

**STONE MY HEART**

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**A Play in Two Acts by**

**Joseph McDonough**

*Final Production Script*

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

ROBBY

TERRENCE

JESSICA

ZACH

MARCUS

**SETTING**

Chicago. A Morgue and other places.

**TIME**

Today

## STONE MY HEART

By Joseph McDonough

### ACT ONE

**AT RISE:** A Morgue and other places. Chicago. Today.

Everything— characters, props, dead bodies, lighting effects— they all move on and off the stage quickly— as if with little effort but with a great deal of urgency and with no sense of rest.

There is a wall of body drawers.

At the rear are a few steps or a walkway leading up or back to some degree of elevation or depth. Light shines through this passageway into the morgue.

ROBBY appears alone in the morgue. He stands beside a bloody dead body covered with a sheet on a wheeled table. The body is ready for an autopsy.

The sound of a guitar playing a few sad chords is heard. A woman's humming is heard.

When speaking with other characters, ROBBY has a persistent but not heavy stutter and is often uncomfortable. He has no stutter when speaking to us in the audience.

JESSICA appears in his vision.

ROBBY

(Out to us)

I couldn't be heard . . . or didn't try hard enough . . . through the stammers . . . she couldn't see me through my mumbles. . . maybe I should have stayed away . . . listened to my guitar. But I wanted his help . . . I needed his help . . .

(JESSICA is gone.

TERRENCE suddenly appears. ROBBY  
begins to stutter.)

Maybe I should have . . .

TERRENCE

(To ROBBY)

Should have? We dream should haves at night . . . and piss should haves  
back out in the morning . . . the same few notes played over and over and  
over again, Robbo . . .

ROBBY

But I . . . I'm . . . in love . . .

TERRENCE

Never a bright idea.

(TERRENCE opens a body drawer. He  
pulls out a can of soda and drinks it.)

ROBBY

It's all . . . skewed. Like through a prism . . .

TERRENCE

It's all black and white to me.

ROBBY

I'm so tense all the time!

TERRENCE

Love isn't worth crying over.

ROBBY

I don't cry. I just feel—

TERRENCE

Feel schmeel.

ROBBY

She's got such bright, fluttery eyes!

TERRENCE

Jesus Christ—

ROBBY

She's all I want . . . Jessica . . .

TERRENCE

Love is worse than useless, Robbo. Leaks into your brain. Paralyzes your thinking. It's a killer.

ROBBY

Yeah . . . pain . . .

TERRENCE

I was in love once, or twice. Maybe a thousand times. Never again.

ROBBY

But you'll help anyway?

TERRENCE

I guess. It's your suicide. I mean it.

ROBBY

Thanks!

TERRENCE

I'll talk to her. I'm practically family.

ROBBY

Exactly!

TERRENCE

They've got a cabin on a lake up in Wisconsin. Nice. I spent a lot of weekends up there. Old fashioned wood burning stove to keep you toasty as you sip your cocoa. Brabo and I would watch it snow on the water in the morning. Snowflakes float for a while, then they drown. Disappear. Pretty cool. He was sort of like having my own dad. He was more of a brooder than a conversationalist.

(He looks down at the body.)

Never exactly sure where you stood with him.

ROBBY

He never said much--

TERRENCE

Maybe they'll sell it now. Cheap. Assuming Jessie doesn't want it. She never had a good time up there. She's not . . . outdoorsy.

ROBBY

Hmm—

TERRENCE

Allergic to fresh air. Definitely not . . . woodsy.

ROBBY

No, not woodsy—

TERRENCE

More of an interior exerciser, I hear. Indoor fun and recreation, you know?

ROBBY

I know.

TERRENCE

But watch her claim she just adores her little love nest among the trees. We'll see. I'll have to ask her.

ROBBY

Mention me.

TERRENCE

Right.

ROBBY

Good.

TERRENCE

She's damn near a little sister to me. Watched her grow up. Fill out.

ROBBY

Yeah—

TERRENCE

She'll listen.

ROBBY

Soon.

(TERRENCE stares at the body.)

TERRENCE

God bless. Poor Brabowski. He never thought he'd be wheeled in here.

ROBBY

No . . .

(TERRENCE lightly touches the body through the sheet.)

TERRENCE

Old Brabo. He sure could use a drink now. So could I.

ROBBY

Me too.

TERRENCE

Let's get drunk after work. Completely wasted.

ROBBY

I don't think so.

TERRENCE

C'mon, Robbo—

ROBBY

You still owe me –

TERRENCE

Actually, I could use some more.

ROBBY

What?

TERRENCE

How 'bout two hundred?

ROBBY

No. My father told me never to loan—

TERRENCE

I'll pay you back.

ROBBY

You still owe me . . . from the c-c-c—

TERRENCE

Yeah, the casino! Hey! I thought we were friends.

ROBBY

We are . . .

TERRENCE

I'm going to help you out, aren't I?

ROBBY

I just shouldn't . . .

TERRENCE

C'mon! It's a two-way street, Robbo!

(ROBBY stutters quite a bit.)

ROBBY

I know . . . but I already . . .

TERRENCE

Yeah.

ROBBY

See?

TERRENCE

No.

ROBBY

No need to waste more . . . just on drinking . . . no.

(TERRENCE does not respond.)

I'm sorry.

(TERRENCE does not respond.)

It's just smarter that way. You know?

(TERRENCE peeks under the sheet and looks at the body's face.)

TERRENCE

Unlucky bastard.

ROBBY

Me?

TERRENCE

Well, you're an unlucky bastard too.

ROBBY

Yeah . . .

TERRENCE

But I think 'ol Brabo's in worse shape. Look.

(TERRENCE lifts the sheet.)

ROBBY

(Softly)

God . . . he looks scared . . .

TERRENCE

Wow. Look at the head trauma. They bashed his cranium but good. They didn't mess around.

(ROBBY stares at the body.)

ROBBY

Brutal.

TERRENCE

Why couldn't they just grab his wallet? Just take the damn money back to the 'hood. Jesus! Now one of them's doing his job . . . not to mention doing his daughter—

ROBBY

Wish you hadn't told me.

TERRENCE

Sorry.

ROBBY

That's not good.

TERRENCE

I know, but it's true—

ROBBY

Definitely not good!

TERRENCE

Marcus made Jessie keep it a secret from him. Poor old Brabo. He's rolling in his grave before he's in it.

ROBBY

Cover him up.

(TERRENCE looks at the body carefully.)

TERRENCE

Hey. Heeeeey! Did you know Brabo wore dentures?

ROBBY

C'mon, cover him up.

(TERRENCE pulls out some bloody dentures.)

TERRENCE

Well I'll be damned. He never said a word. Full set. Niiice.

ROBBY

Put 'em back, Terrence—

TERRENCE

You just never know with anybody.

ROBBY

You're dripping—

TERRENCE

He was always sneaky. Never moved his lips. You notice? Yeah, you slave for a guy for fifteen years. Even go up to the cabin. Watch him eat, listen to him chew nice and quiet to himself, and the son of a bitch never lets on he doesn't have a real tooth in there.

ROBBY

Terrence—

TERRENCE

Like he can't trust you to know. Wonder what else he was holding back on me.

(TERRENCE "talks" quite loudly as Brabowski with the bloody dentures as a puppet of sorts.)

TERRENCE

Nothing, Terrence! I'm your best friend!

(ROBBY quickly looks around to make sure nobody sees them.)

ROBBY

That's against procedure . . . !

TERRENCE

(Talking with the dentures.)

You'll be Cook County Coroner some day! Coroner Numero Uno! After I'm gone!

ROBBY

Put them . . . back!

TERRENCE

(Talking with the dentures)

Wait till I retire, Terrence! I'll retire some day! Some day!

ROBBY

We'll get in trouble!

(ROBBY looks around some more.)

TERRENCE

Trouble from who? Zach? Party boy will puke and pass out if he ever comes down here.

ROBBY

Well—

TERRENCE

Marcus?

ROBBY

Maybe Marcus.

TERRENCE

Marcus is too busy banging Jessie.

(TERRENCE puts Brabowski's dentures back.)

ROBBY

Shut-up—

TERRENCE

Every which way he can. And then some. Started drooling first time he saw the ol' boss's daughter. What did you expect?

(Pause.

ROBBY looks into the passageway toward Marcus's office to check if anybody is listening.)

ROBBY

So, you're absolutely sure?

TERRENCE

Well, I haven't actually seen them fucking if that's what you mean—

ROBBY

I know that—

TERRENCE

They didn't invite me to watch, though that might be interesting—

ROBBY

Please—

TERRENCE

They've been going at it quietly for two or three months now. Haven't you seen them? Shamelessly groping each other.

ROBBY

No.

TERRENCE

Like dogs in the road. She always falls hard for the jerks, you know. God, she's had some real winners— now him.

ROBBY

Is it just . . . is it serious?

TERRENCE

You know how they are.

ROBBY

Who?

TERRENCE

Black guys.

ROBBY

Black guys?

(Pause)

TERRENCE

C'mon. Oh, come on. You know . . . you know . . .

ROBBY

To be honest . . . I don't really know many . . . any black guys.

TERRENCE

Go figure.

ROBBY

I mean I've met them—

TERRENCE

Listen to you—

ROBBY

Lots and lots of black guys—

TERRENCE

Right.

ROBBY

Interacted with plenty of them. Every day . . .

TERRENCE

It's unavoidable.

ROBBY

Say "hi." Smile. But know them . . .

TERRENCE

Well, we all say we know them, but we really don't.

ROBBY

But I don't know many people at all. Any type.

TERRENCE

You're a classic loner.

ROBBY

Yeah.

TERRENCE

Well, they're sexual geniuses. Naturally gifted.

ROBBY

Terrence—

TERRENCE

Hey, it's a compliment. I should be so lucky. I guess that's what she likes.

ROBBY

You're stereotyping.

TERRENCE

Stereotypes are rooted in fact.

ROBBY

Well . . . I could be . . . a sexual genius too . . .

(TERRENCE laughs.)

. . . if that's what she likes . . .

TERRENCE

Stop laughing, Brabo.

ROBBY

I could! I've got . . . you don't know . . . I could please her. Not just sexually . . . make her happy.

TERRENCE

He won't really miss her. He'll throw her away when he's done anyway. She's just extra pussy to him.

ROBBY

Shut-up!

TERRENCE

I'm just telling you the truth.

ROBBY

Talk to her!

