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2 PENS ELIJAH

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CHARACTERS

MARIN APPLGATE:

An attractive, affluent, white woman of fifty-something, dressed for the corporate world. She's a non-fiction travel writer and both highly anxious and agoraphobic. She's very empathetic and a "literary do-gooder."

ELIJAH KING:

African-American and approaching 40. Self-educated, charismatic man of the streets. Brilliant, but a diamond in the rough--and an ex-con. He mixes "street" rhythms and "street" intonations with his vast, intellectual knowledge and myriad poetic references.

TIME

Summer, the early 1990's

PLACE

An isolated one-room shack somewhere in Northern Minnesota. There is one window, which light streams through, depending on the time of day, and an inside door on STAGE RIGHT that leads to a small porch.

When the play begins, MARIN is sitting in a rickety chair, her feet bound tightly together by cord. Across from her is a table and chair, where ELIJAH will sit for much of the play. The only other furniture in the room is a broken down fridge, and several crates of paperback books propped on top of each other to form bookshelves. There's a small bowl of fruit on the table, cord, and neatly organized, labeled boxes that contain cassette-holders with completed and blank Tapes.

Note: This play contains 13 lines from "On Living," taken from Nazim Hikmet's book of poems, Things I Didn't Know I Loved (Persea Books, 1975, Translated by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk). Permission is pending.

This play also contains 33 lines from Langston Hughes' poem, "As I Grew Older," in Selected Poems of Langston Hughes (Vintage Books Edition, 1974). Permission is pending, subsequent to further negotiations with Harold Ober Associates.

SCENE ONE: 6:30 a.m.

Starts with the house completely DARK.
We hear blues music: Buddy Guy's
"Hard Time Killing Floor." Then the
Music dies down. (A few Beats.) Then
We hear the birds beginning to sing—it's
Just before sunrise. After a few more
Seconds, We hear MARIN's frightened
Voice.

MARIN

Rescue me...I'm innocent. I've committed no crime...I'm (MARIN sobs) an innocent
victim. Please. Rescue me...You have. You have eight hours to tape your apology. And.
And get it to Station KATP in Minneapolis in time to be broadcast on the *Five O'Clock
News* with Mindy Velasquez. (Beat.) Or I'll be shot. (Beat.) Call (323) 473-1534 by
eleven this morning for further instructions.

(A few Beats. Then the LIGHTS go up. ELIJAH is pointing a gun at
MARIN. SHE's sitting in a chair and clutching a piece of paper in Her
hand, while holding a cell phone to Her ear. HE snatches the paper out of
Her hand, and tosses it on the floor. Then HE grabs the cell phone.)

ELIJAH

(Speaking into the phone) You got it? ...Okay, good. You know what to do. (HE hangs
up)

(HE goes over to the table and lays down the phone and then the gun.
HE gets some cord and walks back to MARIN. HE ties Her hands
together with the cord, and then HE ties Her feet.)

(ELIJAH sits down at the table. HE takes a Tape out of the Tape Recorder
and puts it into one of many cassette-holders. Then HE labels it. HE grabs
an apple from the fruit bowl and starts munching.)

(MARIN's anxiety attack is getting worst—SHE's sweating and having
palpitations)

MARIN

Please...a...a...pa-per...

(ELIJAH ignores Her)

MARIN

(In-between palpitations) I ne—ee-d...I ne--ee-d...

(Munching the apple, ELIJAH takes out a blank Tape and puts it into the Tape Recorder. HE clicks on the Tape Recorder, then gathers His thoughts and presses RECORD:)

ELIJAH (Speaking into the Tape Recorder):
When, when you came into that bathroom, you looked right through me. Like—like—I was equivalent to a gob of shit. A gob of shit gushin' outta your asshole. (Beat.)

MARIN
A brow-nnn pap—per...bag.

(MARIN starts to hyperventilate)

(3 or 4 Beats.) (ELIJAH clicks off the Tape Recorder)

ELIJAH
Is you a nut case? (Beat.) Where I gonna find you a brown paper bag? (Beat.) You think we all look alike and stash brown paper bags in case we munchin' on our ribs and run outta 40's?...Now where was I?

(ELIJAH presses RECORD:)

ELIJAH (Speaking into the Tape Recorder):
I didn't look up, I knew you by your smell...but when you walked in there—you looked right through me. Like I was a gob of shit gushin' outta your asshole. Like—just like—I didn't EXIST. (Beat.) Then...just as I'm bending to wipe up your shit—you mosey back in and spit in my face...and bam-ka-boom, I'm flat on the curb and my pay check's missing.

(MARIN's gasping and wheezing grows more intense) (ELIJAH loses His train of thought. HE waits for inspiration, but none comes.)

ELIJAH
Shit. (ELIJAH clicks off the Tape Recorder) Didn't no one ever teach you how to slow your engine down? Where you think you speeding to, the 405 Freeway?

(ELIJAH stares at Her for a Beat. Then HE looks around for a paper bag. To His amazement, HE finds one in the trash. HE grabs the paper bag, walks over to MARIN's chair, and holds it over Her mouth for Her to breathe into. Gradually Her breathing slows down, but just a little. ELIJAH tosses the bag on the floor.)

ELIJAH
(Sarcastic, but helping—very impatient to go on with the taping) Tell you what. Pretend you're sun-bathing in Aruba. Now take yourself some long, deep breaths. One and two and...(MARIN closes Her eyes) And now imagine that the sun's pouring down. You got

no cares in the world. (At the irony of that last remark, MARIN opens Her eyes, then shuts them again.) One and two an'...Ever hear the story of "The Tortoise And The Hare"?—slow an' steady wins the race—the breeze is caressing your skin, like—like warm...tapioca. (MARIN opens Her eyes again, at the outlandish metaphor, but SHE begins to breathe more easily)

(ELIJAH walks back to the table)

MARIN

(In-between breathing rhythmically in and out) Won't you—would you please—loosen this cord...it's burning my wrists.

(ELIJAH doesn't answer and starts to fiddle with the Tape Recorder)

MARIN

It will—reduce my anxiety. (2 or 3 Beats.) And make it—easier for you—to work on that tape.

ELIJAH

(Still fiddling and not looking up) (Then:) If I loosen the cord, you gonna promise to shut the fuck up?

(MARIN nods)

ELIJAH

Say it. Let me hear you say it.

MARIN

I promise.

ELIJAH

(Speaking slowly and distinctly) I promise to shut the fuck up.

MARIN

(Speaking slowly and distinctly) I promise to shut the fuck up.

ELIJAH

Speak slowly and distinctly. Ar-tic-ulate your syllables.

MARIN

(Even slower) I pro-mise to shu--ut the fu--uck up.

(ELIJAH goes over to MARIN's chair and loosens the cord binding Her wrists. Then HE walks back to the table, sits down, grabs another apple, and gathers His thoughts. He puts His finger on the Record Button, but doesn't press it yet.)

ELIJAH

(Mumbling to himself) A professor don't scrub no floors on his hands and knees.

(2 or 3 Beats. Then ELIJAH presses RECORD:)

ELIJAH (Speaking into the Tape Recorder)

And when you walked into that bathroom at *Denny's*, I shoulda...I shoulda...cut off your balls. Sliced 'em and stuffed 'em down your throat. Then disemboweled you, fucker...strung you by your feet in the town square—like they did to Mussolini at the end of the war...(ELIJAH takes a few more bites of the apple) I was...was...leaning down to scrub up your fucking shit (Apple in hand, ELIJAH starts rubbing His forehead with His 2nd and 3rd fingers)...and I heard...I heard this throbbin' in the room. These kinda vibrations...And the throbbin' was like the window grate had broke and a bird had flown in—though this didn't make no sense, cause this *Denny's* was sit-u-ated on a junk street in Compton. (ELIJAH wipes His brow)...Then suddenly I realized it wasn't no bird...it was my own Black soul...my beautiful, Black soul RIGHT THERE in the bathroom with me—as palpable—as my fingertips and asshole. (Beat.) (ELIJAH coughs) But then I thought—what your beautiful, Black soul doing flyin' around that room by itself, when it shoulda been ATTACHED to your body.

(ELIJAH clicks off the Tape Recorder, and thinks. HE looks nervously at His watch, and then at His Cell Phone, to make sure His watch is working right.) (Beat.)

ELIJAH (Now mumbling to Himself)

Now where was...

(ELIJAH presses the Re-Wind Button to get back to the previous sentence. HE has trouble at first because HE goes too far. After one or two misses, HE finally gets to the spot HE wants. Then HE presses PLAY:)

ELIJAH's Voice On The Tape Recorder:

“And asshole. (Beat.) (ELIJAH coughs) But then I thought—what your beautiful, Black soul doing flyin' around that room by itself, when it shoulda been ATTACHED to your body.”

