.

CHUCK

I have to get off the phone.

BALDWIN

Can we count on you for the ten thousand?

CHUCK

No, this isn't a good time for me to invest in stuff. I'm sorry I let you down. I'm giving fifty grand to the Irvine Foundation to spread it around, talk to them.

BALDWIN

The Irvine Foundation-

(A tapping on the wall, DAVIS points to it.)

BALDWIN

(To DAVIS)

Nun next door. Ignore it.

CHUCK

Call them, they have my money.

BALDWIN

That's for non-profits, were not a non-profit.

CHUCK

Talk to them.

BALDWIN

But you said-

CHUCK

I have to go.

BALDWIN

Listen, Chuck, wait a minute. Why are you renegeing on this, I mean why did you say you'd kick in-

CHUCK

I can't hear you!

DAVIS

Hi, Chuck, this is Davis, can you hear me?

CHUCK

Yes.

DAVIS

Thank you for your consideration and please keep us in mind for the future. We appreciate you trying to make this work.

CHUCK

You're welcome, Davis. I really believe in you boys. I'll be there on opening night, cheering you on.

DAVIS

We'll put you on the guest list.

CHUCK

No, no, I'll buy two seats. I insist.

BALDWIN

We can sell them now. We have a credit card machine. What's your number? They're five thousand dollars each!

CHUCK

I can't hear you!

DAVIS

Thank you, Chuck.

CHUCK

You're welcome. Remember, I'm your biggest fan.

(CHUCK hangs up. Silence.)

BALDWIN

Wow.

DAVIS

Yeah.

BALDWIN

It was good you-

DAVIS

You can't blow your lid like that. It doesn't help.

BALDWIN

He totally-

DAVIS

I know. But how does it help to call him on it? He felt bad.

BALDWIN

No, he didn't.

(BALDWIN starts writing a check.)

DAVIS

Is everybody broke?

BALDWIN

No. This is New York all over again. "The future." How does anybody expect you to have a future if you can't even get started.

DAVIS

What do we do?

BALDWIN

Pay for it ourselves. It's fine.

(KIPLING enters.)

KIPLING

Hey.

DAVIS

Hi.

BALDWIN

Here's a check.

(He hands KIPLING check and starts getting dressed to leave.)

KIPLING

Money come through?

BALDWIN

Yeah.

KIPLING

Where're you going?

DAVIS

Up to Ashton's. To build.

KIPLING

It's the middle of the night.

BALDWIN

We need to swing some hammers. Work off tension. Ashton reneged. Chuck reneged. Not a good day.

KIPLING

You just said-

BALDWIN

I say a lot of things. (To DAVIS) You all set?

KIPLING

Sorry.

DAVIS

It's ok. Ashton. I kinda figured, you know. Deep down.

KIPLING

Yeah. We grew up with a lot of people like that, didn't we?

BALDWIN

Yep. It's cool. We'll figure it out. (He opens door and looks out, sees something and closes it.) Um, let's go this way. (Leading DAVIS into bathroom.)

DAVIS

What? Why?

BALDWIN

(Pushing DAVIS into bathroom.)

Shorter trip to the car.

DAVIS

(Off)

There's no door.

BALDWIN

(Off)

Window's big enough. Out you go!

(Bathroom door closes. KIPLING tears check in two, throws away pieces. Knock on door. KIPLING opens it to reveal KRISTEN, twenty-five, attractive.)

KRISTEN

Hey.

Something bubbly? KRISTEN

I could boil it. KIPLING

You two sleep here? KRISTEN

Yeah. KIPLING

Who's in which bed? KRISTEN

Me. Him. KIPLING
(Indicating)

(She sits on Kipling's bed.)

I want a bigger role. That's why I set up this meeting with Baldwin. KRISTEN

Roles are all cast. KRISTEN

Well, I want some performances. Of the lead. I don't want to just understudy it, I want some actual shows. KIPLING

Talk to Baldwin. KIPLING

That's why I'm here. (She takes out a joint and lights it.) Do you mind if I do this? KRISTEN

No, not really. KIPLING

I just do it to relax. (Awkward pause.) I used to work in a café downtown and all the baristas were Mexican so I had to say "para ibar" and "aqui" all day. That's all the Spanish I know. KRISTEN

(Pause.)

KIPLING

That was kind of a random story.

KRISTEN

Yeah, I can be random. When I'm nervous.

(Pause.)

KIPLING

I drive for Ricardo Montalban.

KRISTEN

Khan? Wow.

KIPLING

But he speaks English.

(Pause.)

KRISTEN

I was in an improv troupe but I wasn't very good at it so they always assigned me mute characters. They'd say to the audience, "Can we have a character for Kristen?" and they'd actually wait until someone said, "She's a mute." One of the other actors used to sneak out into the audience and shout, "She's a mute" if it was taking too long.

KIPLING

Can you play deaf?

KRISTEN

Deaf-mute. One time I played deaf, I thought I was being really funny. It didn't work. I did my deaf voice, you know like this: (She groans hideously.) It killed the humor.

KIPLING

Were there deaf people in the audience?

KRISTEN

I never thought of that. Maybe that's what killed it.
(Pause.) Yeah, right, deaf people going to improv.

KIPLING

I wonder what deaf people do for entertainment.

KRISTEN

Probably just tactile things like massage and crafts.

KIPLING

Is massage a form of entertainment?

KRISTEN

You're very inquisitive.

(Pause.)

KIPLING

I write for an on-line science program: "Ask the Phid." I have to answer so many questions I like to ask some once in a while.

KRISTEN

You're like the host?

KIPLING

No. I quickly look up the answers and feed them to the host and she answers. She's the Phid. (KRISTEN looks confused.)
PhD: Phid. It's a hobby, I don't get paid that much.

(Pause.)

KRISTEN

Baldwin asked me if I'd perform topless?

KIPLING

That doesn't sound like him.

KRISTEN

He felt we needed to attract a larger straight audience, he's afraid we'll be ghettoized.

KRISTEN

Did you say yes?

KRISTEN

Should I?

KIPLING

I don't think so.

KRISTEN

Why not?

KIPLING

It's not... well, I'm sure you have nice breasts, but... I just don't really approve of that kind of thing.

KRISTEN

Approve? What are you, a fundamentalist?

KIPLING

Yes, as a matter of fact.

KRISTEN

You're Baldwin's brother and you're a fundament-

KIPLING

Yes, what's wrong with that?

KRISTEN

Nothing, I'm just surprised. You go to the Crystal Cathedral?

KIPLING

I checked that out a few years ago, it was too populist. My sect is actually more academic, we're interested in liturgical exegesis.

KRISTEN

Oh, so you're like intelligent fundamentalists.

KIPLING

I guess.

KRISTEN

Kind of an oxymoron, isn't it? Sorry.

KIPLING

That's all right, I'm used to the abuse.

(She rolls her eyes.)

KRISTEN

You don't believe in queer marriage and all that?

KIPLING

I abstain from answering that question.

KRISTEN

Hey, I don't care. I'm not gay. Aren't you a producer on this project?

KIPLING

Yeah.

KRISTEN

So how do you reconcile-

KIPLING

I'm not saying I disapprove of gay marriage but I do make a separation between aesthetics and ascetics.

KRISTEN

So the ascetic can't be aesthetic? And the converse: my breasts can't be ascetic?

(Pause.)

KIPLING

I don't know.

(She suddenly gasps.)

KRISTEN

Are you a virgin?

(Pause.)

KIPLING

Yes.

KRISTEN

Like, for your whole life?

KIPLING

That's what virginity is.

KRISTEN

No, there's conditional virginity, and situational virginity, it's like a situational homosexuality, it's brought on by extraordinary circumstances.

KIPLING

I'm in LA, you think I'm lacking for opportunities?

KRISTEN

You could be brainwashed by your religion.

KIPLING

I'm not.

KRISTEN

So how did I answer the question: "Will you perform topless?"

KIPLING

You'd have to tell me.

KRISTEN

I said, "No, but I'll perform bottomless."

KIPLING

That would be unusual. What did Baldwin say?

KRISTEN

He said people would think I had a deformed breast. (Pause.) Do you want to ask if I do?

KIPLING

No.

KRISTEN

No, I don't or no you don't want to ask?

KIPLING

I don't want to talk about this.

(Pause.)

KRISTEN

My last boyfriend was a writer for *SNL*. He was very clever-clever, you know clever-clever?

KIPLING

I know gay-gay, I imagine it's similar.

KRISTEN

Anyway, he was always explaining things to me. (Pause.) What's it like never to have had a girl friend?

KIPLING

Lonely.

KRISTEN

You ever get sick of it?

KIPLING

Yeah.

KRISTEN

I get sick of guy's moves. You know what I mean?

KIPLING

No.

KRISTEN

I get a boyfriend and we start making out or beyond and I feel like he has all his moves, tried and true. I never do that. I kiss a guy and it's always different, my body, my hands, even my feet respond differently. With guys I always feel like I'm getting a bunch of recycled moves. It's very now age, sustainable, green, salvaged, boring, dull...

KIPLING

That wouldn't happen with a virgin.

KRISTEN

No, I guess not.

KIPLING

A virgin couldn't help but provide new moves.

KRISTEN

Brand new.

KIPLING

Might be kind of amateurish.

KRISTEN

I like dilettantes.

KIPLING

Dilettantes aren't serious.

KRISTEN

I think they are, they just don't take themselves seriously. I hate guys who don't feel like they can relax and joke in bed, they have so much to prove.

KIPLING

I would have to be married before I went to bed with a girl.

KRISTEN

How about with a woman?

KIPLING

Well, I wasn't actually referring... never mind.