TERRENCE

He's got a hell of a temper though . . .

ROBBY

Tell her . . . quietly . . . Marcus . . . tell her Marcus is . . . a mistake! Suggest me . . . I . . . love her!

TERRENCE

Down boy. Down!

ROBBY

She'll get hurt!

TERRENCE

She will get hurt.

ROBBY

I don't want that.

TERRENCE

No. Neither do I.

ROBBY

Good.

TERRENCE

Most men, you know— they just look at her . . . fantasize . . .

ROBBY

I know—

TERRENCE

Her friendly boobs . . . her welcoming tush . . .

ROBBY

They degrade her.

TERRENCE

It's gonna take a little cash.

ROBBY

Cash?

TERRENCE

Not a lot.

ROBBY

What for?

TERRENCE

For starters, we ought to send her some flowers. Condolences crap from the guys down at the morgue. We're sorry her old man got whacked, etcetera, etcetera.

ROBBY

Oh.

TERRENCE

Right now Marcus is the only one giving her any sympathy around here. Am I right? You sign the card real big. I'll say it was your thoughtfulness and concern. Completely your idea.

(ROBBY reluctantly gives TERRENCE some money.)

ROBBY

O.K. Flowers. Nothing too—

TERRENCE

Maybe a little gift? Something tasteful. A cheese tray? I'll work on it. I won't go overboard.

(ROBBY slowly gives some more money.)

ROBBY

Mention me. But not too much. It's a fine line.

TERRENCE

You think I'm stupid?

ROBBY

Just get her— thinking of me.

TERRENCE

Then you make your move.

ROBBY

Get me the receipts.

TERRENCE

Receipts?

ROBBY

And the change. All of it.

TERRENCE

What do you think I am?

ROBBY

It's financial discipline. You could use some.

TERRENCE

If I wanted discipline I'd call a dominatrix.

ROBBY

And you owe me half.

TERRENCE

What for?

ROBBY

For the flowers and stuff.

TERRENCE

Next paycheck.

ROBBY

And you still owe me from the c-c-c—

TERRENCE

The casino. No shit!

ROBBY

Five hundred— five hundred and seventy five—

TERRENCE

Hey, I'm good for it! Next paycheck or two. Goddamn Brabo here hasn't given me raises like I was owed . . . thanks, Brabo!

(He smacks the body.)

ROBBY

Jesus, Terrence!

TERRENCE

Well they crown Marcus when he's only been here four fucking months! And he anoints Zach that political puke as Chief Deputy!

ROBBY

(Glances toward Marcus's office.)

Shhhh!

TERRENCE

I've got the seniority— and the brains! Brabo never liked Marcus either. They forced Marcus on him, you know.

ROBBY

It's just politics—

TERRENCE

It's personal! You need a tan these days. A dark one. They'll look all over, they'll look a thousand different places— till they find a stupid son of a bitch with the correct pigmentation. Right? Right?

ROBBY

(Quietly)

He's kind of a know-it-all, but—

TERRENCE

And wound up too goddamn tight. But did they ask my opinion? Or yours? Robby, you and I are too pale to win this game . . .

ROBBY

Don't bring me into that.

TERRENCE

We're screwed. Unless we do something about it.

(Pause)

We've got to get Marcus the hell out of here. Soon, Robbo! Huh?

ROBBY

(Quietly)

Away from her.

TERRENCE

I say we need to fuck with Marcus.

ROBBY

Wait—

TERRENCE

We can make him quit! If we play the right notes, he'll never be back. Maybe he'll split to some other city where they've got more lucrative quotas to fill.

ROBBY

I don't want to get in trouble!

TERRENCE

It's worth the gamble. Let's just make him completely miserable, huh?

ROBBY

I don't want him mad at me . . .

TERRENCE

(Shouts)

Let's be bold! Make Marcus's life a living hell!

(ROBBY looks into the passageway toward Marcus's office.)

ROBBY

Shhhhh!

TERRENCE

Help me out! We'll both win. Let's embrace a little hate, huh?

(ROBBY doesn't answer. TERRENCE laughs.)

I'm kidding. Kidding! Sort of.

ROBBY

(Whispers)

It's not because he's black! I like Afric-c-c-can-Americ-c-c-can people. When I see them. I understand their struggles—

TERRENCE

Christ—

ROBBY

I'm a minority too.

TERRENCE

You?

ROBBY

A stutterer.

TERRENCE

Oh p-p-please!

ROBBY

I am! I have an unusual Cauc-cauc— white viewpoint. In fact, I respect Afric-c-black people more than I respect self-centered white people like us.

TERRENCE

I'm not self-centered.

ROBBY

It makes no difference if he's black or white.

TERRENCE

No, it does.

ROBBY

Not to me.

TERRENCE

Our society says it does!

ROBBY

Just talk to her for me.

TERRENCE

Are you gonna help me mess with Marcus? I've got a few ideas.

ROBBY

I don't want to do that.

TERRENCE

Oh, come on!

ROBBY

No.

TERRENCE

Take a risk!

ROBBY

No!

(Brighter light shines in from the passageway  
at rear.

MARCUS'S VOICE is heard.)

MARCUS'S VOICE

Terrence? Where are you? Are you down there?

(TERRENCE and ROBBY look at each other.)

MARCUS'S VOICE

TERRENCE?

TERRENCE

(Calls pleasantly)

Yeah?

MARCUS'S VOICE

Is that autopsy completed?

TERRENCE

I'm taking the body to the lab, Marcus.

MARCUS'S VOICE

Come here.

TERRENCE

We're trying to be as thorough as possible! Given the importance—

MARCUS'S VOICE

Now!

(TERRENCE pauses. He takes a deep breath,  
then slowly walks away toward Marcus's office.)

ROBBY

(Whispers to TERRENCE as he goes)

I think he needs Brabowski's report . . . he's got a press conference . . .

(TERRENCE walks into the light and is gone.

The light diminishes.

ROBBY shifts around, then takes another  
peek at Brabowski.

JESSICA appears in his vision, humming, then is  
gone.

After several beats, TERRENCE slowly walks back  
in.

ROBBY watches him.

Silence.)

ROBBY

What did he say?

(Pause)

TERRENCE

Apparently, I have work to do.

(Pause)

ROBBY

Will you . . . will you still talk to Jessica for me?

TERRENCE

Apparently I have work to do!

(TERRENCE begins to wheel the gurney off.)

ROBBY

Oh . . .

(Pause)

TERRENCE

It's a two-way street, Robbo.

(ROBBY doesn't answer.)

Chickenshit.

ROBBY

I'm sorry. I can't.

(ROBBY runs off.)

TERRENCE

Right.

(TERRENCE speaks now out to us.)

We've banished shame from our veins. Evasiveness, delusion and deceit pump through where our hearts used to be. What's left are half-truths, if that. And only a little blood. I see the future, but it doesn't see us. Singularity is a handicap. Perspective a felony. Brilliance a desecration.

(The lights shift)

I am alone . . . sinking . . . struggling to breathe in a sea of stunning incompetence . . . dangerous inequity . . . and casual betrayal. Everybody's a liar. Nobody cares. Why should I? This godless world

changes on me every day. Who among you has earned the right to criticize me?

(A single piano note is heard, then heard again.)

TERRENCE wheels the body off and is gone.

The lights shift and JESSICA appears.

She smiles and sings softly and happily hums to herself.

TERRENCE walks on and carefully steps over to JESSICA.)

TERRENCE

Muddy out. Can't avoid it.

JESSICA

Terrence! Hi. You startled me—

TERRENCE

Oh, I'm sorry—

JESSICA

(Laughs)

No, no, you're fine. I was just daydreaming. Thinking how relieved I am— happy even— that this is the end of it. I really don't like cemeteries.

TERRENCE

Who does?

JESSICA

Yeah. Now Marcus and I can drive up to our cabin . . . God, I can't wait to get up there . . . we can just relax.

TERRENCE

(Laughs)

Well, I'm sorry I snuck up on you. I was just warning you not to get any of that mud on your shoes, Jessie . . . I was watching you . . .

JESSICA

Thanks for looking out for me, Terrence.

(She hugs him.)

Zach just stopped by too. It's good to see old friends again.

TERRENCE

Yeah.

JESSICA

Thanks for your phone calls. Sorry I haven't gotten back to you. I've been a little—

TERRENCE

Preoccupied?

JESSICA

You understand.

TERRENCE

I try.

(Pause)

JESSICA

It's hard to believe that Dad's down there, you know? It's kind of creepy.

JESSICA

But I guess he's in heaven now anyway . . .

TERRENCE

That's what they say.

JESSICA

With God . . .

TERRENCE

They say that too.

JESSICA

Yeah. That's what he believed. Good for him. He needed that.

TERRENCE

If there's anything you need—

JESSICA

I'm doing fine. Thanks, Terrence.

TERRENCE

Call me. We'll go see a movie some night. Something funny.

JESSICA

That would be so wonderful. Let's do it!

(She hugs him again. He holds her tight again.)

JESSICA

Soon.

TERRENCE

Perfect.

JESSICA

(Excited)

Marcus is a big film buff! He'd love it!

(TERRENCE pulls away. Pause.)

TERRENCE

Marcus. Yeah. Yeah.

(JESSICA looks in the distance and smiles.)

TERRENCE

Where is Marcus?

JESSICA

Oh— pulling the car around— so I don't have to walk. God, he's so sweet.

(Pause)

TERRENCE

He was like a father to me, Jessie.

JESSICA

Marcus?

TERRENCE

No. Your old man.

JESSICA

Oh.

TERRENCE

A father. In a way.

JESSICA

A father?

TERRENCE

But not a real one. I should have been so lucky. It's not like he took me up to your cabin or anything.

JESSICA

No, he wasn't that type.

TERRENCE

A loner.

JESSICA

People who knew him . . . loved him . . . I guess . . .

TERRENCE

Can't really say I knew him.

JESSICA

Yeah. Right. He did keep to himself too much. He didn't enjoy people . . . intimacy. Not like me.

TERRENCE

Yeah.

JESSICA

But he enjoyed things . . . Dad used to give me these goofy little reminders. He'd leave me messages to make sure to pack my lunch. As if I wasn't going to eat if he didn't call. Or, "don't stay out so late you forget to do your lesson plans, princess! Your car asked me to remind you to get your oil changed, pumpkin. It was like he almost had a sense of humor.

The same kind of teasing and nagging since I was a little . . . I don't think I ever grew up for him.