(ELIJAH clicks off the Tape Recorder. Then HE presses Record:)

ELIJAH (Speaking into the Tape Recorder):

Now, at this...particular, existential moment, I—I knew that something was horribly wrong. The way that bird be circlin' an' circlin,' you'd think the ceiling was a smoke screen—a wedge between that bathroom and the oceans of eternity...(ELIJAH coughs) I was gonna zoom right outta there and go get my piece—I was sick to death of living—

But. But, I stopped myself, just like. Like a master of *The Tao*...when I realized The Way to stitch the two together—the Soul and the Body.

(ELIJAH clicks off the Tape Recorder. HE kneads his temple with His fist.)

MARIN

(Truly moved, but above all, trying to get on his good side) Unbelievable! Did you memorize...Was that Amiri—

ELIJAH (Interrupting)

E-pi-phany.

MARIN

Baraka?

ELIJAH

(Offended) Baraka? Amiri Baraka? (Beat.) Fucking no--Yours Truly—The Professor here. (Beat.) You never hear the word? (Beat.) Epiphany is a...kinda vision...an act of recognition,

MARIN (Interrupting)

Why, of course.

ELIJAH

...so to speak.

(Beat.)

MARIN

(Pausing) I'm starving. Can you get me some food?...Can I please (Beat.) have something to eat?

ELIJAH

(Sarcastic) How's about tuna and arugula with aioli on a freshly baked mini-baguette?

MARIN

You're making fun of me.

ELIJAH

Shut up, Bitch.

MARIN

(Steeling up Her nerve) I'll be quiet—if I can eat something.

(ELIJAH picks up the gun and strokes it. Then HE pivots suddenly and

points it at Her.

ELIJAH

If I give you something to eat, you gonna—

MARIN

(Interrupting) Yes! I will! I promise!

(ELIJAH goes to the table and puts down the gun, then HE notices that the Tape Recorder is still going—even though HE'd thought HE clicked it off)

ELIJAH

Shit. (HE clicks it off—this time successfully. Then HE goes to the fridge, gets a container of yogurt, and starts spoon-feeding MARIN)

MARIN

(In-between mouthfuls) Do you do this for a living?—I'm sorry, you didn't tell me your name.

ELIJAH

Call me Tom, Dick, or Harry. The names are interchangeable, as far as I'm concerned.

MARIN

Do you do this for a living, (MARIN pauses) Harry?

ELIJAH

Every other Monday. Beats nine-to-five.

MARIN

(Trying hard to establish a common bond) You know, I was intensely political once too. In the midst of the sixties—before you probably entered junior high.

ELIJAH

(Interrupting) Well, ain't that refreshing.

(ELIJAH's cell phone rings. HE dangles the spoon in one hand, and answers it with the other.)

ELIJAH

Yeah. She's all trussed up. Like a *Golden Plump Perdue* ready for the oven. The D.A. didn't call back yet? Not a fucking peep?... I know, bro, but we gotta be patient... If her old man don't miss her, we'll wait awhile and beep him up a 2nd tape, then go with a full-court press. But we gotta take this thing step-by-step or we be blowing it to pieces... I know it wuz my idea, but didn't you never read Aesop—"The Tortoise And The Hare"? Didn't I TELL you to go back to school? SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE

RACE...NO, I ain't clucking my feathers. I'm a man just like you iz... You listening? We gotta do this right. And when The Man calls back, use phone number 3 and toss phone number 2—like I instructed you to do. *Ad Infinitum*. And cruise them freeways and—keep your ass movin'... Now wait an hour, then hit me up. Don't y'all trip. Shit. I ain't going no where.

(ELIJAH hangs up and puts the cell phone away. HE glances nervously at His watch, then takes out His cell phone again to check His watch against it. Then HE puts his cell phone away, and spoons MARIN the last drop of yogurt.)

MARIN

By “D. A.”, you wouldn't by any chance be referring to the husband of any present company, would you... Harry?

(ELIJAH walks back to the table and sits. HE gets himself ready to talk into the Tape Recorder again.)

MARIN

In case you're interested, Josh not answering the message on his cell is quite in character. He's so intense... so devoted to (Beat.) catching the bad guys. Why if I call him at work to leave the date of his dentist appointment, he finds me too intrusive, too demanding--

ELIJAH

(Interrupting) And too fucking talkative. Listen up, lady. You can dis the D.A. and you can suck my dick till you're blue in the face. I ain't gonna un-tie you.

(MARIN is feeling desperate now. SHE looks around and spots the crates of books.)

MARIN

Oh I see that you own Man's Fate! We share a commitment to the underdog. And The Brothers Karamazov! I read it when I turned fourteen—it was my first and favorite grown-up novel.

ELIJAH

Iz you mentally challenged? Do I look like one of those bumblefucks got's time to read—that plays tennis in the a.m. and golf before cocktails?

MARIN

Then why—

(ELIJAH presses Record:)

ELIJAH (Speaking into the Tape Recorder):

Syllogism...Ever heard of the syllogism? If I don't EXIST, then my body iz severed from my soul...If my soul iz dis-attached from my body—then I need the D.A. to prove to me that I do EXIST; i.e., to acknowledge my EXISTENCE. Now...uhm...how do I that? (Beat.) One thing I do know—I ain't gonna get down on my knees and ask his forgiveness for fucking me up the ass. (Beat.) In plain vernacular: common parlance—one thing I don't do—I don't APOLOGIZE to the fuck for being his victim! (Beat.) And I don't get down on my knees no more to scrub floors at *Denny's*—or any other like-minded ven-u (ELIJAH uses a French pronunciation of the word “venue”, with the accent on the 2nd syllable)—to fill in for a friend that been coughin' an' sneezin'!

(2 or 3 Beats.) (Stuck now, and sweating--mumbling to Himself)

Now where wuz?...Damn! I should be at *Starbucks* sippin' *doppio machiatos* and preparing for my seminar at Princeton!

(ELIJAH clicks off the Tape Recorder, and glances nervously at His watch)

MARIN

(Pausing) Then why all the paperbacks?

ELIJAH

Maybe the same reason you ask too many questions.

MARIN

Boredom? Fear? Just in case?

ELIJAH

You the wise-ass. Figure it out. Then do yourself a favor and shut the fuck up.

(ELIJAH is having trouble with His train of thought. HE clicks off the Tape, goes and grabs the newspaper stuffed inside the nearest crate of books, then returns to the table and starts to read.)

MARIN

I stopped reading *The New York Times* a year or two ago—though it was certainly bad enough during Reaganomics. Talk about hidden agendas and axes to grind. Those self-righteous assholes!

ELIJAH (Looking up)

Whaddayou know 'bout self-righteous assholes?

MARIN

If I tell you, do I get an apple?

ELIJAH

(Beat.) Depends. If I think your answer's convincing.

MARIN

(Struggling to ingratiate Herself) Well, I know that A): I don't like them, and B): They rule the world. And oppress millions of hard-working people that have no chance of ever fighting back.

ELIJAH

So if you don't dig self-righteous assholes, why you married to the D.A.—asshole numero uno?

MARIN

Really, Harry. You don't understand. Josh isn't an asshole, or even self-righteous. Just an innocent bystander with the unfortunate karma to come off to some people like a (MARIN pauses) self-righteous asshole.

(ELIJAH stands up quickly and knocks down His chair)

ELIJAH

You don't get it, do you—Mrs. D. A.? The garbage man, Tom Hanks, your mamma's complicit, and leading the troops is the dickhead that plays you. Didn't your anti-war homies teach you nuthin'?

MARIN

(Beat.) Why you don't even know Josh. You...must have mixed him up with somebody else! Josh wouldn't hurt an ant! He fainted in the delivery room when Colin was born—and can't stand the sight of blood. If Matt or Dusty fell off their bikes or scraped their knees—

ELIJAH

You veering off the topic for this evening's broadcast—self-righteous assholes.

MARIN

Well...as I was saying, those hypocrites who write for *The Times*. Those phony darlings of the liberals, are just as hawkish as *Fox News*, maybe more so. At least Bill O'Reilly's up front about his jingoist agenda. Now—do I get that apple?

(Beat.) (ELIJAH slowly picks up the chair. HE looks at MARIN, then Back at the fruit bowl.)

MARIN

And. And I guess one could say that, in certain situations, Josh *can* overdo it. And. And act like a fucking asshole.

(ELIJAH reaches over casually and grabs an apple from the fruit bowl. HE walks over to MARIN's chair and holds it to Her mouth.)

MARIN

(In-between munches) Apropos—broadcasts. What exactly is the purpose of that tape you're working on? And why, exactly, did you decide to (Beat.) kidnap *me*?

(ELIJAH ignores the question)

MARIN

(Glancing over at the crate of books and again trying to establish a common bond) I see that you like Hikmet too! He's my very favorite poet—but only if it's Randy Blasing' and Mutlu Konuk's translation!

ELIJAH

(Beat.) Lady, Hikmet's not meant to be read casually like some dumbfuck novel by Danielle Steele. Yeah, it's a jive translation. But that don't mean it's definitive.