KRISTEN

Has a girl ever hit on you before?

KIPLING

Before when?

KRISTEN

Before now.

KIPLING

I don't know. I have so little experience I'm not sure I'd recognize a hit if one happened.

KRISTEN

Has a woman ever touched you?

KIPLING

Of course.

KRISTEN

Intimately?

KIPLING

Not in real life.

KRISTEN

You have a fantasy life?

KIPLING

I've been kissed onstage. When I was an actor. In high school.

KRISTEN

Did you like it?

KIPLING

No.

KRISTEN

Why not?

KIPLING

It made me forget my lines.

KRISTEN

You must of liked it.

KIPLING

No, I just thought it was a wrong choice.

KRISTEN

Did the script not call for it?

KIPLING

It did.

KRISTEN

So it wasn't wrong.

KIPLING

Well, she was playing my mother.

KRISTEN

Mothers kiss their boys.

KIPLING

She opened her mouth. I got tongue.

KRISTEN

You were doing *Phedre*?

KIPLING

No, *The Glass Managerie*.

KRISTEN

(In a Southern accent)

My goodness. I am just hot as the sin in here. Do have something cool to drink?

KIPLING

Yeah. Lemon Aid.

KRISTEN

Is it fresh?

KIPLING

No, it's in a jar. I have fresh ice cubes. (She smiles.) Here, I'll show you something. You tell me if it's a hit. Come here. (He indicates for her to sit beside him on BALDWIN's bed.)

KRISTEN

Really?

KIPLING

Yeah, come sit here. (She crosses to him and sits. He picks up a large book.) So this girl I acted with, not my mother in the play, my sister, Laura, you know.

KRISTEN

Sure, that's a great part.

KIPLING

Have you played it?

KIRSTEN

No, she's a cripple, I'd only get it if she was mute.

KIPLING

The Miracle Worker. You could play Helen Keller.

KRISTEN

She speaks. Eventually.

KIPLING

That's right. So this girl playing Laura, her name was Jillian and I drove her home one night and she invited me into her room, her parents were sleeping. Here, sit closer. (KRISTEN sits with their thighs touching.) And she had me sit on the bed, like you are now, and she got out her photo album and put it on my lap like this. (He puts book on her lap.) And she put her arm around me like this... (He puts his arm behind her back.) And leaned way over and pointed at individual pictures like this... (He leans across her and points at pictures.) And turned to tell me about them like this. (He turns to face her, their faces are very close.)

KRISTEN

Ok.

KIPLING

Is that flirting?

KRISTEN

What were the pictures of?

KIPLING

You know, her at camp, that kind of thing.

KRISTEN
Summer camp?

KIPLING
Yeah.

KRISTEN
Swim suits, hiking shorts?

KIPLING
Yeah.

KRISTEN
That's flirting.

KIPLING
I thought so.

KRISTEN
You sure you're a virgin?

KIPLING
Yeah. I guess I diffuse situations without realizing it.
(He suddenly stands up and walks to put the book away on a shelf.) Occupational hazard of being a virgin.

(She looks at him, looks at her watch, and stands.)

KRISTEN
Someone told me the production is broke, no money coming in.

KIPLING
It's fine. We had some disappointments but- Yes, we're broke, two major investors backed out today. Very bad news.

KRISTEN
Well, tell Baldwin, the great Baldwin Shank - are those really your names - Baldwin and Kipling Shank?

KIPLING
Sure. They're all family names.

KRISTEN
You tell the great Baldwin Shank that any time he wants it I can lay my mits on a cool 20K, if I play the lead.

KIPLING

You'd do that to Janet?

KRISTEN

Janet has a pilot coming up in five weeks. She doesn't need this project. I do. Part of the 20K would be a buy out for her. If Baldwin has a brain in his head he'll go for it. I know Janet would.

KIPLING

He doesn't have a brain in his head.

KRISTEN

All genius, no finesse. Tell him, plant the seed.

KIPLING

Interesting metaphor.

KRISTEN

Meotitic. Ciao.

(She leaves. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(A few weeks later, evening. BALDWIN in a tuxedo, KIPLING wears a sweater.)

BALDWIN

How do I look?

KIPLING

Good. But aren't you acting tonight?

BALDWIN

Yeah.

KIPLING

So why this-

BALDWIN

I use this to greet the audience, play producer, then I change into my costume and act, then I change back into this to play producer after the show.

KIPLING

You got a space for the opening night party?

BALDWIN
Yeah, Canter's.

KIPLING
Great. Who paid for the-

BALDWIN
Don't worry about it.

KIPLING
You got someone to put up for the-

BALDWIN
No-

KIPLING
So who-

BALDWIN
No one, no one paid. We all just show up at Canter's at eleven o'clock and we have a party space.

KIPLING
That's not a-

BALDWIN
It's five-thirty. My opening night buck-me-up and calm-me-down phone call from Mavis comes at five-thirty. Please don't stress me out.

KIPLING
You don't need me to stress you out-

BALDWIN
Is that what you're wearing?

KIPLING
Yeah, this is a nice sweater.

BALDWIN
You look like a drug dealer.

KIPLING
Drug dealer's can look nice.

BALDWIN
But you look sleazy.

KIPLING

No, I don't

BALDWIN

You do, you look- (Phone rings.) Ok, go outside and think about what you're going to wear.

KIPLING

I know what I'm going_

BALDWIN

(Shoving him out door)

Yes, out! (BALDWIN answers phone on speaker.) Hey.

MAVIS

(On speaker)

Hey. It's opening night. Break a leg!

BALDWIN

Thanks. Wish you were here.

MAVID

Well, Clive and all.

BALDWIN

How's he doing?

MAVIS

Not so good. Still only eats a little. I held him all night last night.

BALDWIN

Poor little baby.

MAVIS

I'm taking him in, have him checked out.

BALDWIN

It's lonely here.

MAVIS

We're lonely too, miss our big boy.

BALDWIN

I have my tux.

MAVIS

How's it fit?

BALDWIN

Ok, you think I'm fat?

MAVIS

I know how you get when you're away.

BALDWIN

How?

MAVIS

Too many donuts.

BALDWIN

I get stressed. Having to crawl into my little bed alone every night. Miss my boys. Cuddly cute babies.

MAVIS

We miss our big boy.

BALDWIN

Is Clive there?

MAVIS

Yeah, I got him right here on my lap.

BALDWIN

Is he a happy baby?

MAVIS

Purring away. Here listen. (Silence. Then we hear purring. BALDWIN turns up the volume on it. More purring. BALDWIN wipes his eyes. Silence.)

BALDWIN

Such a wonderful little boy.

MAVIS

You the wonderful boy.

BALDWIN

Miss you.

MAVIS

Yeah. Well...

BALDWIN

You always hustle off the phone.

MAVIS

Well...

BALDWIN

It doesn't cost anything.

MAVIS

Yeah... well, it's kind of upsetting.

BALDWIN

Don't be upset, boy.

(Pause.)

BALDWIN

Boy?

MAVIS

Have a good show tonight. We'll be thinking about you.

BALDWIN

Yeah. Love my boys. And I hope Clivedon's visit goes well.

MAVIS

Yeah. They usually fix him up.

BALDWIN

He's such a lovely young man.

MAVIS

Bye, boy.

BALDWIN

Bye.

(MAVIS hangs up. BALDWIN crosses to door and opens it.)

BALDWIN

All right, get in here.

(KIPLING enters.)

KIPLING

You see the stray cats Margaret's started feeding? They all come up to her-

BALDWIN
You have the press kits?

KIPLING
Yeah.

BALDWIN
Be nice. Ask them about their wives. Tell them you like their writing. Schmooz.

KIPLING
I don't know their writing-

BALDWIN
Pretence.

KIPLING
I'll do my best.

BALDWIN
(Freaking out)
Your best? Your best? You screw up they'll trash the show just to- No, you're part of the show. You're their first experience of the show. You have to- Wait, I'm going to go out and come in as if I'm a critic arriving-

KIPLING
Oh, come on, I hate all this improv stuff-

BALDWIN
No, here we go. Get a press kit. (He leaves. Through door)
Here I come. You all set?

KIPLING
I'm supposed to be taken by surprise.

BALDWIN
(Off)
What?

KIPLING
I'm not supposed to be set, I'm supposed to-

BALDWIN
(Off)
What?

KIPLING

(Leaning out the door)

The point is not to be set. It's to take me by surprise.
Don't ask if I'm all set.

BALDWIN

(Off)

Ok.

(Pause. KIPLING goes to door again and leans out.)

KIPLING

What are you doing?

BALDWIN

(Off)

Trying to take you by surprise.

(KIPLING shuts door and waits. Door opens and KRISTEN
enters, dressed for opening night, looking great.)

KRISTEN

Hi.

KIPLING

Oh, hi.

KRISTEN

Why is-

KIPLING

What are you-

KRISTEN

Why is-

KIPLING

What are you- Go ahead.

KRISTEN

Why is Baldwin walking around in a tuxedo? He looks like a
doorman.

KIPLING

He's- It's an improv. He's playing a critic arriving. Here
sit. (Sits her on his bed.) You look great. Gorgeous.

KRISTEN
Thanks. It's opening night.

KIPLING
Yeah. (Taking her in) Wow.

KRISTEN
You like?

KIPLING
Ha cha cha.

KRISTEN
Good. I dressed for you.

KIPLING
You did?

KRISTEN
Mostly. You guys get a party space?

KIPLING
Um... Canter's.

BALDWIN
(Entering, in character)
"Hey."

KIPLING
(Handing him a press kit)
"Hi. Welcome."

BALDWIN
"Thank you."

KIPLING
"I'm Kipling. I'm one of the producers."