TERRENCE

Time is a disgusting thing, Jessie. Never get old.

JESSICA

I was still a girl. Ponytail. And braces. Just a kid . . .

TERRENCE

Now you're all grown up.

JESSICA

He'd mail me newspaper clippings. Some current event I could teach to my class. But he and I never discussed those clippings. We didn't talk really. We just checked off details. Health, home, work. Fine, fine, fine. I should have called more. Should have . . . I wish more people could have known him better . . . me included . . . shouldn't I be a lot more . . . devastated? I feel . . . a little guilty.

(She laughs.)

Marcus was teasing me about that this morning. Giving me grief. He makes me laugh, Terrence. He just makes me . . . happy. I can't help it.

TERRENCE

Marcus likes to talk. He's a yakker.

JESSICA

I guess so.

TERRENCE

He tells stories. Great stories. Vivid. Powerful.

JESSICA

You're right. He really does. God, I just love his voice— when he laughs— it booms, fills up the whole room. And when he starts describing things, gets himself really, really into it—

TERRENCE

He's amazing.

JESSICA

He had some scary times growing up.

TERRENCE

I'd be scared.

JESSICA

But he never flinched from anything.

TERRENCE

That's what he says.

JESSICA

He ever tell you about the crazy butcher— the time Marcus had to repossess— in the middle of the night— this old car his dad had loaned—

TERRENCE

Dead cow in the back seat.

JESSICA

Yeah . . .

TERRENCE

Another cow jammed in the trunk. A pig up front on the passenger side with the seat belt on.

JESSICA

That would have completely freaked me out. I would've jumped out of my skin.

TERRENCE

But Marcus drove away, no problem. Black market meat seller. Heard it.

JESSICA

Or the time he and his cousins walked down the wrong street by mistake—

TERRENCE

Saved them all from a knife fight—

JESSICA

Yeah, he—

TERRENCE

Just stared them down. Nice and slow. Never sped up, never broke a sweat, and never once took my eyes off the dudes, till me and my boys were safe down the block.

JESSICA

You heard it.

TERRENCE

Heard them all.

JESSICA

Me too. He does have a way of monopolizing the conversation. Like he's performing— but in a good way.

TERRENCE

But does he listen?

JESSICA

Listen?

TERRENCE

To you?

JESSICA

Sure. He's a listener. He pays attention. He likes to know.

TERRENCE

Know?

JESSICA

All about me. Know what's been going on with me. He's curious.

TERRENCE

Every intimate detail.

JESSICA

(Laughing)  
You're bad!

TERRENCE

No, it's good that he's interested. That's special.

JESSICA

It really is. Marcus is so different . . . Just the way he holds me at night, Terrence. And I feel him breathing against my cheek . . . so peaceful and warm till we're both asleep . . .

TERRENCE

(Kidding her)

Wow.

(She playfully smacks him.)

JESSICA

I was beginning to think every guy out there is messed up.

TERRENCE

(Laughs)

Not all of us.

JESSICA

When I was young and naive . . . a lot of the guys out there seemed so hot . . . but they weren't ready . . . neither was I . . .

(TERRENCE chuckles.)

TERRENCE

Hump her and dump her. Right?

JESSICA

A couple of times I dumped them.

TERRENCE

Sweet Jessie.

JESSICA

I knew what I was doing.

TERRENCE

I swear, I would've killed one for you if I'd known—

JESSICA

Don't say that.

TERRENCE

I mean it.

JESSICA

(Laughs)

Stop it!

TERRENCE

Call me if anybody gives you trouble. Anybody.

(She smiles.)

JESSICA

Don't worry. I'm safe with Marcus. It's not that I'm helpless, Terrence, but who doesn't like to feel loved? God, he practically worships me. Is it wrong to enjoy being the center of attention?

TERRENCE

Not when you deserve it.

(She laughs.)

JESSICA

Get this. Marcus says he has to hold himself back from picking up the phone and calling me twenty times a day. It's kind of cute, isn't it?

TERRENCE

Cute? Psycho maybe.

JESSICA

Stop it, it's sweet! It is.

(TERRENCE looks up.)

TERRENCE

Well, at least the rain stopped. But they say there's more coming.

(TERRENCE helps JESSICA with her raincoat.)

You take care, Jessie. I'll call you. Soon.

(TERRENCE starts to go.)

JESSICA

Terrence?

TERRENCE

Yeah?

JESSICA

Does it bother you?

TERRENCE

Does what . . . ?

JESSICA

Marcus?

TERRENCE

Marcus?

JESSICA

That he got dad's job?

(Pause)

TERRENCE

No.

(Pause)

A little . . . at first . . . you know . . .

JESSICA

Yeah.

TERRENCE

But it's O.K. He's a good guy. He'll . . . do well.

JESSICA

Yeah. Just don't let it bother you. It's not healthy.

TERRENCE

I won't.

(Pause)

JESSICA

Promise?

TERRENCE

Promise.

JESSICA

Cross—

TERRENCE

(Smiles)

My heart.

(She hugs him.)

JESSICA

Thanks. It's good to have an older guy— some kind of a big brother I can be honest with.

TERRENCE

Yeah. That's great. But don't you worry about me. You take care of yourself, Jessie.

JESSICA

I will.

TERRENCE

(Chuckles)

Mud, mud, everywhere . . .

JESSICA

What? Oh, mud . . . right.

TERRENCE

(Playfully)

You can get covered in it, Jessie.

JESSICA

(Smiles)

I'll make sure I don't.

(TERRENCE starts off.

ROBBY has appeared at the edge of the cemetery.

TERRENCE looks over at ROBBY and glares at him in silence.)

TERRENCE

(softly)

It never stops . . .

(TERRENCE is gone.

JESSICA looks around for Marcus's car,  
then the light goes down on her but not out.

Full light on ROBBY.

ROBBY watches her from across the stage  
but doesn't move.)

ROBBY

(To us)

She looked so alone at that cemetery . . . so beautiful to me . . .

(Pause)

To be honest, we'd only spoken a few times . . . seven, actually . . . when she stopped by to see her dad. The holiday party two years ago. The company picnic. When she dropped off a card for her dad's birthday. And four times when she left with Marcus. But I knew which Lakeview apartment window was hers. Where she parked her bright yellow Volkswagen at school. And the gym where she worked out Monday Wednesday and Friday nights. I had this little stalking problem, I guess.

(Lights up full again on JESSICA.

She is still looking around for Marcus' car. )

ROBBY

Jessica?

JESSICA

(Not recognizing him at first)

Oh, hi . . .

ROBBY

Hi, I'm . . .

JESSICA

Rob . . . Rob! Good to see you! I guess it's been, what, since the morgue picnic back in June?

ROBBY

July.

JESSICA

You were my partner. When we won the water balloon toss!

ROBBY

(Smiles)

Yeah! You've got good hands.

JESSICA

Well, we both must. We're a pretty good team, aren't we?

ROBBY

We are!

JESSICA

Thanks for coming all the way for the burial, Rob.

(He is nervous and speaks with a great deal of difficulty. She listens calmly and is not at all uncomfortable with his stuttering.)

ROBBY

I . . . really wanted to . . . Jessica.

JESSICA

It means a lot, Rob. Really.

ROBBY

It meant . . . a lot . . . to me.

JESSICA

I never knew Dad had so many . . . people he worked with . . .

ROBBY

They gave us the morning off—

JESSICA

That was nice.

ROBBY

I . . . I . . . I'm . . . very . . . sor . . . ry—

JESSICA

Thank you so much.

(A car horn honks. JESSICA  
turns in the direction of the car.)

ROBBY

I've . . . been thinking . . . about . . .

(JESSICA turns back to him.  
and smiles.)

JESSICA

I'll look for you at the next picnic.

ROBBY

. . . you . . . thinking about . . .

JESSICA

You're a very considerate guy, Rob. Not many are. I mean that.

(She smiles at him again.

He moves closer to her as if to hug her, but . . .

The horn honks again.

JESSICA runs off in the direction of  
the car.

She is gone.)

ROBBY

. . . thinking about you . . . I . . . love . . .

(The lights shift and ROBBY is  
quickly back in the morgue.

ZACH is in the morgue, deeply lost in thought.

A few drumbeats are heard.)

ZACH

God . . . you should've seen it last night. The fireflies were out of control. Spectacular. They were beautiful, man. Everywhere. No lack of will. Thousands of them— millions of them— blinking on and off, off and on, all around me on the sidewalk. Their tiny insect tails flashing together in this strange symmetry . . . this defiant harmony in the dusk. Yeah . . . they kept on trying, fighting back from the encroaching night—a wall of firefly light! Then dark stillness. Or still darkness, I don't know— A blinding blink of brilliance! Then . . . exhaustion. Energy! Surrender. Faith! Despair. Hope! Death. Love! Life. Dreams . . . me. God, I wanted to blink, to breathe with those tough little fireflies. To feel that electric pulse, that charge! But I couldn't. I can't. I tried Tanya on my cell phone. But she was out somewhere. Probably adding more crap to our bridal registry. So, I go inside. There are some guys in there throwing darts. Lots of hot women. But I hate them. Because they aren't fireflies. Nobody is. None of us have any light to give off. Right? Robby?

ROBBY

Huh?

ZACH

Are you listening? C'mon, man--

ROBBY

Uh, I'm lis—

ZACH

So after last call, I stumble back outside. And I'm still thinking about the fireflies—lightning bugs some people call them—what'd you call them?—

ROBBY

F-f-fireflies.

ZACH

Lightning bugs might be easier to say. No f's. So I'm puking on the sidewalk, assuming the lightning bugs would all be long gone—when whoa . . . I see up ahead of me— just one— a straggler, one poor firefly all by his lonesome. It was last call for the both of us. I stared at him. He stared at me. He wouldn't stop blinking . . . though night had conquered and would soon give birth to day. He blinked in all his glory just beyond my reach, all the way home. I ran along and I tried to jump up and grab him. I wasn't gonna hurt the little guy. I just wanted to hold him—his majesty— his sadness— in my hand. But I couldn't catch him. He disappeared. I cried, Robby. I'm not ashamed to say that. And next thing

I knew, it was time to get up. Time to go to work. Again. Another day.  
God, I hate the days.

(ZACH looks at ROBBY.)

What's the matter with you?

ROBBY

Nothing.

ZACH

You look--

ROBBY

I was just thinking.