MARIN

(Chewing as SHE talks) Then I *was* right. You have read all these books! (Beat.) That infuriates me too. Nothing upsets me more than academic blowhards—

ELIJAH

You think you're here for your own fucking pleasure? I got news for you, D. A.'s Wife. That ain't no *Marshall Fields* cushion rubbin' against your ass. And no *Paul Mitchell* hair gel's foamin' on top your scalp. (ELIJAH pauses)...and that piece on the table ain't no hair dryer.

MARIN

But... I'm. I'm fascinated by the quantity of books that you've read. And your passion for great literature—Harry. Do...you think it's genetic?

(ELIJAH glowers at MARIN. HE snatches the apple from Her mouth and tosses it on the floor.)

MARIN

(Trying to explain) Maybe some great-great grandfather that you've never met-- or never even heard of--stirred this flame inside you...and...whenever did you find the time to read poetry?

(There's the sound of a car approaching on the dirt road that wends by the shack. ELIJAH quickly grabs the gun, puts His hand over MARIN's mouth, and the gun to Her head. Then the noise of the car gradually subsides. ELIJAH slowly withdraws the gun, walks back to the table, and sits down.)

(MARIN lets out a sob, then a whimper. Then another whimper.)

(ELIJAH takes a bag of pistachios out of the fruit bowl. HE cracks them open with his teeth and tosses the shells on the floor.)

MARIN

I thought--I thought--You gave me your *word*.

(ELIJAH spits out a nut)

ELIJAH

In your dreams!

MARIN

(Beat.) (Working hard to regain Her composure) Hey, you'd better slow down there. You're liable to get a spastic colon.

(ELIJAH spits out another nut)

ELIJAH

You a 80's health nut or something? (Beat.) If you think you my fucking Mamma—

MARIN

(Slowly getting back into stride) But where—how—did you come upon Hikmet? It's ...incredible! You've discovered the greatest, yet most abstruse poet of the 20th century—on your own—and a Turkish Commie to boot!

(ELIJAH continues to spit out pistachio shells)

MARIN

Do you think it was an accident, Harry? Some...synchronistic event, as Jung would say?

(Beat.)

(Voice quaking) If you're going to continue to terrorize me, I think. I think, at least, I have the right to get an answer to my questions.

(ELIJAH doesn't answer. HE stops chewing pistachio nuts and reaches for the Tape Recorder. He presses the Re-Wind Button, and then Play, to listen to where He'd previously left off.)

ELIJAH's Voice on the Tape Recorder:

"But then I thought—what your beautiful, Black soul doing flyin' around that room by itself when it shoulda' been ATTACHED to your body."

(ELIJAH shakes His head, Fast-Forwards the Tape, and presses Play again)

that even at seventy, for example, you will plant olives—
and not so they'll be left for your children either,
but because even though you fear death you don't
believe it,
because living, I mean, weighs heavier.

(ELIJAH starts to weep at the beauty of Hikmet's poem. Then
HE clicks off the Tape Recorder, and puts His head in his hands.)

(MARIN is amazed and not sure what to say)

MARIN

(SHE pauses. Then SHE repeats the question SHE'd asked earlier):

But... where—how—did you come upon Hikmet?

ELIJAH

(Muffled—His head still in his hands) The... cage.

MARIN

Excuse me?

ELIJAH

(Raising his head) Is you stupid? The indirect object to your sentence—and the fucking
answer to your aforesaid question.

(MARIN looks blank)

ELIJAH

In the clink—the chicken coop—THE SLAMS. (Beat.) That's when I first read Hikmet.

(MARIN closes Her eyes and starts muttering inaudibly)

ELIJAH

Now let's give this problem an exigesis...uhm... Suppose that *you* couldn't get no work
for... 'bout four years straight... after *you'd* been caged for sixteen. On top of which,
added to this (ELIJAH coughs) EXISTENTIAL situation, you'd been incarcerated
for an act that—Whaddabout you?

MARIN

(Alarmed) What?

ELIJAH

When you start diggin' Hikmet?

MARIN

(Beat.) Oh. I had what you might call...a lonely childhood.

ELIJAH

Uhm. A lonely childhood. (Beat.) Well, there's Frank Sinatra *Only For The Lonely Hearts* lonely and there's Hikmet's solitary confinement lonely. Which lonely was yours, the first or the second?

MARIN

It's possible, of course, that I was wired for loneliness. But I was, in fact, your classic only child. My father was a neuro-surgeon and my mother worked as his nurse..I had to entertain myself early on, if you get what I mean...Later, in the evenings, they'd kick up their heels and party—with other couples in Crocus Hill.

(ELIJAH gets up from the table, unable to think of anything brilliant to say on His Tape, He gets down on the floor and starts doing one-handed push-ups.)

ELIJAH (Continuing the push-ups)

Crocus Hill?

MARIN

Rated the best neighborhood in America by *Town And County*. Very nineteenth century, if you get my drift...Did you hurt your back in prison, Harry? Is that why you're doing push-ups?...My parent's house, for instance, was built in 1899—F.Scott Fitzgerald lived across the street in the forties, and Garrison Keillor was our next-door-neighbor. Want to hear something incredible? When Josh and I returned to St.Paul after ten years in L.A., we moved back into the very same house and—

ELIJAH

You can stash the dramatic monologue. This ain't no audition for the Actor's Studio.

MARIN (Pausing)

What crime did you commit? You can trust me, Harry. We're actually more alike than you realize—out of sync, perhaps, with the rest of the world. Yet we both thirst for poetry like...mother's milk.

ELIJAH

N.A.

MARIN

Is that a street term? I'm not familiar—

ELIJAH

Not Applicable. Ain't fucking relevant. (Beat.) Let me take a wild guess. Now mind y'all, this is just a hunch, but I bet you never had the, uhm, privilege, of filling yourself out a work application for a menial—

MARIN

Oh but it is, Harry, it is! Doesn't Hikmet say everything in life is relevant—and *he* spent seventeen years in prison: one more year than you! Remember the end of "On Living": "...Even if they beat you and throw you into solitary, one must take life seriously...and still look out the window and watch for rain."

(ELIAJH stops the push-ups and sits back at the table)

ELIJAH

You been snortin' something behind my back? You've just axed off lines from two different stanzas and glued them together like your mamma's crap. (ELIJAH pauses) And how would a (Beat.) Crocus Hill wife know about elemental shit such as life and death?

MARIN

I...write travel stories...for *Minneapolis Monthly*—very detailed pieces that describe what it's like for a Guatemalan peasant on the brink of starvation...or a Congolese orphan that's had his legs blown off—

ELIJAH

Um-hum...a jet set traveler. Where you been to lately? Ever go to Mozambique?

MARIN

Well...actually...you could say, I have a rich imagination.

ELIJAH

(HE stares at Her for a Beat. or 2) You telling me you a travel writer and you afraid to fly? An Emily Dickinson throwback? (HE laughs heartily) Shit. I betchyou didn't step foot outsida Minn—ee—so—ta. No, slash that—make it Crocus Hill.

MARIN (Starting to lose it)

If you think I don't have "hands-on-experience"...of life and death...If you think being tied up like an animal in this God-forsaken shack with thick cord piercing my wrists doesn't QUALIFY me as an expert...(MARIN fights back tears) Listen, Harry—or whatever the hell your name is, since it's quite probable that either you or your partner is going to shoot me sometime in the next twenty-four hours—

ELIJAH

Shit. I thought we'd gone OVER that. If your hubbie—"Mis-tah" Calvin Klein Cologne, cooperates and apologizes in an ap--pro--priate--

MARIN

(Interrupting)I think I've earned the right to know what crime you served time for—or for that matter, your God-given name!

ELIJAH

I thought I heard you say a few seconds ago you had a rich imagination. Didn't you and your homies ever rent *The Thin Blue Line* at the Crocus Hill *Blockbuster*? Didn't you never grab a *soc* (pronounced "soosh") course at the U. of M. on the L. A. P. D. and the frequency of frame-ups in the nig-gah community?...In regards to the particular charges--

MARIN

(Suddenly emphatic) Yes—the particular charges.

ELIJAH

I was innocent. Innocent—as a—white woman's pussy.

MARIN

(Refusing to be offended. Also letting down her guard.) But...but...isn't that...what they all say?

(ELIJAH glares at MARIN)

MARIN

(Taking a deep breath) Listen, I'm trying to be honest here. To take this (Beat.) "discussion" to a more straightforward, and *authentic* level.(ELIJAH goes to the fridge, takes out a beer, and cracks it open)

ELIJAH

How's bout kidnapping a cocksucker's wife, and when her old man don't pay the ransom, whackin' her through the left ventricle.

MARIN

I don't think that's very funny, Harry.

ELIJAH

Uhhh...Now...which count you interested in—attempted assault with a deadly—or premeditated rape? As I informed you previously, I was framed.

MARIN

(With desperation) I...but...

ELIJAH

Which part of that English sentence don't you fucking understand—the passive voice or the past tense?