BALDWIN
"Pleased to meet you."

KIPLING
"I love your column. Your reviews. I love your writing."

BALDWIN
"I'm on TV. KCLA."

KIPLING

"Oh, sorry, yes. I love your speaking voice."

BALDWIN

(Looking at his tickets)

"Is this seat on the aisle?"

KIPLING

"I don't--"

BALDWIN

"I only sit on the aisle."

KIPLING

"Well, let me check with--"

BALDWIN

"How long is the show?"

KIPLING

"Two hours."

BALDWIN

"Is there an intermission?"

KIPLING

"Yes."

BALDWIN

"Where does it fall?"

KIPLING

"Where does it--"

BALDWIN

"How long to intermission?"

KIPLING

"One hour."

BALDWIN

"Does the two hours include the intermission?"

KIPLING

"Yes."

BALDWIN

"So it's one hour, then a fifteen minute intermission, then a forty-five minute second act."

KRISTEN

(To KIPLING)

Yeah, you suck at this. You definitely suck at this.

KIPLING

Will they really be this way?

KRISTEN

If you start out by lying, yes. Why don't you just be real with them?

BALDWIN

How's he supposed to be real with them, he doesn't know them.

KRISTEN

(To KIPLING)

You can't talk to a stranger without lying? You couldn't talk to me if you didn't know me? Let's try it. I'm going out and I'll come in, as a reviewer you don't know. Ok? (She leaves and immediately reenters.) "Hi."

KIPLING

"Hello. How are you?"

KRISTEN

"Good. How are you?"

KIPLING

"Fine. That's a lovely outfit."

KRISTEN

"This? Thank you. I got my press packet but I wanted to make sure I got seats on the aisle. Are these seats on the aisle?"

KIPLING

"Well let's go look." (Glancing at tickets) "A2 and 3. Are you expecting someone?"

KRISTEN

"I was but he couldn't make it."

KIPLING

"Stupid him." (She giggles happily.)

BALDWIN

Ok, well what if it were a man?

KRISTEN

Men don't like being complimented on their outfits?

BALDWIN

Some arrive in horrible moods. Here, let's try it. (He leaves and reenters.)

KIPLING

"Hi."

BALDWIN

"Why the hell is this theatre so far down Santa Monica? There's no parking down here."

KIPLING

(To KRISTEN)

What do I-?

KRISTEN

Be honest.

KIPLING

Ok.

BALDWIN

"There're bums out front, it's disgusting. This neighborhood's a slum."

KIPLING

"Yeah, it's terrible. I hate it down here. When you leave there'll be tranny prostitutes working the intersection right over there. They spit on you if you ignore them, like lamas, it's nauseating. Yesterday I slipped in vomit, got it all over my pant leg. Spent the rest of day smelling like puke. Then when I got home last night I had a needle stuck in my shoe."

BALDWIN

"So why'd you do the show down here?"

KIPLING

"Well it's all we could afford. But you write us a glowing review, we'll move it to a beautiful theatre in Westwood."

(She laughs and applauds.)

BALDWIN

"How long's the show?"

KIPLING

"Hell if I know, I haven't made it through the first act."

BALDWIN

You can't say that.

KRISTEN

Why not?

BALDWIN

It's not even honest aside from being negative-

KRISTEN

Yeah, that's the point, it's the kind of dishonesty that pays because it makes the whole thing less serious. He's very charming. I think he'll do great.

BALDWIN

You look very pretty.

KIPLING

She always looks pretty.

BALDWIN

Tonight she looks especially pretty.

KRISTEN

Thanks. I thought I'd dress up for the party. Where is it?

BALDWIN

Canter's.

KRISTEN

Oh, in the Kibitz Room?

BALDWIN

Yeah, whatever it's called.

KIPLING

Can you give me a lift?

KRISTEN

Sure, if you drive my car.

KIPLING

Fine. I have to get dressed.

BALDWIN

You're already dressed.

KIPLING

This? I look like a drug dealer in this. (Turning KRISTEN away from him) Here, talk to Baldwin, turn your back.

(During the following, behind KRISTEN's back, KIPLING quickly sheds his outfit and then lowers on the pulleys the following items, in which he hurriedly dresses: suit, dress shirt, black socks and shoes.)

KRISTEN

(To BALDWIN)

You going to give me some shows?

BALDWIN

Asked and answered. Move on, counselor.

KRISTEN

I want some shows. Janet even agreed to give me some Wednesdays.

BALDWIN

Janet might have but-

KRISTEN

What's your fear of me going in for-

BALDWIN

I have no fear-

KRISTEN

Then why do you act afraid?

BALDWIN

I know you think I'm a big dick.

KRISTEN
No, I think you're a little dick.

BALDWIN
Let's just settle for dick.

KRISTEN
Fine, you're a dick.

BALDWIN
I can't help it.

KRISTEN
Yes you can. Fight it. Be a better person. Let me have a show.

BALDWIN
No.

(KIPLING is dressed.)

KIPLING
Ta da!

(KRISTEN spins.)

KRISTEN
Oh, nice. That your best tie?

KIPLING
Uh, yeah.

KRISTEN
(To BALDWIN as she crosses to closet)
This your shit in here?

BALDWIN
Yeah.

(She throws open closet and quickly picks a stunning orange tie from several hanging on the inside of the door.)

BALDWIN
Hey-

KRISTEN
This, *this* is a tie.

BALDWIN

That's Hermés.

KRISTEN

(Handing it to KIPLING)

Duh, no kidding. Wear this.

BALDWIN

That's a hundred dollar tie.

KRISTEN

He's greeting the press. He needs to look like a million bucks.

BALDWIN

My boyfriend gave that to me-

KRISTEN

And it should be worn tonight, if not by you- (She turns to see KIPLING in the tie.) Whoop di doo, look at you! Zowee!

KIPLING

You like?

KRISTEN

Like? Girl, you could make some money on the strip!

KIPLING

You think?

KRISTEN

Who is your pimp? Damn! (To BALDWIN, indicating KIPLING)
Don't let me near that on payday.

BALDWIN

(Dismissive)

Yeah, nice tie.

KRISTEN

Which draws a very nice line between a very nice face and very nice waist. Even Rembrandt needs fancy lighting. Mmmmm! Thanksgiving Dinner! Butter, rolls and cranberry sauce!

KIPLING

(Offering his arm)

Give me your arm, lady.

KRSITEN
(Taking it)

Oh, melt me, baby.

KIPLING

Doin' it for you?

KRISTEN
You kidding? My nips just went ping! (To BALDWIN) You all
set, grandpa?

BALDWIN
You haven't said anything about my outfit?

KRISTEN
I have one reaction.

KIPLING
I know what it is.

KRISTEN
Go ahead.

KIPLING
(To BALDWIN)
Oh, maitre d', we have a reservation. The name is Shank.

KRISTEN
And don't seat us in Siberia!

(They start to leave.)

BALDWIN
Wait a minute. It's opening night. I want to have a moment.

KIPLING
A mo-

KRISTEN
We do this at the theatre.

BALDWIN
I do it now. Before I leave the house.

KRISTEN
OK.

(They link hands, look at KIPLING.)

KRISTEN

Come on.

(Looking confused, KIPLING joins them, forming a circle of linked hands. They close their eyes, stand in a circle. Suddenly KIPLING releases BALDWIN's hand while still holding onto KRSTEN'S.)

KIPLING
(To BALDWIN)

Stop that!

BALDWIN

What?

KIPLING
You keep squeezing my hand. It's creepy.

BALDWIN
It's an energy circle. You're supposed to pass it along. It can move in different directions.

KIPLING
Ewwwww. That is creepy. I hate it. Is that what actors do back stage?

BALDWIN
One of the things.

KIPLING
Can we go, let's just go.

BALDWIN
(Exiting grandly)
"Once more unto the breech, dear friends, once more!"

(KIPLING and KRISTEN hang back, squeezing each other's hands. For energy. Then they leave. Lights fade to black. End of Act One.)

Act IIScene 1

(Late at night. Kipling in sweat pants reading.
Baldwin enters, still in tuxedo but with tie loose. He
holds a bag of Winchell's and is munching a donut.)

KIPLING

Hey.

BALDWIN

Hey.

KIPLING

Nice party.

BALDWIN

It was ok.

KIPLING

Thirty-five people at separate tables spread out around
Canter's. Classy.

BALDWIN

I wasn't embarrassed until Keifer Sutherland showed up. I
went up to see if he was offended. He was powering blintzes
and having a great time. He loved the show. Loved it. Said
Kantor's was perfect for us, very campy. Who invited him?

KIPLING

I don't now.

BALDWIN

Must have been Kristen. He was all over her.

KIPLING

He wasn't all over her.

BALDWIN

He got into a Junior booth with her.

KIPLING

They were just talking.

BALDWIN

They were both on one side.

KIPLING

Aren't you tired?

BALDWIN

Exhausted. But in a good way.

KIPLING

I came home and collapsed I was so tired.

BALDWIN

I have to stay up till the reviews come out. It's a tradition.

KIPLING

What if they don't come out until Wednesday?

BALDWIN

Then I have to stay up till Wednesday. Otherwise they'll be bad.

KIPLING

That's not a tradition, it's a superstition.

BALDWIN

You want some donuts?

KIPLING

I don't eat donuts. Not late at night.

BALDWIN

Great. More for me. He was holding her hand.

KIPLING

Who?

(KIPLING gets up, removes a Pilates ball from shelf and does Pilates push-ups on it.)

BALDWIN

(Pouring milk from frig)

He Keifer, her Kristen. Milk?

KIPLING

Milk is lactose. Lactose makes you fart.