ZACH

Is my anguish boring you or something? Christ . . .

ROBBY

No—

ZACH

I'm fucking sharing here—opening up—

ROBBY

I'm—

ZACH

Lately, it seems like you've—

ROBBY

I'm fine.

ZACH

Good. 'Cause, dude, I like you. I do.

(He takes some papers out of his pocket  
and hands them to ROBBY.)

Oh, look this over.

ROBBY

What is it?

ZACH

Marcus's new report template.

(ROBBY looks it over.)

You know, you're perfect to have a conversation with. Because—well, with your condition and everything, the other person gets to do most the talking. That's a quality thing about you.

ROBBY

What's this—

ZACH

It's for improving record-keeping. Marcus put me in charge of administrative implementation. Hell yeah, it's a challenge. But shit, he's got faith, you know? That says a lot. In . . . in kind of a professional drifter like me. I gotta try to make it work somehow. I'm outta here.

ROBBY

Zach? Why do we need—

ZACH

Because he's not happy with the old handwritten scribbles you guys have been jerking off with down here. Or words to that effect.

ROBBY

Oh.

ZACH

C'mon. You have to admit documentation has been sloppy.

ROBBY

Well—

ZACH

I know, believe me, this job sucks. The morgue is where incompetent doctors practice medicine. How bad can you fuck up when your patient's already dead? But look, Marcus wants you guys to start off with better facts, dude. Critical analysis of the substances in the system. Signs of previous violence? Does the police report support or contradict the facts? Why, or why the hell not?

ROBBY

O.K.

ZACH

Then you add a little narrative there on the back pages. Not a bad idea really. Are there trends we should learn about? Who in the community is at risk? He wants to see if we autopsy blacks and whites the same. Spend the same amount of time? The same thought process? It's going to take up more of your time, but . . . don't fight it . . . you'll do fine, Robby . . . you're good . . .

ROBBY

It looks—

ZACH

Marcus said he wants to see the heartbreak in every report. Like it was a human being you guys cut open.

(TERRENCE'S VOICE is heard.)

TERRENCE'S VOICE

Hey, Robbo! You hungry?

ZACH

Terrence? You've got a new report template to look over. It's not too bad. I actually like it a lot . . . you'll get used to it . . . all right? . . . You guys really don't have a choice . . . O.K.?

(Pause)

Terrence? Got it?

TERRENCE'S VOICE

Got it.

ZACH

Marcus doesn't want any complaining . . .

(A covered body with feet sticking out quickly appears. Lots of blood soaks through the sheet.

TERRENCE sits beside the body on the gurney as it rolls on. He is eating Chinese food

from a take-out container. There are several other open take-out containers all around the body.

The gurney blocks ZACH's way back to the office.

ZACH is very uncomfortable around the body.)

TERRENCE

You'll hear no complaints out of me.

ZACH

Oh . . .

TERRENCE

Mmmmm. Zach, you have got to try this sweet and sour shrimp.

ZACH

Oh, god . . .

(ZACH looks away.)

TERRENCE hops off the gurney.)

TERRENCE

Hey, I brought lunch. My treat. The usual overpriced stuff. I go in that stiff's dive over on Wabash all the time. The lying bastard overcharged everybody. Got me more than once. Poor guy. That's chow mein up there by the head wound. And egg rolls down by the feet. Make sure you don't grab a toe.

ZACH

I'm gonna--

(ZACH composes himself.)

ROBBY

(quietly)

I'll have an egg roll.

(TERRENCE hands ROBBY an egg roll.)

ZACH tries to go back to the office.)

TERRENCE

Somebody broke into his joint.

ZACH

How can you freaks eat down here?

TERRENCE

Either you're a coroner or you're not. You'll get used to it.

ZACH

Look, read over the template. I'll work with you guys. But it goes into effect next Monday . . .

(ZACH is still trying to go away. But before he can, TERRENCE takes the sheet off the extremely bloody body.

ZACH gets what is obviously his first close look at a murdered body.)

Oh—

ROBBY

Any mustard?

ZACH

OHHHH! GOD! . . . I CAN'T . . . !

TERRENCE

Oh, the inhumanity.

(ZACH runs back to the office and is gone.)

Somebody needs to get rid of that guy.

ROBBY

Yeah—

TERRENCE

Zach's a whack. A real psycho. If his daddy didn't have political connections for Marcus to suck up to—hey, did you know that Zach knew Jessie at Northwestern?

ROBBY

Really?

TERRENCE

She sure could party. Oh, here's an interesting tidbit. She— why am I telling you?

(TERRENCE puts the left over Chinese food away in one of the body drawers.)

ROBBY

You still mad at me?

(TERRENCE doesn't respond.)

I just don't want—

TERRENCE

Forget it.

ROBBY

I've been thinking . . . a lot . . . all the time . . . do you think you could still mention me to her?

TERRENCE

Mention you . . .

ROBBY

Just tell her we'd make a good couple.

TERRENCE

You and me?

ROBBY

No!

TERRENCE

Right—

ROBBY

Break the ice. I clam up. You smooth it. Then I can relax—

TERRENCE

I don't think I can.

What? ROBBY

You're right. Marcus is the boss. TERRENCE

C'mon. ROBBY

I don't want to get in trouble. TERRENCE

You won't— not for this. ROBBY

It's unavoidable. TERRENCE

If you do it smart. ROBBY

No. TERRENCE

But— ROBBY

No. TERRENCE

ROBBY  
 (Stuttering quite a bit)  
 Just do it! I love her! I can't sleep. I'm losing weight—  
 (TERRENCE pats him on the back.)

Hey, slowly now— one word at a time— TERRENCE

Shut-up! ROBBY

Don't get pissy. TERRENCE

I'm not!

ROBBY

Get over her.

TERRENCE

No! If I can't have — I've considered—

ROBBY

Considered what?

TERRENCE

Killing myself.

ROBBY

Oh.

TERRENCE

I've thought about it.

ROBBY

Great. Another goddamn autopsy I'll get stuck with. Before you go, help me out with Ying So Dead over there.

TERRENCE

I'm serious! I'll overdose. I'll order painkillers or—

ROBBY

Since when do coroners get to write prescriptions? I've been missing out.

TERRENCE

Shut-up!

ROBBY

It's more complicated now! Much more!

TERRENCE

Why?

ROBBY

They moved in together. They bought a downtown condo. It's too late!

ROBBY

Oh . . .

TERRENCE

I've been dutifully putting in face time with him. Smiling and listening as he goes on and on and on. Marcus talks too much. Reveals too much. That's a mistake. And he loves to blabber about Jess. Marcus is emotionally attached.

ROBBY

So am I.

TERRENCE

You see it all the time when they date white girls. It's an ego thing with him now. We can't get involved. He's not gonna just walk away because she's gone back to white meat.

ROBBY

Stop it!

TERRENCE

He'll get pissed. Am I right?

(Pause)

Well, am I?

(Pause)

See, this is getting dangerous, Robbo. Believe it. There's a lot of built up anger in him. I want, therefore I am.

ROBBY

Terrence—

TERRENCE

I've been thinking about—worrying about — Jessie too. I probably shouldn't tell you this . . .

ROBBY

No, tell me—

TERRENCE

It'll upset you . . .

ROBBY

I need to know—

TERRENCE

(Whispers)

Marcus beat the hell out of his last girlfriend. Damn near killed her. But they didn't press charges. She wouldn't testify.

ROBBY

What? Where'd you hear—

TERRENCE

A cop told me. He helped clean the blood off her face. I don't want that to happen to Jessie.

ROBBY

No!

TERRENCE

She was a white girl too.

(ROBBY thinks it over.)

We're going to have to break some rules, Robbo.

(Pause)

TERRENCE

We're probably going to have to kill him first.

ROBBY

What?

TERRENCE

Or maybe kill Zach first, and then Marcus. What do you think?

ROBBY

What? Zach?

TERRENCE

Zach . . . he's seriously fucked up, Robbo. And he's got a hard-on for Jessie. You didn't know? Maybe it's an old thing from college. Babes think he's cute. It's those sad eyes, that lost soul crap. I don't trust either

one of them groping with Jessie. They're dangerous. Sick, quivering bastards. They might . . . well . . .

ROBBY

Wait! Terrence—

TERRENCE

We don't have a choice, Robbo.

ROBBY

We can't do that!

TERRENCE

Why not?

ROBBY

Because . . . because . . . we can't!

TERRENCE

Says who?

ROBBY

Terrence! No!

TERRENCE

How else can we protect her? From herself? From them? She's fucking naive with guys. She doesn't understand the way things really are.

(Pause)

ROBBY

Are you serious?

TERRENCE

Oh yeah.

ROBBY

I mean . . .

TERRENCE

Both of them.

(Pause)

ROBBY

Kill?

TERRENCE

Yeah.

(Pause)

ROBBY

Kill?

TERRENCE

Let's not wait for the cops to find her. And call over here for a body bag. Is that what you want? We need to save her life. While we can. You don't own a gun, do you?

ROBBY

No—

TERRENCE

I've got an extra.

ROBBY

But Terrence . . .

TERRENCE

You got a better idea?

(Long silence.)

I thought you loved her.

ROBBY

I do.

TERRENCE

I don't believe you!

(ROBBY begins stuttering profusely.)

ROBBY

I do love her! I— I— I . . .

TERRENCE

Yeah, right. Prove it, liar! I have work to do. Stories to tell.

(ROBBY runs off.

The gurney with the body is gone.

A solitary, repetitive piano note is heard.

TERRENCE speaks out to us as he makes his way toward Marcus's office.)

TERRENCE

Don't know where my days go . . . don't know where my nights go, but they do. And I still feel a rumbling inside—no, a screeching— it burns, it burns, it burns . . . I was handed nothing . . . nothing . . . I am owed, and I will be paid . . . I just can't stop myself. And I don't care to.

(MARCUS appears from his office in dim light.)

MARCUS

Terrence? You wanted to see me?

TERRENCE

Yeah, I love the new report template, Marcus. It'll make a difference down here. Night and day.

MARCUS

(Laughing)

Excellent. I'm trying to be realistic. I'm not trying to change the world. Just the part I live in. The part we live in. Right?

TERRENCE

Absolutely. Hey, I would like to talk if you've got some time.

MARCUS

Today's pretty full . . . tomorrow's out— how about Monday?

TERRENCE

It won't take long. It— well, it concerns Jess.

(Silence.)