(MARIN looks at Him with trepidation)

(ELIJAH circles the room while HE chugs down His beer)

ELIJAH

Tell ya'll what, since you so good at *imagining*, why don't you IMAGINE...an eighteen-year-old Black man—shit, pretend it's an assignment for *Minneapolis Monthly*—say, a dog 'bout my height and weight...with my...uhmm...penchant for Po—e—sie...and say, just for argument's sake, that one scintillating morn in sunny South Central...while he's pourin' hisself a coke at the 7/Seven, two perky white gents, glistenin' in their DKNY sweats and too-tight *Nikes*—their pinkies straight outta *L.A. Nails Plus*—all smiling and polite like Miss Manners—ask him *please* would you pass down a coupla napkins?...and while he reaches for them napkins—executing the favor they politely requested—BAM, they cuff him, then ride him to the station, where they *ask* him to perform a little Rodney King tap dance...And say,

(ELIJAH starts to circle MARIN's chair, and MARIN closes her eyes)

just for argument's sake, (Beat.) they grill him for 48 straight ones, giving him nuthin but piss-water the entire time...then IM-A-GINE that this brother's hypoglycemic, but these dumb motha-fuckers ain't aware of this fact—and by now this fool's head sunk under the table—lower—uhmm—than a D. A.'s wife's tits—

(MARIN opens her eyes)

MARIN

I think I've got a sense where this might be leading...the simile doesn't work.

ELIJAH (Continuing to circle MARIN's chair)

And say just at this high point—or should I say, low point, the zit-faced dick—stinkin' a onions and *Calvin Klein* cologne—grabs this man's dreads, then jerks his head up, shoves a DVD player into his face, and runs this silent movie en—ti—tled “The Death Chamber”—now ain't that euphemistic—like an annotated poem by old Emily D., your comrade-in-fear and temperamental soul sister...then he bends real low...hands him pen and *papier*, (Pronounced “pap-ee-aay”—HE's using the French pronunciation) and whispers in this brother's ear:

(ELIJAH bends down and whispers in MARIN's ear):

(Using his best “Caucasian” accent) ‘Sign your name, Elijah Martin King, or the state will set you up in this no-frills suite and you won't have to pay a thing’—

MARIN

So *that's* your name—

ELIJAH (Up in Her face now)

(Continuing to use his “Caucasian” accent) ‘Free of charge. You get that, nigger?’ (MARIN closes her eyes again) ‘They'll blindfold you and treat you to *Vematryll*. Shoot *Vematryll* into your nigger veins. Ever own a pooch? Sicko vetenarians use *Vematryll* to put dogs to sleep, so their bleeding heart owners won't see them suffer...but you'll suffer, nigger, just like Fifi or Fido. Your pain will be unbearable. Excruciating spasms will

shoot through every sinew of your nigger body...but *Vematryll* will paralyze your central nervous system. It will mask your agonizing death-throes. Your ho mamma, if you knew where she was, wouldn't know that you were suffering. She'd think you were drifting—peaceful as a newborn—into the great, WHITE beyond...' (ELIJAH tosses his empty beer can on the floor) 'Free at last!...FREE at last!...FREE AT LAST!!!' (Each time ELIJAH chants *Free At Last!*, HE shakes His hands in the air, and each *Free At Last!* is delivered with the same throat-throttle that Martin Luther King used in his "I Have A Dream" speech.)

(Beat.)

(ELIJAH changes back here to His own speech patterns): By now the nig-gah's knees are chatterin,' his esophagus is clenched, and his heart's bangin' outta his chest at 100 r. p. m.'s...so, with tears sliding down his shirt, he begs this motha' for a can a beans. (ELIJAH pauses) The dickhead presses up against him, chants 'Beans, beans, they're good for the heart. Beans, beans, they make you'—Then he pulls down his pants, his *Ralph Lauren's*—pops three loud ones in this young bro's face.

(ELIJAH's cell phone goes off. HE waits for a Beat., while HE tries to calm himself down. Then HE answers it.)

(MARIN opens Her eyes)

ELIJAH

(Looking at the time) Fuck ya'll. It's 'bout...7:00 *here*. What the scum bag got to say for hisself? What? I can't hear you. WHAT? (Beat.) Then get your ass OUTTA that tunnel, and drive to a place where I CAN hear you. (Beat.) And I hope—for your sake—you using phone number 4 and you tossed number 3 on the 110 like I TOLD you to do—or before you can stop and find a tree to piss under, we be strung up by our heels like Benito Mussolini...And no, he ain't no rapper, and he ain't been on *Leno*.

(ELIJAH hangs up, then HE starts massaging His forehead intensely)

MARIN

Oh I get it!

(ELIJAH glowers at MARIN)

MARIN

Your, uhm, colleague's driving around the freeways in L.A., so they think you're—we're—*there*, instead of *here*! That's very clever. (She pauses) Do you have a headache, (Pausing again) Elijah?

(ELIJAH doesn't answer)

MARIN

When Josh is tense, I give him *Extra Strength Bayer*, not *Advil* or *Tylenol*. Do you want some? I keep some in my purse.

(ELIJAH goes to the fridge, and gets Himself another beer. HE grabs Her purse, on the floor by the book shelves, and forages through it—then continues to drink)

(FADE-OUT to BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE TWO: 10 a.m.

ELIJAH is out on the porch checking to see if anyone is coming. We hear dogs barking in the distance. A few Beats., then HE comes back inside. HE's unsteady as HE walks—there are several empty beer bottles left on the table. HE sits down again and plays with them, to kill time.

MARIN

(Cautiously) Can I ask you a?

ELIJAH

(Interrupting) *May I. May I* ask you a?

MARIN

May I ask you a question? (Beat.) What's this all got to do with *me*? (Beat.) You never exactly answered my question.

ELIJAH

(Wearily now) Where was—oh yeah: IMAGINE. (He pauses and finishes his beer) Now imagine that this cop's got ambition. And that he goes to night school and grabs his law degree. Then he moves to St. Paul a coupla years later, cause his wife's this whacko, fragile type—and she misses her homies in Crocus Hill. Uhm...sound familiar? Anyone you know—or bang on weekends?

MARIN

But Josh wouldn't—he couldn't (She gasps for breath)--sensitivity training!

ELIJAH

And imagine that this Black man makes it through prison...that *this* was the easy part...That for sixteen years, he's insatiable—reading Hikmet, Langston Hughes, old Emily D.: *ad infinitum*. That the dogs in his cellblock attend his lectures and address him as “Professor.” (2 or 3 Beats.) But when he gets outside, he can't find no work—so he's sleepin' inside a cardboard box. He's got no living family, no living friends. The one that's escaped—what HE'D planned on doing—iz chillin' in the burbs with a foxy lawyer wife and three brainy kids she shuffles in their *Hummer* to oboe and soccer...

(ELIJAH fingers the gun lightly)

Imagine that his possibilities are cut off. His FUCKING POSSIBILITIES. That in truth, he don't believe he even EXISTS—except as a subset of a white man's IMAG—IN—ATION. But his WILL still ain't BROKE. (Beat.) Until, oh lucky day, he meets up with his student—a brother from lock-up that cleans toilets at *Denny's*, that's got bronchial

pneumonia and who asks him to cover--scrub shit and wipe piss stains for six fucking days. (Beat.) You know how they say things happen in threes? Well, on the third day, at three o'clock—I was down on all fours scrubbin' and rubbin' three times in the very same spot. And who happens in to take a shit but The Devil Himself—Mr. Calvin Klein Cologne—MIS-TAH D.A.!!!

(ELIJAH tosses the gun in the air and catches it with one hand)

MARIN

For God's sake, stop! Josh isn't—I'm not—who you think I am!

(ELIJAH's cell phone goes off. HE stops to answer it.)

ELIJAH

(Looking at the time on His cell phone and checking it with His watch) (2 or 3 Beats.) Yeah, man I can hear you. It's 10:30 an' you tellin' me the scum bag DIDN'T CALL BACK YET? That the fucker don't *care* what happens to his dearly beloved? Wouldya' chill. The dickhead's playin' us. Well, we can play too...Didn't you hear me—Mr. Tenth Grade Education? So fucking what if I dropped out in the *ninth*? I earned my PHD in an 8 by 10. It took me *sixteen* years, and I studied with the best—Yours Truly: The Professor here. Would you shut the fuck up so I can give this problem an exigesis? I'm working on the counter-move...the uhm, *pas de deux*. Didn't you memorize "As I Grew Older," by Langston Hughes? And the Tao de Ching—like I taught you to do? (ELIJAH recites the following lines sonorously, and with rhythmic assurance): "*The Master is ready to use all situations, and doesn't waste anything. This is called embodying the light.*" (Beat.) And don't forget, (ELIJAH glances over at MARIN) we still got the queen. (Beat.) Uhm...whaddawe do now? (2 or 3 Beats.) We see what The Man's got to say for hisself—in an existential sense. We use the shit's own words against him...we apply a little pressure here and a little pressure there—a kinda mind game massage—chiropractor mix...I know, bro. He fucked you too—maybe worst than me. But remember what I told you. Above all, stay calm and focused. Now—drive up through Hawthorne to the 101, then over to Glendale an' east to Pasadena. And hit me up in twenty.