BALDWIN

I like to fart. It's healthy,

KIPLING

No, it's not.

BALDWIN

Beans, beans they're good for your heart,
The more you eat the more you fart,
The more you fart the better you feel,
So eat some beans at every meal.

(Pause.)

KIPLING

That's a recommendation for beans not donuts.

BALDWIN

The point is farting's good for you.

KIPLING

Because of that poem?

BALDWIN

I need to pig out.

KIPLING

Go ahead.

BALDWIN

You're going to do that while I'm eating donuts?

KIPLING

I am so stressed out from today, if I don't do this I'll
climb up the wall.

BALDWIN

Have a donut.

KIPLING

That shit's horrible for you.

BALDWIN

But it knocks me out. I'd never go to sleep without donuts.

KIPLING

I thought you had to stay up till- (He suddenly jumps up
and runs to door.) Oh, gross! What's that all about!!

BALDWIN

What?

KIPLING

(Throwing open door)

Just cause it's silent doesn't mean it doesn't stink. Oh, yucko! It smells like burnt sugar. (BALDWIN is laughing.) I don't think it's funny. That is disgusting. Yuck. You're wearing a tuxedo!

BALDWIN

You don't think people fart in tuxedos?

KIPLING

They shouldn't.

BALDWIN

I bet the Academy Awards is one big fart fest. All that organic food.

KIPLING

You do this at home?

BALDWIN

I'm not at home.

KIPLING

Mavis groove on your farts?

BALDWIN

No.

KIPLING

So don't do it here.

BALDWIN

This is my vacation.

KIPLING

Oh, oh, oh! (Throws on fan.)

BALDWIN

Holding back farts is unhealthy.

KIPLING

You learn that in a poem?

BALDWIN

Here I sit, broken hearted-

KIPLING

That poem is not about the goodness of farting, it's about depression over not being able to poop.

(Phone rings. KIPLING darts to speaker, hits it and then darts back to safety of the open door.)

KIPLING

(Shouting to phone)

Hello.

VOICE

(On phone)

I'm trying to sleep.

BALDWIN

What the fuck is that? Janet? Is that you?

VOICE

I'm trying to sleep.

(KIPLING shrugs.)

BALDWIN

Janet? Is that you cranking us?

VOICE

I'm trying to sleep.

BALDWIN

Fuck you, Janet, you'll get to sleep faster if you take that black dido out of your ass.

KIPLING

Stop it!

BALDWIN

The butt plug goes in your anus, Janet, not your pussy. You're not sleeping because your crotch is gagging on sex toys rammed up the wrong hole.

KIPLING

(Quickly closing the door)

It's the nun. It's the fucking nun, shut up. (Into phone)
Hi, Margaret. Margaret, it's Kipling. Are you ok?

(We hear a faint chanting sound.)

BALDWIN
What is that?

KIPLING
Margaret?

BALDWIN
What is that?

KIPLING
It's the rosary.

BALDWIN
Oh, for Christ's sake. Like we're Satan or something, that really pisses me off-

(Pounding on door. KIPLING and BALDWIN look at one another. More pounding.)

OFFICER
(Off)
Police. Open up.

(KIPLING opens door.)

OFFICER
(Off)
You two alone in here?

KIPLING
Yeah.

(OFFICERS will remain unseen throughout.)

OFFICER
Can we come in and look around?

KIPLING
No, I'm afraid you can't.

(The beam from a flashlight blinds KIPLING.)

OFFICER
You got something to hide?

KIPLING
Please don't shine that light in my eyes.

OFFICER

Your neighbor said- Oh, damn! Jesus, what are you two doing in there! Whoo, stand back, Jerry. Toot tsunami in this place.

SECOND OFFICER

Dang!

OFFICER

Whoo! Your neighbor says you're raising a ruckus in here. Causing a disturbance.

BALDWIN

So what?

(Beam hits BALDWIN's face.)

KIPLING

I'm afraid she's mistaken, officer.

BALDWIN

She called us! She disturbed us!

OFFICER

What's in that bag?

BALDWIN

Donuts.

OFFICER

Can I have one? I'd like to sniff it.

BALDWIN

(Throwing bag through door)

Go ahead, officer. Help yourself.

OFFICER

Tastes all right. (To SECOND OFFICER, off) Here, try one. Don't eat mine. Try one of the others.

SECOND OFFICER

Tastes good.

OFFICER

You know your neighbor's a nun with Mary Star of the Sea?

BALDWIN

What difference does that make?

OFFICER
You got something against Catholics?

BALDWIN
What the hell-

KIPLING
No, officer. We're brothers. We were raised Catholic ourselves.

BALDWIN
We were?

KIPLING
Anglo Catholic. Episcopalian.

BALDWIN
News to me.

(Pause.)

OFFICER
What's your mother?

KIPLING
Methodist. My father is Episcopalian.

OFFICER
Religion comes from the mother. You're Methodists.

KIPLING
We're Methodists.

OFFICER
Why do Methodists disapprove of foreplay?

KIPLING
Um... I don't...

OFFICER
Why do Methodists disapprove of foreplay?

KIPLING
Oh, is this a joke? Umm... I don't know.

OFFICER
Because it leads to dancing. (Pause.) That's the only Methodist joke I know.

KIPLING

It's not very funny.

OFFICER

Like I said, it's the only-

BALDWIN

Why do cops like donuts?

OFFICER

I don't know.

BALDWIN

Because they like to rim a sweet hole.

(Pause.)

OFFICER

Is that like a gay joke?

BALDWIN

Yeah, I just made it up.

OFFICER

It's not very funny.

BALDWIN

Yeah, well, I'm gay and I get to make up not funny gay jokes.

OFFICER

(To KIPLING)

You seem like a reasonable young man. Your friend here is pretty rowdy and he's keeping the old lady awake.

(Phone rings.)

KIPLING

Should I answer that?

OFFICER

Of course. Always answer the phone, it might be something important.

KIPLING

(Into phone)

Hello-

I'm trying to sleep.

VOICE

Is that her?

OFFICER

Yes.

KIPLING

Ma'am. It's the police, ma'am. We're responding to your call, ma'am.

OFFICER

I'm trying to sleep.

VOICE

Ok, ma'am. We'll be going. Sweet dreams. (We hear the phone hang up. In a whisper) Hey, why did the gay baby cross the road?

OFFICER

I don't know.

KIPLING

Because he was stapled to the chicken. I just made that up.

OFFICER

You're not allowed to make up gay jokes.

BALDWIN

It's actually a variation on the chicken crossing the road joke. You can staple anything to the chicken and it works. Gets it across the road.

OFFICER

Thank you.

KIPLING

Can I have my donuts back?

BALDWIN

Here. (Donuts fly back in the room.) They have better ones on Motor. Winchell's are all right. But not as good as Motor Donuts. I know it's rough when you're farting and all but keep the door closed, it'll cut down on noise.

OFFICER

KIPLING

Yes, officer.

OFFICER

And cut down on the noise. Tomorrow's Sunday, big day for nuns.

KIPLING

Yes, officer. (He closes the door.) Are you fucking stupid? Arguing with LA cops?

BALDWIN

Why are LA cops-

KIPLING

Duh, Rodney King.

BALDWIN

Yeah, they're going to taser a guy in a tuxedo.

KIPLING

Get into bed. Go to sleep.

BALDWIN

I have to stay up. For the reviews. It's a tradition.

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Morning. BALDWIN and DAVIS stand looking at the paper. BALDWIN shoves it into DAVIS' hands with disgust.)

BALDWIN

Look what's right underneath it.

DAVIS

Hey, that's great. Thomas got a great review. Wow. "A startling new voice. Rarely does the clarion cry of such an original and-"

BALDWIN

Thank you. Peechy!

DAVIS

What's your problem?

BALDWIN

You're going to read me my best friend's glowing review on the day we got a totally shit one.

DAVIS

We didn't get a shit one and he's not your best friend.

BALDWIN

Oh, fuck you.

DAVIS

What, now you're going to turn on me?

BALDWIN

He had his play done at the Taper. At the fucking Mark Taper Forum. Of course it's brilliant. A million dollar production versus a ten thousand dollar throw up job.

DAVIS

So you think our show is shit as well.

BALDWIN

It can't compete.

DAVIS

You get a stinky review you immediately say your own work is shit.

BADLWIN

A bad review should ruin your breakfast but not your lunch.

DAVIS

Who said that?

BALDWIN

My friend who makes pornos.

DAVIS

Porn gets reviewed?

BALDWIN

(Grabbing paper)

Let me see that. Shit, look at that. He would have to open the same week as I do in LA.

DAVIS

It doesn't matter. The *Weekly* liked us, and the *Observer*.

BALDWIN

The *Weekly* likes everything and the *Observer's* for street people.

DAVIS

Don't be so bitter.

BALDWIN

I'll be whatever I want. (His phone rings, he answers.) Hey, you read the *Times*? It's right there with a big glossy picture- When? Why? Ok, I'll call her. (Hangs up.) Janet's sick. Says she can't go on tonight.

DAVIS

Should I call Kristen?

BALDWIN

I'm doing it. (Into phone) Hey. Can you meet me and Janet down at the theatre at ten to rehearse? She can't go on. You go on tonight. You all set? Yeah. Great. See you then. (Hangs up.) Well, someone's happy.

DAVIS

We invited too many industry to the opening, they sat on their hands.

BALDWIN

Should have done a tragedy. Thomas's play is a tragedy.

DAVIS

It doesn't say it's a tragedy.

BALDWIN

It's about slavery.

DAVIS

But it says its full of laughs, the laughs humanize the drama, relieve it from being maudlin.

BALDWIN

Audience laughs twice in a tragedy it's considered humanized.