I'm sure it's nothing. I wouldn't worry about it or anything. I just thought you should know . . .

MARCUS

Come on in.

(MARCUS is gone.

TERRENCE speaks out to us again.)

TERRENCE

I am, therefore I want.

(TERRENCE goes off into Marcus's office.

ROBBY appears with a guitar and strums a few chords.

JESSICA appears in his vision.

He speaks to us.)

ROBBY

If I could've been anything in the world-- beside's a Level I Medical Examiner-- I would've been a guitarist. Jazz guitar. Some classical, maybe. I'd let the music help me understand what I see. I'd let the guitar find words for me. Sing the chords that shout in my head but get bottled up in my mouth. The chords would take me away somewhere new. I'd climb on the back of the music and we'd run, we'd sprint, we'd roar . . . ! I practiced when I could. In the dark at home.

(Guitar chords are heard all around him.)

And I still played the chords in my head -- played on and on-- when I was cutting open the bodies during the day. We all have our tricks. To speed through our time as fast as we can. Taking my mind off the severed lives I was dissecting. Slicing human flesh with my hands, I heard a beautiful C chord, then a striking G7 as I measured the entrance and exit wounds, extracted fragments of bullets, recorded which organs had stopped functioning first. Statistically summing up the snuffing out of life. D minor, G minor, A7. The music I heard kept my warm blood pumping . . . A blues riff pierced through me and carried me off. Far away. Nowhere. Everywhere. I was a damn good coroner. I never knew I was there. I was safe in the music. The minutes ran by . . . and they couldn't touch me . . .

the hours raced on . . . and I kept running . . . but as the days and the nights gained on me . . . I knew in my heart they were faster . . .

(ZACH appears beside ROBBY.

ZACH is drunk and very weepy.)

Robby? ZACH

ROBBY  
(Startled)  
Huh— Zach? What are you doing--

ZACH  
It's raining out here—

ROBBY  
It's after midnight—

ZACH  
Terrence gave me your address. I waited . . .

ROBBY  
I went to a gym—

ZACH  
Terrence said you were always home. God, my head . . . !

ROBBY  
What do you want?

ZACH  
Well let me in.

ROBBY  
It's late.

ZACH  
Let me in! Jesus Christ—

(ZACH pushes his way in.)  
Thanks.

ROBBY

You're soaked.

ZACH

God, did I have too much to drink tonight. Ohhhhh, man. Don't mix tequila with whiskey and gin. It'll mess you up . . .

(ZACH walks around nervously  
and can't stand still.

He taps compulsively with two pens  
from his pocket.)

ROBBY

You want to sit down?

ZACH

No!

ROBBY

What's the matter?

ZACH

Nothing.

ROBBY

You're crying—

(ZACH turns away)

ZACH

Am not! It's the goddamn rain.

ROBBY

Is there something—

ZACH

Hate it when it rains all night— Chicago's so desolate and cold and wet in the rain . . .

ROBBY

Maybe I should call—

ZACH  
(Sees the guitar)  
You play?

ROBBY  
No.

ZACH  
Dude, nice six-string—

ROBBY  
Just for fun—

ZACH  
Let me try!

(ZACH grabs the guitar.)

ROBBY  
Hey!

(ZACH plays some bad chords.)

ZACH  
Out of tune.

ROBBY  
Don't drip on it—

ZACH  
I won't.

(ZACH tries a few more bad chords.)

I played in a garage band. Guitarists were cool. Girls all wanted to fuck the guitarist. I was a drummer.

ROBBY  
Well . . . drummers are cool too—

ZACH  
Drummers got hand-jobs.

ROBBY

Oh.

(ZACH starts to cry.)

ZACH

He fired me! Humiliating. You heard?

ROBBY

No.

ZACH

Shit. Went to lunch today with Terrence. God, my head hurts! We started drinking—I was trashed over at the commissioner's meeting at 3:00. I was supposed to lay out Marcus's new record keeping concept thing. I could hardly stand up. I didn't make any goddamn sense. Stupid! The commissioners laughed in our faces. But Marcus smiles and gives them this incredible speech. So they approve his plan anyway, despite me. God, Marcus was so pissed at me afterwards. I didn't think I had that much! Two shots tops, I thought. I don't know . . .

ROBBY

So you're fired? For sure?

ZACH

Tanya went nuts when I told her. She wants stability. We're supposed to get married next month. That'll be heaven. If I don't kill her first. She emasculates me, man! She picked out a tux for me. I'm supposed to match the tablecloths at the reception. Bitch, bitch, whine, whine! Her father already thinks I've got an alcohol problem. Now I'm out of a fucking job. But does that make me unstable?

ROBBY

Yes.

ZACH

You gotta put in a good word for me!

ROBBY

Like what?

ZACH

I know, I know. I'm just a political hack. I am. My old man got me the job. I'm a medical embarrassment. Underneath my lab coat, I'm bare-assed naked. Wanna know something?

ROBBY

I'm not sure—

ZACH

Between you and me, I was most likely to succeed in high school, man . . . but in med school . . . I graduated last, Robby.

ROBBY

At least you passed—

ZACH

And there was a like a big fucking gap between me and second last. I was everybody's study break. Hey, Zach, you got a joint? Sure! Why read about brain cells when you can kill a few? God, I remember almost nothing. The major organs . . . one heart, two lungs . . . basic gynecology. I have no doubt I'm the worst board certified doctor in Chicago. If I had a real medical practice— with real patients— you'd be so goddamn busy at the morgue— they'd open up a fucking drive-thru!

ROBBY

I'll call you a cab. You're drunk.

ZACH

No! Please, man. Help me! It's not goddamn fair! He doesn't understand me. I'm liberal. I'm cool with blacks. Cool with gays. Really cool with lesbians. Hispanics, Hindus, handicapped. Cool, cool, cool. It's the beautiful American story, Robby. I need some help, man. I just want him to see me—take another look at me. You've earned respect. Everybody knows you do the best job down there. With the stiff.

ROBBY

Either you're a coroner or you're not.

ZACH

Your professional opinion means something. Tell Marcus I'm at least a decent guy. Good for morale anyway. We're pretty good friends, aren't we?

ROBBY

Not really.

ZACH

Well . . . you're hard to talk to with that stuttering thing! There's only so much time in the day. But I like you anyway, man. You stutter your words, I slur mine. Don't ever start drinking or you'll be fucking hopeless.

ROBBY

I want my guitar back.

ZACH

Just giving a word of advice.

(ROBBY tries to grab the guitar.)

ROBBY

Give it back!

(ZACH holds the guitar away from  
ROBBY.)

ZACH

You gotta say something for me. Tomorrow. First thing before he hires somebody.

(Pause)

ROBBY

I don't think so.

ZACH

Shit!

(ZACH tosses the guitar back to ROBBY.)

Shit! Thanks a lot! I'm supposed to take Tanya on a three week cruise to Alaska. How the hell am I going to pay for a cruise?

ROBBY

Well . . . maybe you can do something for me.

ZACH

What?

ROBBY

It's about Jessica.

ZACH

Jessie B. Yeah—

ROBBY

Promise me—

ZACH

Yeah! Anything!

ROBBY

Stay away . . . don't talk to her . . .

ZACH

Talk to her . . . that's a great idea . . . hey, it's perfect . . .

ROBBY

No—

ZACH

Marcus will do anything for her— Yeah, yeah, Terrence said that too, I think. I can't remember . . .

ROBBY

You're not listening—

ZACH

If a cute babe like Jessie B asks him—

ROBBY

That's not it! Leave her alone!

(Pause)

ZACH

Hey-- why are you so fired up?

(ZACH laughs.)

ROBBY

Stupid idiot! I won't help you . . . unless . . .

ZACH

If you don't want to, f--f--f— fine.

ROBBY

Shut-up!

ZACH

She still likes me. She'll talk for me, won't she? She's cool. Warm when you hug her. Her hair smells so good. Damn, you know, she's so . . . strong . . . and honest . . . all lit up when she grins . . . her eyes so funny and smart . . .

ROBBY

No—

ZACH

(Not listening)

Jessie B owes me . . . if she doesn't . . .

ROBBY

No, Zach!

ZACH

(Fumbles through his pockets)

Where's my cell phone? Gotta call Jessie B . . .

ROBBY

Don't!

ZACH

Have f-f-f-f-fun.

ROBBY

Ass . . . hole!

ZACH

Screw you! You don't know what it's like. Inside my head. The fucking view from this side . . . you'd be crying too!

ROBBY

I don't cry.

(He turns away.)

ZACH

Goddamn it! She better fucking help me! She has to! She better!

(ZACH runs and is gone.)

ROBBY

Stay away from her . . .

(The lights shift.

JESSICA appears out of the dark and walks into the bright light.

She is deeply lost in thought and singing, almost mumbling, to herself.

She has been crying and wipes tears from her face.

ROBBY sees her.

She bumps into ROBBY.)

JESSICA

Oh!

ROBBY

I'm sorry—

JESSICA

No, I wasn't . . . Rob?

ROBBY

Jessica? I didn't recognize—

(She tries to hide the fact that she's wiping away tears.)

JESSICA

So sunny out . . .

ROBBY

Yeah . . . Jessica?

JESSICA  
It practically blinds you.

ROBBY  
Is something—?

JESSICA  
Do you live around here?

ROBBY  
No . . . I was . . . you?

JESSICA  
Yeah. We're right upstairs there.

(Pause)

ROBBY  
Something the matter?

JESSICA  
No, I was going out for a walk . . . I like walking . . .

ROBBY  
Me too . . .

(Pause.)

Beautiful out. Huh?

JESSICA  
Yeah . . . The scent in the air makes me feel like I'm up in Wisconsin.  
We've got this, well, this little old cabin out by a lake in the middle of  
nowhere . . .

ROBBY  
Sounds like fun.

JESSICA  
I can literally walk for hours on the pine needles around that lake . . .

ROBBY  
Good exercise.

JESSICA

Never enough time though . . . I've got my own problems, now I've got Zach too.

ROBBY

Zach?

JESSICA

Yeah. I was just over at his place again.

ROBBY

Oh.

JESSICA

Zach is so messed up. I'm really worried about him. I've been trying to talk to him.

ROBBY

I think he does drugs.

JESSICA

It's so sad. He's a decent guy.

ROBBY

He's not—

JESSICA

You should have known him when he was younger. He was really something . . . something wild and brilliant then. We go way back. We've got a little history, Zach and me . . . nothing bad, Rob.