(ELIJAH hangs up. Then HE grabs the legal pad and pen in one of the crates and sits down at the table, and starts writing.) (A few Beats.) (HE gets up and goes back to the crate, picks out a CD from one of His CD boxes, and puts it into the CD player on top of the crate. "Coming In From The Cold," by Bob Marley, comes on. ELIJAH walks back to the table, sits down, and resumes writing in the legal pad.)

(5 or 6 Beats.) (ELIJAH gets stuck and crosses out what HE's written. HE crumples up the sheet HE's working on and tosses it on the floor, then HE starts a new page. After a few Beats., HE stops writing, and goes and turns off the CD.)

MARIN

I could help you, you know—I am a writer, despite my. My shortcomings. My lack of experience in the—the real, empirical world.

(ELIJAH goes to the fridge, gets another beer)

MARIN

If you tell me what you are working on, I can—

ELIJAH

Real and empirical mean the same thing. They redundant. And if you do any more gabbin' Lady—

MARIN

Yes, I know. You'll shoot me—or do something equally horrible. I promise to be quiet.

(ELIJAH starts writing in the legal pad again. When HE finishes what HE's working on, HE reads it over to Himself, alternately frowning and smiling. Then HE takes out his cell phone and dials.)

ELIJAH

Yo. Ready? I got it.

ELIJAH

(HE uses his own speech patterns--not the Caucasian accent HE'd used for MARIN) If you don't call back by 1: 00 o'clock, I'll blindfold her and treat her to *Vematryll* (Beat.)—shoot *Vematryll* into her Crocus Hill veins. Ever own a pooch? Sicko vetenarians use *Vematryll* to put dogs to sleep so their bleeding heart owners won't see them suffer. But she'll suffer, *honky*, just like Fifi or Fido. Her pain will be unbearable. Excruciating spasms will shoot through every sinew of her Crocus Hill body...But *Vematryll* will paralyze her central nervous system. It'll mask her agonizing death-throes. Her Crocus Hill Mamma, if she came to tea, wouldn't know she was suffering.

ELIJAH

You got the thing recorded? *Vematryll*. (HE spells it for his partner:) V. E. M. A. T. R. Y. L. L. (Beat.) Good! Three thumbs up!

(ELIJAH hangs up His cell phone)

MARIN

Wasn't that a bit tacky? A little extreme and over the top?

ELIJAH

Since when have you been in the truth-telling business?

MARIN

Why—whatever do you mean?

ELIJAH

You just like the asshole you married to. You playin' with the truth like you diddlin' with your pussy.

MARIN

I'm not sure what you're—

ELIJAH

You jivin' 'bout your marriage and that man you married to like—like it was a story for *Minneapolis Monthly*—a piece on El Salvador or Bangladesh, that you never really been to.

MARIN

Josh can exhibit two different sides sometimes...and he's a bit like Jekyll and Hyde—but he always *stands up* for what he believes in, no matter the cost to himself. (Beat.)

ELIJAH

Stands up for what he believes in? That gotta be the joke of the century.

MARIN

He *does*. (Beat.) If you don't believe me, then think about this. When those two officers were shown on that videotape beating the guts out of Rodney King—who do you think...got incensed at their behavior because it gave the department a bad name? (Beat.)

ELIJAH

So... You expect me to believe this?

MARIN

Yes. (Beat.) I expect you to believe this. (Beat.) He even argued with the captain of his precinct, at the expense of...Besides, I don't see exactly... see *you* facing up to the truth.

ELIJAH

(Wearily) And what truth might that be?

MARIN

The truth that every person is responsible for their own actions. Not some *external* oppressor that victimizes—

ELIJAH

(Picking up the gun, then waving it at MARIN) Can it, Lady. Save it for them articles you so good at craftin' an' them yuppies you so good at con-in'. The Professor got his work to execute—his Magnum Opus—"Krapp's Last Tape--Elijah's Style"—Yeah, I dig that—(Beat.) "Elijah's Last Tape"!!

(FADE-OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE THREE: 11 a.m.

Starts with the house completely DARK.
We hear “Kind Of Blue” by Miles Davis.
Then the music dies down, and the LIGHTS
go up.

ELIJAH is sitting at the table speaking into
The Tape Recorder. MARIN is listening
attentively, trying to understand what’s
behind ELIJAH’s “riffs.”

ELIJAH (Speaking into the Tape Recorder):
(HE coughs)...Spiritually a year of intense gloom...Shiverin’ in the park...drowned in
dreams and: burning to be gone...Yeah, just like *Krapp*. The fire in ME. The light and
the dark...And of course, my two epiphanies: one 10 years ago, down in the hole—
reciting Hikmet’s “On Livin,” and choosing life over death...The other two months ago,
when The Man walked into that bathroom where I was down on my knees and scrubbin’
floors...A transformational event—that lead up to—and preceded what’s happening
now... (2 or 3 Beats., while HE tries to think of something more to say)

(HE clicks off the Tape Recorder, then puts His head down in His arms
and thinks)

(2 or 3 Beats.)

(ELIJAH lifts His head and turns the Tape Recorder back on)

ELIJAH (Speaking into the Tape Recorder):
This one’s for you, MIS-TAH Pig-Turned Lawyer. An’ anyone else who cares to listen. I
bet you never rented *I Was A Fugitive From A Chain Gang* at *Hollywood Video*. (Beat.)
Well, you fucking should. At the end, the way Paul Muni survives, is he steals.
(Beat.) When I flew the coop and said *chao* to the slams, I didn’t fucking steal. (Beat.) Or
mooch. Or wail...(Beat.) But YOU try resting your pillow on piss-perfumed streets in the
Gulag of Skid Row L.A. (Beat.) YOU try que-in’ up at *Burger King* and *Church’s
Chicken* at six a. m. like they was Stations of the Cross. (2 or 3 Beats.) Then be told you
can’t work cause you been inside.

(ELIJAH clicks off the Tape Recorder and puts His head down again)

MARIN

(Pausing) (Referring to what HE’s just TAPED:) You know, you have a point. A definite
point, Harry—I mean, Elijah. (SHE pauses)

ELIJAH

Uhm. (HE starts to nod off.)

MARIN

Maybe you need to take an apple—if you're hypoglycemic—

(2 or 3 Beats.)

(ELIJAH raises His head, then HE grabs an apple from the fruit bowl and takes a bite)

MARIN

You can't expect someone to feel like a man, if he—

ELIJAH

(Interrupting) And how would *you* know what it feels like to be a man. Uhm. Let me correct that—how it feels like to be a Black man—no, stash that—how it feels like to be a fucked-up-the-ass *Black man* in the *black* hole of Amer-i-ca?

MARIN

Why...I thought that we covered that. (Beat.) I have a *rich* imagination. (SHE pauses) Listen, there's something I've been meaning to say to you. (2 or 3 Beats.) Despite the brilliant tape you just recorded—on the exigencies of being screwed by the system—At the heart of it all, you know...(SHE pauses) you're a coward.

(HE walks over to Her, and then leans into Her aggressively)

ELIJAH

Who you callin' a coward, Ms. Part-Time Travel Writer that never leaves her home?

MARIN

(Convinced that whatever is going to happen to Her, SHE'd better try to access Her braver side, SHE takes a breath, then plunges in:) Well the way I look at it...a coward takes the easy way out.

ELIJAH

(Still leaning up against Her) And what in your rich i-mag-ination constitutes the 'easy way out'?

MARIN

Well...If you were a truly brave man, you would have challenged Josh directly—and taken him instead of me.

(When HE doesn't answer and doesn't change His physical position, SHE gets even more desperate)

...And...and a brave man—Black or otherwise—wouldn't take it out his anger on someone who can't...who couldn't fend for themselves (SHE gasps for breath), a fifty year old, frightened woman, who's a-gora—

(ELIJAH bursts out laughing, as HE suddenly gets it.) (HE relaxes and moves away, then walks back slowly to the table and sits down.)

ELIJAH

A-gora-phobic! I got it now! (HE laughs some more) You a part-time travel writer that's afraid to fly—And you also agoraphobic!

MARIN

(Fighting tears now) Yes! I'm agoraphobic! (Beat.) And you don't know what it's like to be weak, to be blown about by every wind and be terrified you won't land on your feet--to see every possible danger of every possible event!

ELIJAH

Then we even. You don't know what it's like to be strong and have someone steppin' on your back and forcin' you down.

MARIN

But...if you really wanted to stitch your soul and your body together, as you said in your tape, *even if* Josh did what you say he did--you would have beaten the crap out of him, man to man...and then moved on with your life.

ELIJAH

(Standing up and glowering at Her) Bulls-eye, Lady. Even if!

MARIN

I—I—didn't mean that the way it—really...

(2 or 3 Beats.)

(HE sits down again and starts fiddling with His Tapes)

ELIJAH

Okay, I'm a shit. I'm a coward. This is not what being a man is about. But your husband took something away from me, Lady—my in-div-i-dual, unique *life spirit*...And I'm not afraid of jail again—but what I will do to myself and others, if I keep ending up a victim and that unfeeling shit controls my life again.