DAVIS

No, no, it says it "achieves the drama indirectly through the graceful and gentle humor of the-"

BALDWIN

Can you just read me the whole review? Please. Just start at the beginning and read me his whole review-

DAVIS

No, I just-

BALDWIN

No, please, I have half an hour before I have to rehearse an understudy, before I have to get someone ready to replace the only person that the *Times* liked in my show. Please brighten my day-

DAVIS

They liked me.

BALDWIN

Ok, fine, why don't you take the night off as well. You and sick Janet can go to the Taper and laugh at the slaves.

DAVIS

I just-

BALDWIN

Oh, no, you couldn't, they're probably sold out!

DAVIS

All right, fine, Jesus, I was just-

BALDWIN

Yeah, great, I'm sorry. Have a donut.

DAVIS

Those are day old.

BALDWIN

Then don't have one, more for me. (Doing some kind of bird) Ahaaa! Ahaaa! Ahaaa!

(He munches on his donut for a while.)

DAVIS

(Looking at paper)

Obama's in China. They talked about everything except human rights, seems they're dancing around that subject. Still, it's good they're talking. Apparently there's a huge untapped market over there for American products so what

they lack in human rights they make up for in shopping rights-

BALDWIN

Why are you reading me about Barak in China?

DAVIS

I'm keeping you company. You're supposed to do that when...

BALDWIN

When what? When someone's in shock? Why don't you loosen my belt and call 911.

DAVIS

You want me to come with you to rehearse Kristen?

BALDWIN

(Standing, moving towards door)

Yeah, do that. Let's go. We can pick up sparklers on the way.

DAVIS

You know those are illegal.

BALDWIN

Are you going to start with me? Are you?

DAVIS

I'm just saying-

BALDWIN

Spare me. I'm clutching a fire extinguisher throughout the entire sparkler scene, no one is more concerned about the safety of my cast than I am.

DAVIS

Ok.

BALDWIN

Would you put that down? You are obsessed with that paper.

DAVIS

I read the paper every day, I'm sorry.

BALDWIN

Yes, thank you, I don't need a reminder that all of LA, all eight million people in the LA basin, are reading the paper today. I don't need that reminder.

DAVIS
(Dropping paper)

There, it's down.

BALDWIN
Was there nothing, absolutely nothing in that review that could be used as a pull quote?

(DAVIS picks it up and peruses it.)

DAVIS
"Bursts of spastic energy."

BALDWIN
Spastic?

DAVIS
Yes.

BALDWIN
We could put "bursts of" dot-dot-dot "energy." What else?

DAVIS
(Seeing something)
Oh, here. No, forget it.

BALDWIN
What?

DAVIS
No, I misread.

BALDWIN
What?

DAVIS
It won't work.

BALDWIN
Just read it.

DAVIS
"A wild energetic time seems to be the author's intention but it all gets lost in desperate mugging and wink-wink puerility."

BALDWIN
"A wild energetic time" dot-dot-dot.

DAVIS

Not really the spirit of the thing.

BALDWIN

You're asking me to respect the integrity of that review? Because that person should die, in my cosmology, that critic should be reduced to a pile of quivering protoplasm. Give me that thing. (He reads. He sees something awful, cries out in pain.) Ahhhhh!!! (Sees something else awful.) Ahhhhh!!!! (Reads more.) Ok, here's some pull quotes: "Funny" exclamation mark. "Boisterous" exclamation mark. "Unctuous" exclamation mark.

DAVIS

(Grabs paper)

There are no exclamation marks. There's a "not" in front of "funny," an "over" in front of "boisterous" and "unctuous" is not a compliment.

BALDWIN

You learnt that at Yale?

DAVIS

No, in grammar school.

BALDWIN

Let's go.

DAVIS

I thought you said the Taper offered you a production.

BALDWIN

I lied. Ok? No one offered me a production. *This* is my production. Let's just go. We have to get Kristen ready.

(They head towards door. BALDWIN turns around and sits.)

DAVIS

What's wrong now?

BADLWIN

I can't believe that review.

DAVIS

It's not that bad.

BALDWIN

I never get bad reviews. Never.

DAVIS

There had to be a fist.

BALDWIN

I mean, I've gotten bad reviews, but never one from an important paper. I mean I've gotten one from an important paper but... Jesus, everyone loved that show, in New York, in Florida, on that Cruise ship. They loved it.

DAVIS

It wasn't to his tastes. It happens.

BALDWIN

I feel completely invalidated. I gave up my entire summer to do this show and now it's a flop,

DAVIS

It's not a flop.

BALDWIN

Not the show, my life. My life's a flop.

DAVIS

Oh, come on...

BALDWIN

Hey, I'm letting this ruin my breakfast, would you let me, would you allow me to let this ruin my breakfast? (They munch donuts disconsolately.)

(Knock on door.)

ASHTON

(Entering)

Hail the conquering heroes.

DAVIS

Ashton.

BALDWIN

Donut?

ASHTON

No, thank you, I don't eat sugar. Well fructose. Occasionally.

DAVIS

Are you lost?

ASHTON

No, on the way to the airport. To pick up Denzel. Gives us an opportunity to chat. Get acquainted. It's all in the contract. My p-time with Denzel. Hey Baldwin, enjoyed the show last night.

BALDWIN

(Mouth full of donuts)

Thank you.

ASHTON

I was thinking about it as I drove down here. I'm always trying to think commercially. I grew up on art films but now I try to see the commerce in the art. Can I give you some advice?

BALDWIN

Is this why you dropped by?

ASHTON

No, I'm just killing time. Rather wait here than at the airport. You should always plan an hour for the airport but have a stop off position on the way in case you're running early. (Pause. They stare at him.) It's too campy. It's too gay gay. It's so-

DAVIS

Ashton, forgive me, and we like input, we do, but we usually take it from people who've made an investment, who've been there when the chips were down.

ASHTON

I gave you my garage. To build that set.

DAVIS

Yes, you did.

ASHTON

That cost me plenty.

DAVIS

It was very generous of you-

ASHTON

No, it cost me plenty.

DAVIS

How did it cost you plenty?

ASHTON

I'll tell you. I know I'm not a big time investor, but I'll tell you if you can spare one minute.

DAVIS

Sure.

ASHTON

I'm a lumberman, Canadian lumber. My father left me a 1.5 billion dollar operation when he died. And all I ever wanted to do was make movies. Get away from the boards, the saws, ya know? So I brought CarolAnne down here and built her that beautiful house and spread it around that I was looking for a project. I read a hundred scripts, went to screenings every night, took lunches. Set up my own production company. It was hard work. But since it's a company I can deduct all my expenses, cut myself a healthy salary, write most of the house off as an office, it all comes out even in the end, almost.

DAVID

Amazing.

ASHTON

The point is I made myself. I came to Hollywood with nothing, nothing, and I made myself. That's talent. That's determination. What you guys are doing, it's fantasy time. Sorry, but it is. It stinks of peanuts. Davis, you have something. Yale, that's something. You must know someone here, someone to connect with. Another Eli.

ASHTON

I know you.

DAVIS

Oh. Well, there must be someone else. Here's the thing, and this is why you have to have a thick skin in this business. CarolAnne, she's gorgeous. And I love her. I met her when I got back from college. She went to McGill, smart lady. A queen of Canada, really. But she wanted to get out as well, escape Montreal and all that wood smoke provincialism. And I liked that about her. I did. I loved her.

DAVIS

Ashton, what are you trying to tell us? Because whatever it is this is all pretty depressing, you know what I mean.

ASHTON

Well, be careful about marrying someone like CarolAnne. Essentially you're getting a gal who wants things more than she wants people. You know Rockwell Torment?

DAVIS

Head of TAA, was at ICM, before that at Torment Agency, has one client: Tom Criuse, takes him wherever he-

ASHTON

He's boning CarolAnne. It started that weekend you were all hammering away in my garage. Bang-bang-bang. Drove her crazy. She couldn't stick around. We were trying to have an argument, CarolAnne and I, really trying to argue, trying to shout it out and bang-bang-bang. She threw up her hands. Said she was going to Rockwell's. He had a nicer place, no Mickey and Judy crew in the garage hammering boards together. Bang-bang-bang. And she left. That's when he started boning her.

DAVIS

You can't be blaming us for your wife leaving you.

ASHTON

You see I'm too generous. I like to help young artists. I like to encourage-

DAVIS

Young? We're the same age as you.

ASHTON

I gave you something. I allowed you into-

DAVIS

You promised us five-thousand dollars-

ASHTON

Do you know what shop space costs to rent, by the hour?

DAVIS

And when you reneged on us, at the last minute-

ASHTON

I checked it out, I could charge you sixty-three hundred-

DAVIS

You guilt tripped yourself into offering us the use of your car port-

ASHTON

And I just ignored insurance, the insurance alone-

DAVIS

You have been so fucking hostile this whole time-

ASHTON

Probably another grand.

DAVIS

Why do you hate us, Ashton, why-

ASHTON

I don't hate you, I hate small time, I hate-

DAVIS

Small time, small time is building your fucking pool house-

ASHTON

I hate no money, low talent-

DAVIS

You talk about talent in the same breath as you talk about cash-

ASHTON

I would never invest in this, in any of this low life-

DAVIS

Ashton, Ashton, I was building your pool house, your pool house and you came out all growling and asking what I was doing in Hollywood. And I when I told you, you got all generous and telling me you wanted to kick in and could I send you a budget.

ASHTON

I wanted to encourage you, how is that wrong?