ROBBY

Good.

JESSICA

Did you hear? Zach's fiancé? She dumped him, the poor guy.

ROBBY

She did?

JESSICA

After he lost his job. And she'd already had three bridal showers.

ROBBY

Zach is trouble.

JESSICA

Zach needs help. I think he's a danger to himself. Somebody needs to be checking on him.

ROBBY

Did you get Zach his job—

JESSICA

Well, I tried to get him his job back. But Marcus was mad at me. Marcus wouldn't listen.

(Pause)

Rob, do you know why Marcus is mad at me?

ROBBY

No.

JESSICA

He hasn't said anything?

ROBBY

Nothing.

JESSICA

I don't understand when guys . . . something's wrong with him . . .

(JESSICA begins to cry.)

Marcus wouldn't call me back today . . . Last night, when he came home. He was different. He wouldn't listen and he wouldn't talk. He started acting very, very weird.

ROBBY

How?

JESSICA

He wouldn't take his eyes off me. Wouldn't stop staring. Just kept watching me . . . calculating, like he's planning out what he wants to tell me. But he doesn't say a word. He just glares and glares at me . . . he's angry . . . furious . . . his eyes . . . there are tears . . . he looks so hurt . . . like he's terrified inside . . . and I'm scared of him too. A little. Maybe

more than a little. And I'm thinking, am I more scared because he's black? I don't want to think that. But I'm scared.

(Pause)

ROBBY

Let me help you. Please, Jessica. Please . . .

JESSICA

Well . . . could you do something for me, Rob?

ROBBY

Anything.

JESSICA

Would you talk to him for me? Please? Say you ran into me. And you noticed . . . just ask him what's wrong. Why he's mad at me. Ask him if I did something. Will you do that for me, Rob?

ROBBY

O.K. I will.

(JESSICA starts to leave then stops.)

JESSICA

All he said, he told me . . . he said . . . he needed to leave so he didn't kill me.

ROBBY

Kill you?

JESSICA

The words just flew out . . . then he said them again. He shouted them. And he ran.

ROBBY

(Firmly)

That won't happen.

JESSICA

It was just the anger talking. The confusion talking . . . right?

(ROBBY doesn't answer.)

That's how guys are. Isn't it? Guys talk like that.

(ROBBY doesn't answer.)

Just ask him to call me. We'll get past this. I want us to. Tell him I still  
 . . . tell him I'm all right . . . I'm fine . . . fine . . . fine . . . O.K.?

ROBBY

O.K. I will.

(She hugs ROBBY.

The lights shift and JESSICA  
 is gone.

ROBBY is back in the morgue.

He stands still.

TERRENCE appears.

ROBBY hears TERRENCE but stares  
 straight ahead and does not look at  
 TERRENCE.)

ROBBY

O.K. I will.

TERRENCE

I'm proud of you, Robbo.

(ROBBY continues to stare  
 straight ahead, oblivious.

Several piano notes are heard.

MARCUS enters from his office  
 and stands in half light.)

MARCUS

Terrence?

TERRENCE

Marcus. It's my fault . . . I shouldn't have said anything—

MARCUS

No, you might be right about her . . . you are.

TERRENCE

I hope I'm not. God, I hope I'm not.

MARCUS

Terrence? I saw her leave Zach's apartment! Just like you said. They hugged at the door . . . and she touched Zach's face . . . lovingly . . . you could see it . . .

TERRENCE

I know.

MARCUS

This is so difficult . . . I don't want to . . . I'm trying . . .

TERRENCE

I know.

MARCUS

I thought she . . . I thought Jess . . . loved me! I thought we both . . . she told me!

TERRENCE

I hope she does, Marcus. I really hope so. You just have to ask yourself . . . would she tell you the truth.

MARCUS

We need to talk some more. Can't stop thinking. . . can't stop . . . !

(MARCUS is gone.)

TERRENCE

I'm proud of you, Robbo.

(Silence.)

Love is the most enviable gift I could ever imagine.

(ROBBY speaks quietly and  
without stuttering.)

**ROBBY**

Shut-up. I want her safe. Even if I can't . . . I just want her safe. What do you want me to do? Tell me.

**TERRENCE**

Wait for me. The heavens are opening.

(TERRENCE speaks out to us.)

I've decided to become God. Since the position is open.

**BLACKOUT**

**END OF ACT ONE**

## STONE MY HEART

### ACT TWO

**AT RISE:** ROBBY stands alone in a pool of light.

ROBBY

(To us)

I waited for Terrence . . . and waited . . . I remembered waiting as a boy, being dragged to doctors and clinics, speech pathologists and therapists. Teachers. Psychiatrists. Vocal exercise. Medication. Surgery. Anti-depressants. And still I stuttered. And waited for a cure. I was in such a hurry to speak correctly. I couldn't wait any longer to hear words glide out of my mouth— freely, smoothly, effortlessly— so people could understand me without wincing. So kids would listen without giggling. I needed to cure myself. I read of ancient Demosthenes who overcame stuttering by speaking with pebbles in his mouth. I decided to try it. Early one morning I snuck outside and found several small stones along the fence in our backyard. I cleaned the dirt off the stones, washed them over and over till they were all shiny and smooth. Then I shoved as many as I could into my mouth . . . and started mumbling, first softly, then boldly, shouting out consonants and vowels, as proudly and courageously as I could! Then I swallowed a stone . . . and ended up in the emergency room. Later, I would read that Demosthenes committed suicide. But that day, I got to skip school. No kids laughed at me that day. And when I spoke, I could tell my stutter was just a tiny bit better. I was a little smoother, a little bit closer to normal. It would last for a while . . . and then . . . I swallowed quite a few stones growing up . . .

(The lights shift.

Morning.

TERRENCE'S VOICE is heard.)

TERRENCE'S VOICE

What the hell?

ROBBY

(Looking around)

Terrence?

TERRENCE'S VOICE

Who's there?

(ROBBY runs to the body drawers.

ROBBY pulls open a body drawer and lifts the sheet.

TERRENCE is under the sheet, on top of a naked dead body. TERRENCE is quite disheveled.

ROBBY is stuttering again.)

ROBBY

Terrence!

TERRENCE

Jesus Christ! You scared me to death!

ROBBY

What -- what are you doing?

TERRENCE

Must've dozed off.

ROBBY

You're not supposed—

TERRENCE

If Zach could drink on the job, I can sleep—

ROBBY

Get off of . . .

TERRENCE

God, these things aren't made for comfort! Well, I guess when you're dead . . .

ROBBY

Why are you—

TERRENCE

They're not designed for two— Owwww, my back!

(ROBBY helps TERRENCE out of the body drawer.)

Easy does it. Where'd my shoes go? My socks?

ROBBY

Why were you sleeping? I waited all night—

TERRENCE

(Stretching)

Ahhhh . . .

ROBBY

Where've you been?

TERRENCE

Ohhhhhhh . . .

ROBBY

Has Jessica called?

TERRENCE

I'm alive . . . alive!

ROBBY

You said you'd come get me!

TERRENCE

Sorry. I got distracted.

(TERRENCE tucks in his shirt and puts on his shoes and socks.

ROBBY looks down at the body in the drawer.)

Who's this?

ROBBY

A fresh one.

TERRENCE

Who is she?

ROBBY

Zach's hottie.

TERRENCE

What?

ROBBY

Well, ex hottie. Late hottie.

TERRENCE

Terrence!

ROBBY

Late ex hottie. Cold late ex hottie.

TERRENCE

Tanya? That's her?

ROBBY

That's what the toe-tag said. She didn't say much.

TERRENCE

God . . . she was pretty.

ROBBY

Yeah. I hear she was pretty easy. Though challenged by taste. I actually hit on her myself once. But she wasn't that easy. Poor Tanya. I should have been so lucky.

TERRENCE

What happened to her?

ROBBY

She died.

TERRENCE

ROBBY

I know that! How?

TERRENCE

Not sure. No visible wounds that I could find. I looked and looked all over.

(ROBBY gives TERRENCE a look.)

ROBBY

You— what were you—?

TERRENCE

Excuse me, but it's my job!

(Finishes tightening the belt on his pants.)

Either you're a coroner or you're not. You look her over. Real suspicious. Broken neck? Suffocation? She's all yours, Robbo. You'll figure it out. You're better than me.

ROBBY

Homicide? You sure?

TERRENCE

Hate to say it, but probably Zach . . .

ROBBY

Zach!

TERRENCE

The Whack. A fucking nutcase.

ROBBY

Yeah—

(TERRENCE closes the body drawer.)

TERRENCE

Zach wasted everything. Spent his life spinning gold into piss.

ROBBY

But-- God, I never thought he'd— you were right!

TERRENCE

It's time. Some people can't handle this place. They just silently break. I was just talking about this with Marcus. He's smart, you know. I'll give him that. And charismatic? I'll spit that one out too. Marcus . . . he's beautiful to look at . . . but I don't think he's seen enough death. Death is just a concept to him. He's heard of it. Read about it. But he's never confronted it. Wrestled it. Feared it! Living's been too . . . agreeable. Winnable. I hate him . . .

ROBBY

We'll be quick about it, right?

(MARCUS appears in half light.

TERRENCE stares at him.

ROBBY does not see MARCUS.)

TERRENCE

It's a hell of a lot worse when they suffer . . . when he suffers. On and on. Lingering. Not knowing what it looks like. When it's coming. Dying of worry. And dying of living too. Rolling over and over in pain, again and again and again, before he goes. A thousand mini-deaths, one at a time.

(Pause)

And then, that last overwhelmed look of acceptance. Those are the ones that stay with you.

(MARCUS is gone.)

Robbo, are you ready?

ROBBY

Yes.

TERRENCE

You're not backing out on me?

ROBBY

No!

TERRENCE

Tonight then.

ROBBY

Yeah. Tonight.

TERRENCE

Good. You have any idea where Zach might be?

ROBBY

No.

TERRENCE

The police told me they want to question him but he's disappeared. I keep expecting Zach to contact Jessie.

ROBBY

I think he might.

TERRENCE

Especially with Marcus gone from their condo. He's been sleeping in his office. Trapped in his cage.

ROBBY

Jessica wants me to talk to Marcus. For her.

TERRENCE

You didn't, did you?

ROBBY

No.

TERRENCE

We don't want to get them back together. Don't do it.

ROBBY

I won't!