MARIN

(Intuiting that SHE's finally connected with Him) Then why stop at an apology? Why not...choreograph a Satanic dismemberment—one organ at a time—so you can watch him suffer as he watched you suffer: first an eye, then an ear...maybe a testicle or two, and then...(Beat.)

(ELIJAH picks up His chair and takes it over to MARIN. HE sits down backward, so His chest is against the back of the chair,

and His feet straddle it. Then HE leans forward toward MARIN.)

ELIJAH

Let me ask you something. What makes you think a man just sits down one day and decides to kidnap a D. A.'s wife? What makes you fucking think a man would rationally think out—piece together such a heinous act? Or, for that matter—what do you think it would take for a sensitive soul such as yourself to commit such an act? An' what would it take to bring that man to the brink of civilized behavior and cross the line? USE YOUR IMAGINATION.

MARIN

Greed? Revenge?

(ELIJAH looks at Her like SHE's crazy)

(2 or Beats.)

MARIN

Uhm...a sense of powerlessness?

ELIJAH

Now yo' cookin'. And while you at it, why don'tchu throw in a loss a healthy respect?

MARIN

Listen, Elijah—Have you ever read Joan Didion?

ELIJAH

Joan who?

MARIN

She says, 'The willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life is the source from which self-respect springs.'

ELIJAH

(HE picks up His chair, and takes it back to the table. Then HE sits down and resumes fiddling with His Tapes) Now ain't you the one to quote Joan Didion. Ain't that like the pot calling the kettle black?

MARIN

Why...whatever do you mean?

ELIJAH

If you so brave, why you never muster up the courage to leave the sick fuck?

MARIN

Well, you might not understand this, but when I first met Josh, he was a lifeline!

(ELIJAH rolls His eyes and continues to fiddle with His Tapes)

The night that he first laid eyes on me, I was crumpled up on a stoop with my head between my knees. I'd been researching the after-effects of the Watts riots for my journalism class, and was walking down those devastated streets block by block. (Beat.) I'd gotten so dizzy that my knees had locked and—and Josh *literally* rescued me. He swept me up in his arms...And then—he encouraged me. Why if it hadn't been for him, I wouldn't have earned my Masters' Degree. But then...after we got married, as the years flew by, the very things I most admired about him...His intensity, his willfulness, his anger. They grew (SHE pauses) a little more extreme. (Beat.) And I began...having difficulty. And eventually...at a certain point, I could barely leave the house. (Beat.) It took a year or two to convince him to re-locate. But after he finished law school, he agreed to join me—he understood that I needed to go home, to Crocus Hill.

ELIJAH

(Looking at Her directly now) The shit-brain *understood*?

MARIN

(Irritated) It's not as if he doesn't have a sensitive side as well. He held my hand all the way to Brazil. (Beat.) And the very thing inside him that drove him to better himself and earn a law degree *while working as a cop*—is also what makes him sometimes lose control of his emotions. He came from a very poor family, and had a devastating childhood—

ELIJAH

(Interrupting) LOSE CONTROL?

MARIN

His mother was a single parent and a heroin addict—

ELIJAH

(Really impatient now) Bull-shit. The Triggering Incident, Lady—not the Back Story! That what I want to hear. So rev up yo' engine and start explicatin' your text—and this time you better be in the TRUTH-TELLIN' business. (HE picks up the gun and points at Her) or I might really decide to plug you right here and now. Yeah. (Beat.) I just might do that.

MARIN

I'm not sure what you--

(HE reaches under the table and grabs Her purse, and takes out a carefully folded up piece of paper. The HE walks over to Her, still holding the gun, and flaps it in Her face)

ELIJAH

Read.

MARIN

But—but I can't see it. You're not holding straight.

(ELIJAH re-positions the paper with a theatrical flourish.)

ELIJAH

Here, your Highness.

MARIN

(SHE reads it reluctantly) 'Dear Carrie, I just got your email, and I've been trying out different ways to answer your concerns (you know us writers—we can never do anything straight-forwardly). Well, here goes—I really appreciate your concern for my welfare and my safety. But in some ways, I'm sorry I even told you about the "White-out Incident." I didn't mean to raise such alarm in you, and Josh was having an off-day...'

(HE folds up the paper and puts it back in Her purse. Then HE lowers the gun)

ELIJAH

Well?

MARIN

Well what?

ELIJAH

I'm losing my patience. Yeah, I just might do that. (Beat.) And make it believable or it won't be dramatic and your audience will sniff out yo' lies.

(MARIN stares at him, not sure how serious HE is)

MARIN

(Beat.) (Softly) I took a hotel once.

ELIJAH

Louder. I can't hardly hear you.

MARIN

(Louder) To get some space from. But then (SHE pauses)

ELIJAH

I ain't got all day.

MARIN

(Louder) In the middle. The middle of the night, I woke up...with my hands clenched and these dreadful palpitations.

ELIJAH

What was you doing in journalism class, removing your earwax with a Bobbi pin and/or scratchin' your pussy when the teacher was speakin'? You never heard of the 4 w's—where, what, who, why? That's basic shit.

MARIN

The *Radisson Riverfront*... I'd checked into the *Radisson Riverfront*. Though now it's called the *Royal Crowne Plaza*. And. (Beat.) And I woke up in the middle of the night. (Beat.) It was a panic attack, of course, a not unfamiliar lifelong companion. I had to take a cab back at 3 o'clock in the morning. Then the next day, I was still hung over—it's like recovering from an all-night bender, but without the alcohol. I—I was rushing to pick up Josh's shirt from the cleaners—his very best shirt, an *Armani*, the shirt he'd picked especially to try his first important case. He was already late leaving the house—the case was to start in just two hours.

(MARIN starts crying softly)

ELIJAH

I'm LOSIN' MY PATIENCE.

MARIN

(Beat.) I hadn't realized that I'd left my *White-Out* in the bottom of my purse—I'd been patching up a story on female circumcision, and was two days past my deadline. (Beat.) And when I reached into my wallet to pay for the shirt, the *White-Out* spilled on it without me knowing. So when I got back to the house, I saw the *White-Out* drizzled over the entire left sleeve. (Beat.) I tried to fix it with stain remover, but that only made things worst...And when Josh rushed down the stairs to grab the shirt, he saw what had happened. He...

(ELIJAH picks up the gun and strokes it lightly)

MARIN

He walked purposefully up to our bedroom, then went over to my desk and grabbed my manuscript--the only copy of the novel I'd been working on for years...Slowly and methodically, he ripped it to shreds, until it was totally *unrecognizable*. Then he made me promise not to screw up his shirts again.

(2 or 3 Beats.)

ELIJAH

And you worried 'bout being holed up in this shack with ME? And you afraid that *I* gonna plug you?

(ELIJAH starts laughing hysterically. When HE finally stops laughing, HE puts the gun down on the table and begins to pace nervously around the room--alternately checking His watch at various intervals, and escaping into a trance-like state.)

MARIN

(Struggling to re-gain her composure) (Beat.) *Au contraire*. Maybe *you're* the one that's scared to be with me.

(ELIJAH doesn't answer and continues to pace)

MARIN

(Beat.) Because...If you weren't so frightened of me, then you wouldn't tie me up. Isn't that right?

(2 or 3 Beats.)

I can see you terrified of Josh—but *me*? (Beat.) What could I possibly do to you? (2 or 3 Beats.) Tell you what, if I can prove to you that I'm on your side. If I can show you that I'm truly empathetic, will you un-tie me then?

ELIJAH

And how you gonna achieve that? What if you also got two different sides, like your Jekyll and Hyde hubbie: MIS-TAH D.A.? Then I'll be in deep shit.

MARIN

I'll prove it to you. Listen, I didn't want to tell you—since it's so damn personal, but, I had this dream.

ELIJAH

Oh Jesus. She had this dream.

MARIN

Yes, I had this dream. Last night—just a few hours before you came to our house and...snatched me away. This homeless Black man and myself were walking on the manor of my dead father's house—it was somewhere in the south, and it was back in the fities. And suddenly this angry white-trash hunter was pointing his rifle at us through the majestic pine trees. I tried to explain to him that I was the daughter of my prestigious father and that he owned the land—so there was no reason for him to shoot at us. He told me to walk away, to 'move on,' in his words...but the Black man should stay. Then the Negro besides me started to shake, and I suddenly felt the enormous *powerlessness* that I couldn't protect him from that bug-eyed, blazing-angry Cracker—oh yes, and I forgot to mention that the Black man looked just like you! (A Beat. or 2)

ELIJAH

Uhhm. Now ain't that a coincidence?

MARIN

Yes! It is a coincidence!

ELIJAH

(Quietly) And then, what did you do?

MARIN

I...moved on, I walked away...and then I heard the gun-shot.

ELIJAH

And that's supposed to convince me that you on my side?