DAVIS

By promising something you were never going to-

BALDWIN

Guys. Guys. (They shut up.) Ashton, we're sorry about what happened. And we're sorry if we contributed-

ASHTON

(To BALDWIN with bald hostility)

You see the problem here is, the problem with you is, you're a learner. You're here to learn. Another thing I should charge you for because I'm not paid to teach. But here's a lesson, real simple: At some point you learned not to burn bridges. You learned to suck up to money, you learned to be patient and keep your cool. But that doesn't really cut it, ok? I mean, maybe it will work with the next Joe, but I doubt it. It's a closed circle, Winny. I'm only here because I'm an Eli like Davis. You're not. You're not even Ivy Wall. Why should I even let you suck up to me? Explain.

BALDWIN

(Quietly)

I guess I don't know who I'm talking to.

ASHTON

No, you don't. I'm the producer of a Denzel Washington pic. You know who he is? He has three Academy Awards for Best Actor.

DAVIS

Two.

BALDWIN

And one's for Best Supporting Actor.

ASHTON

Is that true? (He palm pilots this.)

DAVIS

Ashton, if I had ten million dollars they'd let me be a producer of *Stallion*. It's that simple.

BALDWIN

You'll never get the stink of bark off your flannels.

DAVIS

I'll say hello to CarolAnne when I see her. I'm working on Torment's house.

(ASHTON leaves, slamming door in his wake.)

DAVIS

Yeah! I mean, yeah! That felt good!

BALDWIN

Very satisfying.

DAVIS

Damn it, that was!

BALDWIN

And he'll tell everyone he meets for the next month that we're a couple of dicks.

DAVIS

Why did he even come out here?

BALDWIN

CarolAnne dumped him. He's probably in shock. There are worse things than a bad review.

DAVIS

Ooooo... Life lesson.

BALDWIN

That distracted me for ten seconds. I can't even believe I have to perform tonight. Before I speak each word I'll think: "The *Times* hates me. The *Times* hates me."

DAVIS

No, you won't. You'll disappear into the moment.

BALDWIN

(Sarcastic)

"My character is like a warm blanket I draw up over my shivering body." I wish I was Denzel Washington. When he acts he makes millions, hit or flop.

DAVIS

He has to ride in from the airport with people like Ashton.

BALDWIN

We shouldn't have done that.

DAVIS

No.

BALDWIN

He was upset. We should have made him feel better. He lashed out but he wanted a hug.

DAVIS

You're right. I don't know about the hug but...

BALDWIN

I don't mean a literal hug. A human hug, the hug of humanity.

DAVIS

Next time.

BALDWIN

Let's go. We'll rehearse Kristen, eat our meals, the day will pass, the night will come and life will go on. "I can't go on, I'll go on."

(He leaves. DAVIS follows. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(That night. Late. KIPLING, still dressed, on his bed, reading. Suddenly we hear a very loud TV through the wall, it is an episode of *The Flying Nun*. KIPLING calmly makes a call.)

KIPLING

(Into phone)

Hi, Margaret, it's Kipling. Kipling. Yes, I got the juice. Thank you. You know your TV's up loud again. Really loud. Yes, I'll wait. (A moment passes and it gets quiet. Another moment.) Thank you, Margaret. I do like Sally Field, wonderful actress. And Deborah Kerr. Robbie Coltrane? Oh, yes, *Nuns on the Run*. I'll rent it. Goodnight, Margaret. (He puts phone away. BALDWIN enters.)

KIPLING

How did Kristen do?

BALDWIN

Really good.

KIPLING

I was there.

BALDWIN

You were?

KIPLING

Yeah, I was testing you. She was good. Not as good a singer as Janet, but a good actress. It was kind of amazing to see someone else in the role and still have it work.

BALDWIN

It was.

KIPLING

Good job.

BALDWIN

Thanks.

KIPLING

That scene where she's getting dumped. Janet always plays it really over the top. Kristen was kind of heart breaking in it.

BALDWIN

I know. I don't like that so much.

KIPLING

I did. I was va klempt.

BALDWIN

I think that kind of emotion is cheesy.

KIPLING

Nothing wrong with a little cheese.

BALDWIN

She's pretty, isn't she?

KIPLING

Yeah, why did you give her such a small role?

BALDWIN

I don't know. I like misfits. She's not a misfit, she's like a popular girl.

KIPLING

You should do a show with her as the lead. She's incredibly sympathetic.

BALDWIN

There's a play I want to do about a girl who marries a gay guy for security, you know, and he marries her for his

parents, so he'll pass. But they both end up hurting each other. They didn't think they could but they do.

KIPLING

Like they have sex with other people and it's not ok.

BALDWIN

Yeah, and they're surprised by that.

KIPLING

What happens in Act Two?

BALDWIN

She kills him with some power tools.

KIPLING

Onstage?

BALDWIN

No, off. Unless there's a big wardrobe budget. Then there'd be money for laundry and it could be a blood bath.

KIPLING

They could wear all red and it wouldn't show.

BALDWIN

Even if it doesn't show it gets sticky. The blood is made with corn syrup. Actors don't like sticky.

KIPLING

You could get a dog from the SPCA and have him lick the costumes every night after the show.

BALDWIN

Do dogs like sugar?

KIPLING

Maybe some cats.

BALDWIN

We'd need a few of them. What would we do with them after the show closes?

KIPLING

Feed 'em to pit bulls.

BALDWIN

You've really started thinking like a producer.

KIPLING

It's acting. I just imagine I'm you.

BALDWIN

I don't know what happens in Act Two. I guess he comes out of the closet and she finds a good guy to love.

KIPLING

That's sweet.

BALDWIN

We'll let wardrobe decide.

KIPLING

Audience loved it. Tonight.

BALDWIN

They did.

KIPLING

Very friendly.

BALDWIN

Anyone in the lobby mention the review?

KIPLING

One woman. She said it was mixed.

BALDWIN

Mixed? I guess it was. When I read it this morning it seemed all bad.

KIPLING

It liked the songs and the subplots, even the central story. It just said it was too campy.

BALDWIN

You think it's too campy?

KIPLING

That's your aesthetic. It wouldn't be your show if it was all naturalistic and believable.

BALDWIN

But Kristen was believable.

KIPLING

Yeah, she works in that role. She gets both the campy and the naturalistic. She's a good actress for you. Somehow she puts both things across.

BALDWIN

And Janet doesn't?

KIPLING

Janet's like a little powerhouse. She's a lot of fun. With the wrong audience though it all seems very ach and remote. Like a ballet being watched by sports fans.

BALDWIN

Tonight we had the right audience.

KIPLING

Yeah.

BALDWIN

What about my acting?

KIPLING

You play yourself.

BALDWIN

Yeah.

KIPLING

Well it's not really acting.

BALDWIN

I hate that assumption. It's hard playing yourself.

KIPLING

It wasn't an insult. It's tough playing a dick. I'm exhausted every time I run the lines.

BALDWIN

It felt better tonight. I wasn't worried about reviews any more. I could just relax and be in the moment.

KIPLING

Seemed the same to me.

(Phone. BALDWIN looks at it and smiles. He uses the speaker.)

Hey, Chuck.

BALDWIN

Baldy!

CHUCK

Hi.

BALDWIN

I can't hear you!

CHUCK

Chuck, I'm here. So is Kipling. How are you?

BALDWIN

Hi, Chuck.

CHUCK

What's with those names? Baldwin and Kipling.

BALDWIN

They're family names. On my father's side. They go way back.

CHUCK

Are you named after writers?

BALDWIN

No, they're family names, on my-

CHUCK

James Baldwin is black. How can you be named after a black writer?

BALDWIN

Never mind.

CHUCK

What?

BALDWIN

My brother dates Missy Eliot, did you know that?

KIPLING

Shut up.

CHUCK
She's a good singer.

BALDWIN
You listen to her music?

CHUCK
Of course. I like her and Justin and some gangsta, but more the classical stuff – Tupac and Biggie. Gangsta kids today are all punks. (Pause.) I'm sorry about the review.

BALDWIN
Yeah, that didn't help.

CHUCK
And I'm sorry about the money.

BALDWIN
Yep, that woulda helped.

CHUCK
Well...

BALDWIN
How are you?

CHUCK
Not so good.

BALDWIN
What does that mean?

CHUCK
I have diabetes.

BALDWIN
Chuck.

CHUCK
Yeah, pretty bad.

BALDWIN
Chuck.

CHUCK
Yeah, I'm fat. You know that. Not something you have to tell people about yourself.

BALDWIN

Can't you... I mean, aren't there regimens...

CHUCK

Yes, yes, yes... That's why I went on coke, to lose weight, for me that was the perfect regimen. I was a fat kid, never got a handle on it until cocaine. Then when I kicked the coke habit, well... I'm going to have to move out of this place, into a care facility. Condo care, something like that. There's one on Wilshire.

BALDWIN

Chuck, that's awful.

CHUCK

It's not. It's ok. It's what people like me do. We used to return to the Holy Land or Florida, now we go into condo care on Wilshire. Hal Linden is in my facility. That'll be fun, live down the hall from Barney Miller.

BALDWIN

You know Hal Linden?

CHUCK

Sure. He started with me. Everybody started with me.

BALDWIN

Teddy Kennedy?

CHUCK

Oh, sure. He called me before he died. Wanted to make sure it was a good time.

BALDWIN

I'm sorry about your illness, Chuck. I didn't know.

CHUCK

No, I don't let people know.

BALDWIN

You should.

CHUCK

I don't like sympathy.

BALDWIN

Ok. How about empathy?

CHUCK

That's ok.

BALDWIN

Fine, we empathize.

CHUCK

Thanks. Listen, it's a good show. Not incredible, but solid. Shows you can write. You know me and all that gay stuff, but you deserved better from that review.

BALDWIN

You get what you get. You move on.