TERRENCE

Good. Marcus is so pissed at her. Christ, he thinks Jessie's been screwing Zach.

ROBBY

What? She wouldn't!

TERRENCE

Of course she wouldn't. But he sees her with a male friend— you can't reason with him. Let's keep them apart. Keep her safe.

ROBBY

Yeah.

TERRENCE

I'll stay on Marcus.

ROBBY

Just keep Marcus away from her.

TERRENCE

Oh, I'll do much better than that. Marcus is mine.

ROBBY

Right.

TERRENCE

And I'll think of a trap to lure Zach to you. Shouldn't be too hard.

ROBBY

Yeah . . . O.K.

(TERRENCE laughs.)

TERRENCE

God, is Zach ever pissed at you.

ROBBY

Me?

TERRENCE

Last time I saw him he was.

ROBBY

I was gonna help him!

TERRENCE

But you didn't.

ROBBY

No.

TERRENCE

Too bad.

(Looks at Tanya.)

Well, Zach's bringing the work in. If he wasn't a psychopath, we could put him on commission. Watch your back.

ROBBY

Yeah . . .

(TERRENCE reaches into his pocket and pulls out a pistol. He hands it to ROBBY.)

TERRENCE

Here. I brought this for you.

ROBBY

Oh. O.K.

(ROBBY slowly takes the gun.)

TERRENCE

You know how to use it?

ROBBY

Yeah.

TERRENCE

Be careful. I loaded it for you. You're all set.

ROBBY

Right.

TERRENCE

And as soon as you see Zach, shoot him. More than once.

ROBBY

I can shoot.

TERRENCE

Not in the back though. Nice, clean entrance wounds in the front.

(TERRENCE taps his chest.)

Think of the heart. Pop two or three direct in the chest cavity. Make it lovely.

ROBBY

Lovely . . .

TERRENCE

You can claim self-defense.

ROBBY

What if—

TERRENCE

The cops will buy it. The evidence is all over.

ROBBY

You're right.

TERRENCE

We're agreed then.

ROBBY

Yeah. Yeah. Maybe I should watch Jessica's condo. I might catch Zach there.

TERRENCE

Good . . . O.K.

(ROBBY starts to go.)

No, hold on. Maybe I . . . I'll just send Jessie straight to you . . . yeah . . . it's easier that way . . . she'll be safer with you.

ROBBY

Send her to me!

TERRENCE

Then you'll find Zach through her . . .

ROBBY

I'll protect her!

TERRENCE

I'll work it out. Zach will follow her. It makes sense . . .

ROBBY

Yeah. Do it!

TERRENCE

We'll save her yet. Go on home now, Robbo.

ROBBY

I will!

(ROBBY runs off.)

TERRENCE

Sweet Jessie . . . she has no idea . . . there's still a smattering of innocence in this world . . .

(MARCUS and JESSICA appear in half light  
in near embrace.)

She sees all the good in people, even when it isn't there. There's something wrong with that. The tyranny of hope. Then the deep disappointment drips in . . . much more painful . . . double agony . . . his and hers . . .

(ROBBY runs back on.)

ROBBY

Terrence? Terrence?

(MARCUS and JESSICA are gone.)

What if Zach doesn't show up?

TERRENCE

I think he will.

ROBBY

What if he left town?

TERRENCE

He didn't. Zach wants to kill Jessie too.

ROBBY

He does?

TERRENCE

She let him down, Robbo.

ROBBY

Oh, god—

TERRENCE

Yeah, Jessie didn't get him his job back. Then Tanya here dumps him—  
It's all the same to guys like that. That's how violence works.

ROBBY

Send her to me!

TERRENCE

Go home now.

ROBBY

You kill Marcus. I'll kill Zach.

(ROBBY runs off.)

TERRENCE

(To us)

We do what we can, while we can. If you're not playing games, you're  
being played. So play . . .

(TERRENCE disappears.)

The lights shift.

Steady drum beats are heard in the distance.

Then a saxophone wails.

ROBBY stands alone.

ROBBY pulls out the handgun. He checks  
to make sure it is loaded.

JESSICA appears. She is very tired and distraught.

She stares blankly ahead, softly singing snippets  
of musical gibberish to herself. She slowly  
turns toward ROBBY.)

JESSICA  
Rob-- ?

ROBBY  
Jes—?

(ROBBY quickly stuffs the gun  
into his pocket. He turns and sees her.)

Hi!

JESSICA  
Are you busy, Rob?

ROBBY  
No. I was getting some fresh air—

JESSICA  
I was out . . . driving around . . . and around . . .

ROBBY  
Come on in! Hurry!

(She stands still. ROBBY looks around  
but doesn't see anybody else.)

JESSICA  
. . . I was too alone at home today. No voices to fill the quiet . . . I  
couldn't sit still. I just started driving. And driving. Past my old schools.  
The little park where I played soccer. Past old houses of friends I used to  
have . . . apartments of guys I used to know . . . I was just driving around  
. . . driving . . . the radio singing along with me. We were mumbling the  
words to old songs we used to know. Just mumbling songs that hum and  
float in your head . . . you ever do that, Rob?

ROBBY  
I mumble songs. All the time.

JESSICA  
Oh . . . yeah, sorry—

ROBBY  
No—

I didn't mean—

JESSICA

No, no—

ROBBY

I've been trying to figure out . . . how . . . what . . .

JESSICA

Come on in— I insist—

ROBBY

(She doesn't move.)

To figure out what I should . . . to save what I . . .

JESSICA

I can help you—

ROBBY

I'm glad you were home today—

JESSICA

Me too—

ROBBY

Sorry to intrude—

JESSICA

Not a problem!

ROBBY

(ROBBY looks around as he lets her in.)

Nobody followed you?

JESSICA

It's so hot today.

ROBBY

It's the humidity—

JESSICA

Ahhh . . . air conditioning.

ROBBY

Yeah.

(Pause)

JESSICA

I shouldn't be bothering you—

ROBBY

No, no. I can help. I'm a good listener.

JESSICA

(Smiles)

You are. I remember.

ROBBY

(Smiles back)

My conversations go pretty slow.

(Pause)

You want something to drink?

(Pause)

Have a seat—

JESSICA

I can't believe Marcus hasn't come home. Not to get his clothes . . . days  
. . .

ROBBY

You're welcome here—

JESSICA

. . . so stubborn . . . won't talk to me . . . messages at work . . . but I think  
he really wants to talk . . . middle of the night the phone rings. Caller I.D.  
says it's his cell. Marcus? But he just listens. Listens. And waits.  
Marcus? Say something to me! I want to hear your voice! Give me some  
words! He hangs up. Like he didn't know what to say. Or can't.

(Pause)

And I'm scared again. It's so irrational. I'm normally . . .

(Pause)

What can I do?

(Pause)

Did you talk to him for me?

(Pause)

Like you told me you would? I've been dying to know. Did you?

(Pause)

ROBBY

Yes.

JESSICA

Did Marcus say why he's mad at me?

(Pause)

ROBBY

I probably shouldn't tell you this . . .

JESSICA

No, tell me—

ROBBY

It'll upset you . . .

JESSICA

I need to know—

ROBBY

Marcus told me . . . you're sleeping with Zach.

JESSICA

What?

ROBBY

(Slowly and carefully)

He said you and Zach are lovers.

JESSICA

How—

ROBBY

He doesn't want to see you again. Marcus is finished with you.

JESSICA

Finished with me.

ROBBY

Yes.

JESSICA

But— he thinks I cheated on him? He thinks I'm some kind of . . .

ROBBY

No, you couldn't be— he's crazy. He doesn't appreciate you . . .

JESSICA

It's stupid! I haven't been sleeping with Zach! Or anybody . . . but Marcus.

ROBBY

I'm worried, Jessica. You were right about him. Marcus might hurt you! Stay away! Stay here.

JESSICA

(Not listening)

It's ridiculous.

ROBBY

He doesn't love you—like—

JESSICA

Marcus is staying at the office, right?

ROBBY

I--I don't know—

JESSICA

Terrence suggested I go to see Marcus there.

ROBBY  
He did?

JESSICA  
I need to tell Marcus he's wrong.

ROBBY  
But Terrence told me—

JESSICA  
I'll go see Marcus!

ROBBY  
No, that wouldn't be good—

JESSICA  
And Zach too . . . yeah . . . perfect.

ROBBY  
You shouldn't—

JESSICA  
But what if I got Zach to go too? Then Marcus would believe— right?  
He'd have to believe if he heard it from both of us . . . I'll call him . . .

(She starts to go.)

ROBBY  
No. Don't go outside—

JESSICA  
I can't wait anymore . . .

ROBBY  
But Zach might kill you!

JESSICA  
What?

ROBBY  
Zach—he already killed Tanya.

JESSICA

Tanya?

ROBBY

Yeah.

JESSICA

What?

ROBBY

It's true.

JESSICA

When?

ROBBY

Just happened—

JESSICA

She's dead?

ROBBY

Yeah. Zach—

JESSICA

No. That's ridiculous.

ROBBY

She's dead! The police think—

JESSICA

They're wrong! He wouldn't hurt Tanya—

ROBBY

I think he did! I heard—

JESSICA

No, he's not like that! You don't know him.

ROBBY

I—

JESSICA

No, no, no! You guys have this all messed up! You heard wrong! I need Zach to help me! I just need to get Zach to meet me there. Then we'll get this all straightened out . . .

ROBBY

No!

JESSICA

. . . we'll force Marcus to listen! He'll understand and apologize. We'll be O.K.

ROBBY

Stay here—

(She quickly hugs ROBBY.)

JESSICA

Thanks for listening, Rob! I'm starting to feel better now!

(ROBBY tries to hold on to her but she breaks away.)

(JESSICA starts to run off.)

ROBBY

Jessica, wait! Wait!

(JESSICA is almost gone but stops and turns.)

JESSICA

What?

(Pause)

ROBBY

What time?

JESSICA

What time—

ROBBY

What time will you meet?

JESSICA

I was thinking 8:00?

ROBBY

Tell Zach 7:30. If you're coming at 8. Zach is always late.

JESSICA

Oh. O.K. Yeah. 7:30. Thanks.

ROBBY

Good . . .

(JESSICA is gone.)

A repetitive piano note is heard.

The lights shift.

ROBBY stands alone in the morgue.

He carefully pulls out his  
gun .

He cautiously looks around.)

ROBBY

Zach . . . Zach? I'd like to help you . . .