MARIN

Don't you see? When I woke up from the dream, I just...couldn't live with myself! I felt like going out and buying a gun and then pulling the trigger right there. Can't you understand? I had this overpowering guilt and shame of the worst kind possible, because I couldn't protect you—him—when I should have! And I resolved in that very moment of time to never again in my life let that happen...ever again! I would never betray a Black man that needed my help!

ELIJAH

And you want me to trust you on accounta' your dream?

MARIN

My father wasn't from the south and he was never very rich... But he rode to Mississippi during Freedom Summer, and he joined a local cadre. (Beat.) He was *there* when Goodman and Schwerner and Chaney were murdered...and when Chaney was beaten to a pulp...

ELIJAH

He did, huh? He was, huh?

(HE stops pacing, goes over to one of the crates, and grabs a newspaper,
Then HE sits down at the table and starts to read it)

MARIN

Elijah—I promise, for all I'm worth, that you can *really* trust me. I have too much to lose if I don't keep my word. Give me any challenge, and let me prove it to you!

(After a few Beats. HE looks up)

ELIJAH

If you can recite "As I Grew Older," by Langston Hughes, verbatim, that is word for word—maybe then, I might un-tie you.

MARIN

I don't know if you're aware of this fact, but Langston Hughes wrote his very best work when he was depressed. And if he can, you can too!

ELIJAH

(Disgusted) (Beat.) And how would a person like you have an intimate knowledge of the artistic up and downs of Langston Hughes?

MARIN

(Excited now) I'll accept your challenge. You admitted you wouldn't take Josh on man-to-man. Well, what about man to woman. Or woman to man—whichever way you want to strategize it. Wouldya' say about hand-to-hand combat...in a *literary* sense! Come on, Elijah. Wanna prove yo' manhood?

ELIJAH

(Looking at Her more attentively now) You mean you wanna play a kinda' poetry strip-tease? Ain't that a bit on the cutting edge for a little rabbit that's scared shit-less?

MARIN

(Beat.) Why not? Just for fun! (Beat.) And let the best man win!

(2 or 3 Beats.)

(Determined) Will you?

ELIJAH

If you can quote me every line of "As I Grew Older" I can publish the Great American novel (Beat.) AND be offered an *Endowed Chair* at Harvard.

MARIN

Does that mean that you'll un-tie me if I can?

ELIJAH

Why should I?

MARIN

Because...Because I told you the most painful emotional details about my marriage with Josh. I was truthful. Like you asked me to be. Now it's your turn to be generous with me.

(ELIJAH doesn't answer)

MARIN

If—I promise to put in a good word for you...in case...(SHE pauses) events don't go exactly as planned?

ELIJAH

You know, your Highness, the last time I got myself en-meshed in hand-to-hand- *literary* combat with a white person—I got plugged.

(MARIN stares at Him in disbelief)

(Beat.) You see yo' Highness—in the slams there wuz this cracker that taught the poetry workshop. And guess whose poems he dug the most? That's right—the poems of Yours Truly. (Beat.) And guess who took these poems and tweaked a word or two there and a word or two here—then published them as his own? You got it—the same shit bag: Professor Drummond of Princeton Uni-ver-sity. Now, if you get this one right—you go to the head a the class. (Beat.) Guess who won a Guggenheim from Princeton two years later for these very *same* poems? Bingo! (Beat.) The same, white mothafucka'.

(MARIN is silent for a few more Beats.)

MARIN

Elijah—as the two of us are bonded here together...in the vortex of the storm that is gathering around us---I PROMISE, I SWEAR to you—you *can trust me*. Let me prove it to you. If you don't want the Langston Hughes poem, then choose another one. Pick any poem by any poet you want—Amiri Baraka, Michael Harper, Gwendolyn Brooks. Ed Bullins—you name the poet. The ball is in your court.

(ELIJAH paces some more about the room, then stops suddenly)

ELIJAH

“As He Grew Older.” But that means every correct stanza break. Every right comma. Every accurate pro-nun-ci-ation. *Ad infinitum*.

MARIN

And then you'll un-tie me?

(HE looks nervously at His watch)

ELIJAH

(Wearily now) And then I'll un-tie you.

MARIN (Reciting):

(Slowly, tentatively at first, but then gradually picking up steam--and in a few spots, catching herself in time when she starts with the wrong word)

“As I Grew Older,” by Langston Hughes. (Beat.)

“It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dream.
But it was there then,
In front of me,

Bright like a sun—
My dream.

(MARIN gives a small sigh and then starts up again)

And then the wall rose,
Rose slowly,
(NO STANZA BREAK)

Slowly,
Between me and my dream.
Rose slowly, slowly,
Dimming,
Hiding,
The light of my dream.
Rose until it touched the sky—
The wall.

Shadow.
I am black.

I lie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dream before me,
Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow.

(MARIN stops to catch Her breath)

My hands!
My dark hands!
Break through the wall!
Find my dream!
Help me to shatter this darkness,
To smash this night,

To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!”

(FADE-OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 4: 12:45 p.m.

The stage is dark. We hear Tupac's "Only God Can Judge Me Now." Then The music dies down and the LIGHTS Go up. ELIJAH is nervously pacing. MARIN is now un-tied, but still sitting In Her chair. SHE's munching on an Apple.

(ELIJAH looks at His watch, and takes out His cell phone to check the time against it. Then HE goes to the fridge and grabs a bottled water. HE takes a container of pills out of His pocket and chugs down several pills with the water. Then HE goes back to the fridge and gets a few beers, cracks one open, sits, and chugs one down.)

MARIN

Alcohol lowers blood sugars, you know.

ELIJAH

Your blood sugar gonna be tanked permanently, if you don't shut your grill.

(2 or Beats.)

(ELIJAH's cell phone rings. HE answers it.)

ELIJAH

Yo'. I'm listenin.' Didn't I tell you The Man would call back?...Did he say he would apologize?...Uhm, when? When he gonna do that? Did you tell him it gotta be the *Five O'Clock News* (Beat.) with Mindy Velasquez? (Beat.) Not the *Six O'Clock News* with Bret Hardin? Good job. And he gonna call you back at 2:00 to inform you of the details? And you usin' phone numba 5, like I instructed you to do? (Beat.) Three Thumbs Up. Now snatch yourself a dog an' fries at *Pink's* and no matter what happens—keep your ass movin.'

(ELIJAH hangs up. HE stands at the table and starts labeling His boxes of Tapes in an ultra fastidious manner—then HE begins marking the date of each TAPE on a separate sheet of legal pad paper, mumbling to Himself as HE does it.)

(Several Beats.) (HE accidentally mixes up two Tapes, and puts one in the wrong pile.)

ELIJAH

Shit.

(HE picks up the wrongly filed Tape and puts it back into the correct pile)

MARIN

Do you mind—if I ask you—about those tapes you’ve been working on?

(ELIJAH continues organizing the Tapes and doesn’t answer Her)

MARIN

...Are they part of that Magnum Opus that you’ve been talking up so...assiduously?

(HE doesn’t answer, and keeps working)

You know...you could still teach your seminar on life (Beat.) and literature. If not at Princeton, then at least Cal State or USC.

ELIJAH

(Finally stopping and looking up for a Beat.) An’ who’s gonna support me while I’m doing that? You? The D. A.? The Guggenheim Foundation? I’ve got as much chance of teaching a seminar at USC (Beat.) as you do, Lady, of flyin’ to Bosnia and doing a piece on the genocide.

MARIN

(Looking sheepish) Well, it isn’t as if—(Changing tacks now and growing very agitated) Are you really willing to risk your *life* for—for an *apology*, for God’s sakes and—and threaten someone who’s done absolutely nothing to you, just to make your point?

ELIJAH

(Again mumbling to Himself) The price of a painting goes up after the artist dies, now don’t it?

MARIN

(Feeling desperate now) But why? (Beat.) Why even bother to continue with this charade? Even if you have to go back to and serve more time, people will still read your work...your Magnum Opus—why it’s--

(ELIJAH lays down the Tape in His hand)

(Interrupting Her) Maybe you shoulda asked me that question before that shit of a husband of yours walked into that bathroom at *Denny’s* and paid me that surprise visit-- then preceded to IGNORE me, and spit in my face...and before I wuz floatin’ on the ceiling and lookin’ down, achin’ for some bon—a--fide knowledge that I do EXIST!

MARIN

Why of course you exist! Whatever makes you think—

ELIJAH

(Interrupting again) A man needs his self-respect even more than his oxygen—whether or not he incarcerated. Ever try to purchase yourself a shot of self-respect? Or, did you find out like The Professor here, that it ain't an item you can tack onto your Starbucks card, with your low-fat muffin and non-fat *machiato*?

MARIN

But--you're... positively brilliant!

ELIJAH

Brilliant and invisible. (Beat.) Like you will be, Lady, if you don't trash that fuck-head you live with.

MARIN

(2 or 3 Beats.) If you must know—I am *planning* to leave him...if, with your help, I get through this...situation in one piece.

ELIJAH

Is you jerking me off again?

MARIN

No—I am not (Beat.) jerking you off.

ELIJAH

How can I tell?

MARIN

What?