CHUCK

I can give you some money now. To republicize, you know. If that will help.

BALDWIN

Wow.

CHUCK

Yeah, don't ask. I wasn't in a good place when you called before.

BALDWIN

I wasn't either.

CHUCK

You're young, for you it's ok.

BALDWIN

I'm not that young.

CHUCK

Well, you're not fat. So it's ok.

BALDWIN

Can we come see you? Take you out for Deli?

CHUCK

Well, I don't know.

KIPLING

We have a car.

BALDWIN

Yeah, Kipling's a driver.

So you guys have a limo?

CHUCK

Yeah.

BALDWIN

Stretch?

CHUCK

No, town car, very classy, discreet.

KIPLING

Can you waddle out of that palace of yours for a night out?

BALDWIN

I don't know.

CHUCK

We can bring a stretcher.

BALDWIN

You think I can't get myself off the couch?

CHUCK

No, I was joking-

BALDWIN

I can party you under the table any time, queen bee!
Tonight! Tomorrow morning! Any time!

CHUCK

I'm sure you can-

BALDWIN

In an hour I could have a cement mixer of blow and the
Nicks' cheer leading squad up here!

CHUCK

Sure, sure.

BALDWIN

We'll go to Morton's.

CHUCK

No, somewhere we can afford. Factor's. It's on us.

BALDWIN

CHUCK

Ok, come on up. If I don't answer the door, I've fallen asleep. Go away.

(He hangs up.)

KRISTEN

You're turning down money?

BALDWIN

Yeah.

KRISTEN

You crazy?

BALDWIN

Too little, too late. Anyway, it was wrong. He was doing it cause he felt guilty.

KRISTEN

Take it when it's offered.

BALDWIN

Well. He's also broke.

KIPLING

Why do you say that?

BALDWIN

Moving out of Brentwood? Into a care facility? He's broke. It's an excuse. House is probably in hock. We gotta go. (To KRISTEN) You wanna come with?

KRISTEN

To Factor's with an agent who's washed up? Not much of an offer.

BALDWIN

But if it was Kantor's with Keifer Sutherland-

KRISTEN

Keifer's a high school buddy-

BALDWIN

He's ten years older than you.

KRISTEN

Fifteen.

So how is he a-

BALDWIN

I didn't say we were in high school at the same time.

KRISTEN

Isn't he married?

BALDWIN

Tiger Woods is married.

KRISTEN

Did he like the show?

BALDWIN

He told Liz Smith he did.

KRISTEN

Liz Smith!

KIPLING

Yeah, Liz Smith.

KRISTEN

Way to go, Kristen.

KIPLING

Well, a plug is different from a review.

BALDWIN

Yeah, more people read it.

KRISTEN

Let's go.

BALDWIN

KIPLING

(Tossing BALDWIN keys)

You go. Take him out. He's your chum. Have a moment with him. That's what he wants.

If it makes him feel better, take the money. Might make him feel like a player.

KRISTEN

(BALDWIN leaves.)

KIPLING

Oh, sure.

(She sits on the bed and gestures for him to sit beside her. He does, like before.)

KRISTEN

(Opening her laptop)

I loaded it with pictures from my performance. (She puts the laptop on his lap and leans over him, way over, types in her address and uses the curser. She stays leaned over him, with her arm around his waist.) Here, here's my favorite folder, all shots from Act Two. Woops, that's the dressing room folder. It's all me getting dressed.

(He looks. He swallows.)

KIPLING

Wow.

KRISTEN

(Turning to face him, their faces close)

What?

KIPLING

You're not deformed.

KRISTEN

Well I have a mole. You see, right there. Here, we can zoom. See it?

KIPLING

Yes, now I do.

KRISTEN

My mother wanted me to have it removed. I think it's cute.

KIPLING

It's brown. (Pause. He swallows a couple of times. Shifts.) Who took these shots?

KRISTEN

Davis.

KIPLING

Davis is married.

KRISTEN

Stuff like this doesn't bother Davis. He gets into character and he says he doesn't even notice women's bodies anymore.

KIPLING

You believe him?

KRISTEN

Oh yeah, he kept saying, "Work it, girl. Uh-huh. Uh-huh."

KIPLING

It's quite a... folder.

(They kiss.)

KRISTEN

Hey.

KIPLING

Hi.

(They kiss again.)

KRISTEN

Better than your mother?

KIPLING

My mother doesn't kiss me like this.

KRISTEN

In *Glass Menagerie*?

KIPLING

Oh, her. Yeah.

(Another kiss. Then she suddenly breaks and closes up her laptop. She moves away.)

KRISTEN

Thanks for letting me show these.

KIPLING

I never saw the ones of your performance.

KRISTEN

Oh, well, you could come over some time. We can have a proper flickr evening.

KIPLING

That'd be great.

KRSITEN

I like people who like my acting.

KIPLING

I hope you get to play it again.

KRISTEN

Not likely with the show closing.

KIPLING

If you did, I'd bring a bunch of people.

KRISTEN

Why haven't you brought them already?

KIPLING

They wouldn't appreciate it. It's so gay gay right now. The way Janet plays it. She's like a drag queen. But when you do it, it's just gay. One gay.

KRISTEN

Your church?

KIPLING

Yeah, I think they could deal with it.

KRISTEN

You're a producer. How much would it cost to keep the showing running after this month?

KIPLING

It's only eight a week. Right now it makes about four. So sixteen thousand to make up the shortfall.

KRISTEN

Not much.

KIPLING

Yeah, Baldwin's good at keeping the costs down.

KRISTEN

I can swing that. Janet's off to make her TV pilot end of the month. I'll give you - you, not Baldwin - I'll give you sixteen bills to keep it going another month with me in the lead.

KIPLING

Just so my church friends can see it?

KRISTEN

No, so I can invite every industry insider on the planet.

KRISTEN

Where's the money coming-

KIPLING

My uncle. He's made a fortune in Monster Truck shows and he wants to see me make it. I had a thing with him when I was in eighth grade. He carries a torch for me. Mmmm. He's a good kisser. Like you.

KIPLING

That's kind of gross.

KRISTEN

Kidding. He's gay as RuPaul. Rough being a Monster Truck promoter when you're that gay. He saw the show tonight, loved it, loved it! I can talk him into it. It will be like a bit of gay lib for him.

KIPLING

I'll talk to Baldwin.

KRISTEN

Talk to yourself. You're a producer. Baldwin's clever but in terms of self-management, he's a child. I'd get a lot of agents in there: it's good for me, good for him, everybody wins. (She is packed to leave.)

KIPLING

Do you have to split?

KRISTEN

Yeah. Dancer goes to bed at night, gets up early, stretches, eats right, lives clean. Tomorrow, I'm back to lead dancing.

KIPLING

I like you in that role as well.

KRISTEN

Tell me, do fundamentalists really believe in passive wives?

Depends on the sect.
KIPLING

Does yours?
KRISTEN

KIPLING
I have no loyalty. There are many creeds. Good thing about Christianity is you can always shop around.

KRISTEN
To suit your needs?

KIPLING
Within reason.

KRISTEN
I like this place. It forces intimacy.

KIPLING
Yeah.

KRISTEN
See ya.

(And she's gone. Blackout.)

Scene 4

(Next day. BALDWIN at speaker phone. We hear MAVIS connect.)

MAVIS
Hi.

BALDWIN
Hi.

MAVIS
How's it going?

BALDWIN
All right. How are you?

MAVIS
Not so good.

BALDWIN

Oh, yeah?

MAVIS

They're laying off all these people at work. Trying to balance the budget. It's very stressful.

BALDWIN

They'll never lay you off.

MAVIS

No, but a lot people I know are having their hours cut, or worse. It makes for a very traumatic work environment. (Pause.) I wish you were here.

BALDWIN

How's Clive?

MAVIS

He's stopped eating.

BALDWIN

Jesus. You think it's-

MAVIS

I don't know. I don't like to think about it. I'm taking him in tomorrow.

BALDWIN

Do you want me to come home?

MAVIS

Yes, of course.

BALDWIN

I mean for the weekend.

MAVIS

Oh. You can't really afford that. All this flying back and forth.

BALDWIN

No.

MAVIS

Anyway.

BALDWIN
Where is he?

MAVIS
Here, on my lap.

BLADWIN
I can't hear him purr.

MAVIS
No, not too happy right now. Sick little boy. Maybe I can get him to purr. Here. Come on, little boy. Big Clivedon. Sweet young man. No? Here, I'll give him a kiss. (We hear a smooch.) You hear that?

BALDWIN
Yes.

(BALDWIN is crying.)

MAVIS
You ok?

BALDWIN
Yeah, fine. I'm fine.

MAVIS
You sure?

(KIPLING enters, wearing driving suit.)

BALDWIN
Here's Kipling.

MAVIS
Hey, Kip, who you drive today?

BALDWIN
Missy Eliot, Donna Summer and Henry Gibson.

MAVIS
The guy from *Laugh-in*?

KIPLING
No, sorry, Jackie Chan. I get them confused.

BALDWIN

Look, Mavis, I gotta run, rehearsal and shit. I love you, ok?

MAVIS

Yes. I love you too.

BALDWIN

Big handsome boy.

MAVIS

You're the big handsomeness.

BALDWIN

Bye.

MAVIS

Bye, Kip.

KIPLING

Bye, Mavis. (Hang up. To BALDWIN) You ok?

BALDWIN

No, no, I'm not ok! What are you going to do about it?

KIPLING

Bald, come on, take it easy.

BALDWIN

Show's a flop, my boyfriend's dying and my cat misses me.

KIPLING

What!?