(A voice is heard from the darkness.)

MARCUS'S VOICE

Zach is no longer employed at this establishment.

(Silence)

Are you here to shoot me, Robby?

ROBBY

(Keeping his gun out)

No.

MARCUS'S VOICE

I might not mind. Too much.

ROBBY

Zach is supposed—

MARCUS'S VOICE

I haven't seen him. I haven't seen anybody. In fact, there's a terrible lot I haven't seen. But I should have.

ROBBY

I'm just waiting . . .

MARCUS'S VOICE

For what?

ROBBY

Nothing.

MARCUS

Me too.

(MARCUS enters the morgue.

He stares at ROBBY. He is calm but intense, defeated but purposeful.

ROBBY keeps the gun on him.)

Do I frighten you, Robby?

(Pause)

Well?

ROBBY

A little.

MARCUS

Is it because you're alone, in the dark, with a black man?

ROBBY

No.

MARCUS

Oh, I've seen that before. Many, many times. It's O.K.

ROBBY

That's not it.

MARCUS

Is it because you're alone in the dark with a crazy man?

ROBBY

No.

MARCUS

Alone, in the dark, with a crazy black man?

(ROBBY doesn't answer.)

Bingo!

(MARCUS laughs.)

ROBBY

No! Really! I have nothing against African-Americans—

MARCUS

I am so comforted.

ROBBY

As a group. Or individuals—

MARCUS

I can sleep easy now.

ROBBY

O.K.

MARCUS

But what about me?

ROBBY

Huh?

MARCUS

What do you think of me?

(ROBBY doesn't answer.)

Maybe you just don't know. Do you?

ROBBY

Maybe . . .

MARCUS

Your ignorance . . . and my own . . . I do, lately, find all the stress . . . to be a bit unbearable. Don't you?

ROBBY

Yeah.

MARCUS

No relief in sight. Is there?

(Pause)

Are we expecting Zach? Is that what you said? Is he going to leap out of the shadows there behind you? Pop out of a body drawer? Like an angry cadaver sprung to life! His homicidal blood rising, his fangs twitching, his eyes seething to kill again!

ROBBY

I don't know . . .

MARCUS

Watch out for him, Robby! Just ask his girlfriend. And Zach swings a mean, vicious knife. I've felt it in my back.

(Pause)

Well, let me tell you something while we wait for Zach. Can I tell you a story, Robby?

(Pause)

What if it's a good story? Well, a true one anyway. I'll let you judge if it's good. What if I told you my father was the most respected man in our neighborhood? Not loved, but respected. And what if I told you that he was a man of business! Honest, tough, but fair! If your car broke down and you needed a little loan before payday, you knocked on our door. If sales were slow and the corner grocery needed to pay their suppliers, my father would get the call. When the local undertaker fell behind in his taxes, my father became an investor. He was always working, thinking,

talking . . . loving who he was. And I never saw him wear anything but a neatly pressed, three-piece suit. And this beautiful fedora gently tilted on his head. He'd stroll every day through the neighborhood, calm and confident, touching that noble hat to all the ladies, smiling hello to everyone. And trading in the currency of the latest gossip. Well, one day, Robby, I look out the window and I see my father— he's running. I'd never, ever, seen him run before. But he's running as fast as his stiff legs can carry the man. Faster than a man his age ever runs. Past our house and down the street. The back of his suit coat flapping behind him like a cape. I run after him. Was somebody chasing him? Some punk? The police? I catch up to him and grab his warm, wet coat. What's the matter, Dad? Why are you running? He looks down at me, his eyes ablaze with fear. He tells me very softly, "I saw it . . . staring at me in the mirror . . . I was satisfied . . . comfortable . . . safe . . . I've been lying to myself, son." Then the old man, he gives me a hug, and he walks away. And I see his fedora, blowing around and around in the street.

(Pause. A saxophone begins to play,  
slowly, sadly.)

That night he shot himself. He was no longer a man. No longer in control, Robby. Yes, I understand now that it was his time . . . when the days looming ahead . . . just struggle, and pain . . . and more of the same . . . you can't outrun that . . . no, it's time . . .

(ROBBY doesn't move. MARCUS  
stares at him.)

Well then . . . why don't you shoot me? Please.

ROBBY

Don't—

MARCUS

Please! It's O.K. I won't think ill of you. Do it.

ROBBY

I really don't want to . . .

MARCUS

It's time . . .

ROBBY

Please . . .

(MARCUS laughs again.)

MARCUS

But it's not your time, I suspect. Do I suspect correctly? You must have something to live for.

(Pause)

So, how is Jess?

(Pause)

Have you seen her?

ROBBY

She's O.K.

MARCUS

So you have seen her?

ROBBY

Yes.

MARCUS

Hmm. She is beautiful. Isn't she? Those dark eyes . . . so soothing and warm . . .

ROBBY

She is.

MARCUS

Ah. I was correct.

ROBBY

What?

MARCUS

Seems like everybody's seen Jess. She's seeing everybody, isn't she? Everybody and anybody! Except me. And they all see through Marcus, but Marcus. And you chuckle. You all must have a good chuckle . . . so just tell me I'm right. Tell me I'm right, Robby! Tell me I'll never have her to myself.

(Pause)

ROBBY

You're right. She told me. She said it -- she's finished with you.

(Pause)

MARCUS

Thank you.

ROBBY

She's afraid to tell you . . .

MARCUS

Afraid . . . of me? I've seen that before. Yes. Can I be afraid too?

(Pause)

ROBBY

Just forget her, Marcus.

MARCUS

A man . . . if he's a man . . . he needs to see who he is! At least understand what he must have . . . and what he must do . . .

(JESSICA appears from Marcus's office with light shining in from behind her.)

JESSICA

Marcus? Are you down here?

(MARCUS turns to her.)

MARCUS

I've been waiting, Jess . . .

(She looks at him without speaking for several beats.)

JESSICA

I've been waiting too . . .

MARCUS

I've been thinking and thinking so much . . . too much . . . you're heavenly, Jess . . . for me . . .

JESSICA

Maybe I do know you, Marcus . . . I'd like to think we both know . . .

(MARCUS and JESSICA step toward each other and stare at each other with uncertainty, fear and passion.

A few piano notes, then the saxophone are heard growing louder and louder.

MARCUS and JESSICA embrace, then kiss.

MARCUS pulls away from the kiss, then they slowly move into Marcus's office.

They are gone.)

ROBBY

Jessica? Where are you going?

(ZACH jumps out from the darkness with a wild shout.)

ZACH

AHHHHHHH!

(ZACH jumps on ROBBY and gets an arm around his neck.

ROBBY'S gun falls to the floor.)

Been looking for you!

ROBBY

Help!

(They struggle to the floor.)

ZACH

Not afraid of a sniveling mush-mouth!

ROBBY  
Stop! Zach!

ZACH  
I'm useful for something!

ROBBY  
You're . . . hurting me . . .

ZACH  
Stuttering goddamn coward!

ROBBY  
Get off!

ZACH  
(Looks up)  
This is for you, babe!

(ZACH chokes ROBBY.)

ROBBY  
Please—

ZACH  
(Still looking up)  
I let you down, Tanya! I'm sorry . . . sorry! God, I miss you! I'll be stable now. Gonna stop drinking. Soon! I swear!

(He keeps choking ROBBY  
violently.)

At least the hard stuff. Maybe a beer now and then . . . after work . . .  
when I'm lonely . . .

(ROBBY manages to reach the  
gun and grab it.

ZACH sees the gun and grabs  
ROBBY'S arm.

They struggle for the gun.)

ROBBY  
Don't make me shoot you!

ZACH  
No, I'll kill you!

ROBBY  
I'll kill you first!

ZACH  
I'll kill you second!

ROBBY  
Second?

ZACH  
You already killed Tanya, goddamn it!

ROBBY  
What?

ZACH  
Took her away from me!

(ZACH starts to cry as they struggle.)

ROBBY  
I did not!

ZACH  
I should have been somebody different . . . I should have . . . I'll never get it right . . .

ROBBY  
I didn't kill her!

ZACH  
Stuttering psycho!

ROBBY  
That's you!

ZACH  
You're out to get me!

ROBBY

What?

ZACH

Terrence says I'm next!

(A loud gunshot is heard coming in from the darkness.)

TERRENCE

You might be.

(TERRENCE appears holding a gun.)

ZACH

Owww!

(ZACH is wounded and staggers back.)

Somebody help me! Police!

(ZACH staggers off.

ROBBY is still on the ground.

TERRENCE is silent.

TERRENCE picks up Robby's gun and holds them both.

ROBBY stares up at him.)

ROBBY

Zach is crazy . . . but we got him . . . you're letting him get away . . .

(TERRENCE doesn't move.)

What the hell's the matter with you?

TERRENCE

I can't help it.

ROBBY

Terrence—

TERRENCE

Words live or die on their own now. They don't need me. My words thrive . . . because you see them. Because you breathe them. Because you bleed them. You deceived yourselves . . .

ROBBY

TERRENCE!

(TERRENCE shoots ROBBY.

ROBBY is wounded and stumbles to the ground.)

ROBBY

G-- G-- God . . .

TERRENCE

There's an ecstasy in leaping across boundaries . . .

ROBBY

God . . . damn . . . you . . . !

(A loud gunshot is heard from Marcus's office.

ROBBY looks in that direction in anguish and whispers to himself.)

Jessica . . .

TERRENCE

Shhh!

(TERRENCE listens.

Another loud gunshot is heard from Marcus's office.

ROBBY screams.

TERRENCE smiles.)

TERRENCE

You believe in heaven? Well, it stopped believing in you. And me. No. No. The gifted are condemned now. And the diligent exalted.

(Softly)

I've won . . . and I'll enjoy it . . . alone . . .

ROBBY

Why . . . me . . . ?

TERRENCE

(Squats down beside Robby)

It's good you're not a crier. You're better off, Robbo. A thousand times better. You were nothing. Luckless. You couldn't thrive.

(ROBBY dies.

TERRENCE gets up and walks away.

He speaks to us.)

He was becoming more like me than he ever knew . . .

(Pause)

. . . and I'm more like you than you'll ever admit . . .

(With his finger, TERRENCE hits a shrill piano note as he exits.

TERRENCE is gone.

Lights shift on ROBBY.

After a beat, ROBBY slowly rises.

He looks out at us.)

ROBBY

(To us)

Terrence never spoke again. Not a word.

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