BALDWIN

I mean my boyfriend misses me and my cat's dying, the show is still a flop. I have sacrificed my life, my happiness, my pet for this show and none of you care. Two dozen people I have dragged through this experience and none of them, not one of them, has at any point given a shit.

KIPLING

That's not true.

BALDWIN

It is true. All any of you do is complain. Or run off to your lameass day jobs and leave me to arrange things. I

spend my life arranging things while people go off to make money.

KIPLING

Everyone has been committed to this project-

BALDWIN

Who hauled himself out here to do this? Who raised the money? Who built the set? Who wrote the script? Who directed the pseudo-professionals into passable performances? Who marketed-

KIPLING

Here we go, this has turned into your Fifth Symphony, overwrought and over played.

BALDWIN

How long have you been here?

KIPLING

Oh, not this-

BALDWIN

No, how long have you been here?

KIPLING

I'm tired.

BALDWIN

Just tell me, I'm curious, how many months, nay years, have you frittered away dreaming in this smoggy corner of Northern Mexico?

KIPLING

I just... look, I just live here. That's all I do. I have my little dreams which are... yes, unfocused and maybe lame and... whatever. But that's all I do. I live here. I don't see that this, all this, this drama, has gotten you anywhere. It isn't that big a deal. It's not. And all these people, all these backers, have dried up, they're not there. They're gone. So what have you achieved? This is my home, it's the little life I've made for myself. You go back to New York, this is still here. It's fine. Ok? It's not the Holmby Hills but it's-

BALDWIN

Yeah, ok, your little corner of paradise, your little Elysium. Great, congratulations.

KIPLING

Why are you such an ass about it?

BALDWIN

Because I have a program, don't you get it? This was a program, a plan, a course of action. A device for getting my name out there, making a connection, launching a career in film, television, whatever. The big time! It's very depressing to see yet another course of action dry up and flake away into the breeze like a dehydrated piece of dogshit. It is.

KIPLING

Well, maybe you're right.

BALDWIN

About what?

KIPLING

Maybe it all adds up to something at the end. The karma of ambition. An over night success twenty years in the making.

BALDWIN

I heard that from a drag queen who finally got a spot hosting horror movies on late-night TV.

KIPLING

Another rung on the ladder of-

BALDWIN

I heard that from a female stand-up who finally got a gig on a lesbian cruise ship.

KIPLING

Is she a lesbian?

BALDWIN

No. She wants to marry a stockbroker and have babies. Now she's trapped in the Mediterranean with a mullet.

KIPLING

If they're happy, what does it matter how big they are? They're successful. You're successful. Mildly. Why isn't that enough?

BALDWIN

I wanted to write the next *Indiana Jones* movie.

KIPLING

They'd never let you write the next *Indiana Jones* Movie.

BALDWIN

Why not?

KIPLING

You know how it is. They'd be paranoid you'd sneak in all kinds of gay subtext that they couldn't detect.

BALDWIN

I would, but what's wrong with that?

(Pause.)

KIPLING

Mavis must miss you.

BALDWIN

Yeah.

KIPLING

You have a life, like I do.

BALDWIN

Oh, stop. Pease, I don't need advice from my chauffer brother.

KIPLING

Look, don't make fun of me. People like the way I drive. I'm very popular with my clients.

BALDWIN

Missy Eliot likes the way you drive?

KIPLING

Yes, she always compliments me on my smooth turns.

BALDWIN

Oh, my God.

KIPLING

And she asks me about my life, my writing, she's a very nice person, very sensitive.

BALDWIN

She's flirting with you.

KIPLING

Ok? That's bad? To be flirted with by Missy Eliot?

BALDWIN

You're a fundamentalist.

KIPLING

And so is she. We get along.

BALDWIN

Are you supposed to be flirting with each other?

KIPLING

You think fundamentalists aren't interested in connecting?

BALDWIN

You're going to connect with Missy Eliot and have babies?

KIPLING

I don't think that way. Guy! She's just nice and I like driving her, like I like driving most of my clients. I enjoy it, why is that wrong?

BALDWIN

You enjoy driving Dennis Hopper?

KIPLING

No, not Dennis Hopper. He's insane.

BALDWIN

This is why our ancestors crossed the plains? This is why the Donner Party consumed its children. This is why our father killed himself as an attorney for thirty years, so you could enjoy driving rock stars around LA?

KIPLING

Yeah, I guess. Who thinks about things like that?

BALDWIN

Chuck. Chuck Soloman for one. He spent his whole life trying to build on his father's success.

KIPLING

And he built a mound of cocaine.

(BALDWIN is near tears again but he fights it back.)

KIPLING

You're really a mess.

BALDWIN

Yes, I am. I'm lonely and washed-up and on the wrong side of the continent. Why do you think I'm so fucking uptight all the time? You think I'm always like this?

KIPLING

Yes.

BALDWIN

I am not always like this.

KIPLING

I've known you for thirty-two years, you're always like this.

BALDWIN

Oh horsey poop.

KIPLING

I've seen you in New York and you're always like this.

BALDWIN

In New York it's ok to be like this. Everybody's like this. (Pause.) Look, um, how ready are you to step in for me? I mean, for real? Take over my role.

KIPLING

Uh... You need a night off?

BALDWIN

I don't mean tonight, I mean next week. In ten days.

KIPLING

I could do it.

BALDWIN

Really?

KIPLING

Yeah, why not?

BALDWIN

It's just that, well, I have to go home... I want to go home.

KIPLING

The Bible, Baldwin. We believe in the Bible. That's the core of fundamentalism.

BADLWIN

And what do you believe about Leviticus?

KIPLING

Does the whole world think Christians sit around reading Leviticus all day-

BALDWIN

What do you believe about-

KIPLING

We've debated it. That's what we do. We debate. We compare sources, translations, exegeses. That's why I drive an hour each way to this church, to have debates, not harangues, debates.

BALDWIN

Intelligent debates?

KIPLING

No, stupid ones. People say things like, "Well I don't like the way my gay neighbor dresses, there must be something wrong with them" and we all say, "Yep, Clem, I agree!" (He mock spits like an Oakie.) We talk about Buber and Aquinas and Augustine, people bring in new research, new perspectives, but we always go back to the texts, that's what it's about.

BALDWIN

And what conclusion do you reach?

KIPLING

It's not a courtroom. We don't always conclude. Sometimes people get offended and leave the church because we're too liberal, sometimes the opposite.

BALDWIN

What have you concluded about homosexual-

KIPLING

Nothing. Nothing. We've moved on, or away, or to the side. We have issues we cannot reach conclusions on so we just move away from them, live with debate, with

indetermination, not allow ourselves to be forced into decisions by current events.

BALDWIN

And beyond the church, what do you feel?

KIPLING

What do you think?

BALDWIN

I assume you support us.

KIPLING

How could I not support you and Mavis and Clive? Clive's a cat, Mavis is a librarian. You think I'm anti-cats and librarians?

BALDWIN

You're so complex, so deep.

KIPLING

If your question is can I take over your role the answer is yes. I've pretty much taken over the production.

BALDWIN

What's that supposed to-

KIPLING

We're extending. I decided.

(BALDWIN in shocked.)

BALDWIN

We don't have the money to-

KIPLING

I raised sixteen thousand dollars this afternoon. Kristen will put it in when she takes over the lead at the end of the month, Janet said it's fine, and Dennis Hopper said he'd kick in another sixteen as insurance. That's thirty-two in one afternoon. Quack, quack, quack.

BLADWIN

Dennis Hopper?

KIPLING

Yeah, I told him about it and he checked it out.

BALDWIN

How?

KIPLING

He's friends with Keifer Sutherland.

BALDWIN

Can we have the money now-

KIPLING

It comes when Kristen comes, end of the month.

BALDWIN

How do we make it to the end of the month?

KIPLING

You're the great programmer. You'll have to figure that out.

BALDWIN

I take Charlie out to Factor's again, squeeze him for that eight, and we plaster Liz Smith all over the *LA Times*.

KIPLING

Now you're thinking.

BALDWIN

24's a great show, I can be a 24 writer. We take Keifer and Dennis to Factor's to thank them-

KIPLING

Morton's.

BALDWIN

Factor's.

KIPLING

Morton's.

BALDWIN

Canter's.

KIPLING

Morton's.

BALDWIN

We take Dennis and Keifer to Morton's to thank them, bring Charlie along to thank him - everyone hits it off,

Charlie's career is resuscitated, he goes back on cocaine, he gives us sixteen as thank you.

KIPLING

Ok, calm down.

BALDWIN

When we put Kristen in the role we have the *LA Times* out to re-review-

KIPLING

Calm down.

BALDWIN

I invite Thomas to the press night, *Times* loves him; Thomas invites his friends from the Taper, I show them my script for Kristen as the chick who marries the gay guy... but...

KIPLING

But what?

BALDWIN

Kristen.

KIPLING

What about her?

BALDWIN

Well, this is all based on one understudy performance. I mean-

KIPLING

Watch it.

BALDWIN

I mean that doesn't prove absolutely-

KIPLING

Watch it.

BALDWIN

Watch what?

KIPLING

Just don't say nasty things about-

BALDWIN

I haven't said anything-

KIPLING

Like Elizabeth in *Tannhauser*.

BALDWIN

Where did this Wagner obsession come from?

KIPLING

Like a Verdi soprano.

BALDWIN

Yes, fine, I'll shut up. I've shut up. (Pause.) He's not fat anymore. He's stopped eating.

KIPLING

I feel bad.

BALDWIN

You should.

(Pause.)

KIPLING

I'll miss you.

BALDWIN

I'll miss you too. But not this place.

KIPLING

Kinda small, isn't it?

BALDWIN

Sure is.

(Blackout.)

End of Play