ELIJAH

That you not jerking me off?

MARIN

Isn't that implicit? (Beat.) You trusted me enough to un-tie me, didn't you?

ELIJAH

You actually believe your own cir-cu-lar reasoning or you just playin' to the crowd?

MARIN

Why—I didn't mean to--

(HE snorts and then goes back to compiling his Tapes)

MARIN

Elijah. (SHE pauses) What would it take for you to feel that you exist?

(ELIJAH ignores Her and continues to work on His Tapes)

MARIN

It seems to me that that true knowledge of one's existence comes from within—not from some outside, arbitrary force.

ELIJAH

(Continuing to work on the Tapes) You mean like the way you co-habit with the D.A.-- with your phoney self-knowledge? Seems to me you got this victim thing down perfect. And that it's bitches like you who *enable* scum-bags like your hubbie! (2 or 3 Beats.) (Then HE puts down the Tapes) To know that I exist? (2 or 3 Beats.) Listen Lady, when I was shiverin' down in the hole, I thought of putting an end to it all. I was too tired out to roll my load up the mountain each day, then stand there and watch it roll all the way back. Like Sisyphus, you know.

(Beat.)

An'...I was 'bout to do it—when I heard Hikmet's voice. (Beat.) And it stopped me from thinkin' in them, uhm, earlier terms. And then, like Hikmet hisself--in the dark, I began to see light seeping through the bars...I began to hear birds, and smell the creatures of the earth—JUST LIKE HIKMET when *he* was in the hole. And I thought to myself—if *he* could make it through *seventeen* years—most of, mind you, in the hole—well, then I could too. And I didn't even mind that I was down there in the first place as a consequence of saving my cell-mate's life, at great cost to myself.

(HE sighs)

But after four years of looking for MEANINGFUL WORK, and not getting hired—cause of a little, existential item called a “record”...and then meetin' the D. A. insida that bathroom in such a (HE coughs) syn-chro-nis-tic way...it DID something to my body and my soul. Something mysterious, that can only be repaired by re-enactment and reversal: a public apology by the mothafucka' who forced me to sign that false confession. And who put salt in my wounds a month ago, by jerkin' me over in that toilet at *Dennys*.

(ELIJAH stops talking abruptly, then HE turns away so MARIN won't see the strong emotions bubbling up inside Him)

(MARIN is silent for a few Beats.)

MARIN

But is a public apology actually *necessary*? Isn't it...just possible that Josh's intense passion to... execute justice for that poor teenage girl who was raped and assaulted, made him over-react? And...that in this deluded frame of mind, he over-did it, and *convinced* himself that you were guilty?

ELIJAH

(Quietly but with great force) I thought you said earlier that you was on my side.

MARIN

But I am! I am, Elijah! And believe me, I'm terribly sorry for what you've been through. And I'm moved by your eloquence. (Beat.) It's just that—(SHE pauses) A month ago, when Josh returned from LA, I couldn't sleep. I went down to the kitchen to heat up some milk...and there was Josh, slumped over some photos—looking as glum as I'd ever seen him. (Beat.) They were pictures of *her*—or what was left of her. One eye protruded out of its socket, and her breasts were slashed. Her rib cage had collapsed into her... (SHE shudders) ...I asked him *why* he was looking at them, and he told me he'd bumped into you at a *Dennys* in Compton—and that it was making him re-live the case.

ELIJAH

Oh he did, did he? I thought you told me you had no knowledge of my sit-u-ation. And when I described my forced confession, you squealed (HE mimics MARIN's previous delivery of her lines from the first scene) "*Josh wouldn't, he couldn't...sensitivity training!*" (Beat.) Now who you gonna believe--him or me?

MARIN

He said...though you'd...strongly protested your innocence, there were two eye-witnesses that had positively ID'd you. So I didn't know what to believe! There was no DNA evidence included in the testimony. And besides, I still don't think he had the right to pass judgment on you just because of some gut feeling! (Beat.) Just like that callous, white hunter in my dream, who passed judgment on that poor, unsuspecting Negro, had no right either.

ELIJAH

So now you finally in the truth-tellin' business, ain't you? (Beat.) Have you ever fought for anything in your life—ever? (A Beat. or 2) And you think I'd go to all this trouble snatchin' you from your kitchen and driving you all the way up here, and taking my own life in my hands...for an apology over a crime that I *did* commit? (Beat.) Oh, who the fuck cares what you think, anyway, bitch? (HE picks up the gun and points it at Her) Now do myself a favor and shut the fuck up.

(HE goes back to rearranging His Tapes obsessively)

(Several Beats.) (Then ELIJAH's cell phone rings)

MARIN

You know, I could speak to Josh and--

(ELIJAH motions MARIN to be quiet. Then HE answers the phone.)

ELIJAH

Whassup. That right? No, man, I been bustin' my nuts on my Magnum Opus—(The following phrases should be recited rhythmically, almost like a rap song:) Riff-in' an'

hone-in', Hone-in' an' craftin'. (Then:) You grab yourself that snooze?... Yeah, I know that. No one's as stingy as you is. What you say? YOU LEFT PHONE NUMBER 4 AT THE *AMOCO* STATION? You fucking DUMBER than I thought you was... NO, I begged *you* not to go in with me—on accounta' your intelligence quotience and your vulner-a-bility—but YOU insisted on comin' along--'cause I gave you English grammar lessons, and then I stopped them from pluggin' you... Shit. Okay, DON'T hit me up when the asshole calls back at two o'clock. Go ahead and quit, fool—and scoot down to *Los Cabos* and don't never come back!

(ELIJAH hangs up the phone. HE takes a few more pills out of the container in his pocket, reaches for the bottled water, and pops them down His throat.)

MARIN

(Getting up from her chair and starting to walk over to ELIJAH) Can I help? I'm good at—

(ELIJAH scowls, picks up the gun, and motions for Her to sit down)

(MARIN sits down)

(ELIJAH goes to the fridge and gets another beer, cracks it open, and downs it. Then HE grabs his legal pad, sits down, and starts writing furiously for several Beats.)

MARIN

(SHE pauses) Do you have another plan of action, now that your colleague... won't be there to answer his phone when Josh calls back?

(ELIJAH continues writing in His legal pad for several more Beats., Then HE looks up)

ELIJAH

(Smiling but feeling desperate) Your guess is as good as mine iz, Mrs. D. A.'s Wife. Wanna take a wager? (HE takes a nickel out of his pocket) Head or tails? (HE thows it up in the air)

(FADE-OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 5: 1:45 p.m.

ELIJAH is sitting at the table, staring into Space with a blank, depressed expression. MARIN is sitting in Her chair, looking Worriedly over at ELIJAH.

.MARIN

Can I ask you a favor? If—if anything happens to me that places my life in jeopardy. Will you. Could you try to make sure that the (She pauses) *least* violent scenario occurs?

(2 or 3 Beats.)

I know this is a cataclysmic time for you, as well as for me. Maybe together we can think of a way to—minimize the fall-out.

(Beat.)

(MARIN closes her eyes, clenches Her fist, and grimaces. Then SHE starts to have an anxiety attack. SHE gasps for breath, and starts to whimper. Her anxiety attack increases, but ELIJAH ignores Her and continues to Stare straight ahead.)

(Several Beats.)

(ELIJAH picks up the gun, walks over to MARIN, and stands in front of Her) (2 or 3 Beats.) (Then HE walks back slowly to the table and sits down.)

(Several more Beats.)

(MARIN works at controlling Her anxiety attack)

MARIN

People will read your...Magnum Opus, you know, even if you...go back to jail. If only for sensationalism.

ELIJAH

You mean like the way they'd read the memoirs of Jeffrey Dahmer?

MARIN

If you're Jeffrey Dahmer, then I'm...Tokyo Rose. (Beat.) And I was saying, you can still teach Josh a lesson a lesson or two!

ELIJAH

Listen up: This here is the chronology: I was wronged. I didn't commit the crime. And I deserve to work at gainful employment. (Beat.) On top of which, my Magnum Opus—and my literary *oeuvre* in general, deserves to be recognized--whether I live or die. Some people need their wrongs righted—they need things to be said to them to *right* the wrong, you know, instead of shufflin' off into the sunset. In order to be whole—they need the person that violated their rights to ac-know-ledge their wrong-doing in a public context. And I plead guilty to having this need! Number 1) I didn't commit the crime. Number 2) The dick-head forced me into that false confession. Number 3) He needs to apologize, and respect me for who I is. Case closed.

(MARIN is silent for a few Beats., as SHE thinks about what HE's just said)

MARIN

Well...doesn't it depend on what one means by respect?

(ELIJAH is about to answer Her, when They hear a series of car noises outside—and it's not so clear how close the cars are to the shack)

(ELIJAH stands up quickly. HE grabs His gun, and races out to the porch to investigate the noises.) (A Beat. after HE goes out, MARIN scoots over to the table, picks up ELIJAH's cell phone, and dials JOSH)

MARIN

Talking softly into the phone and cupping Her hand over Her mouth) Josh—it's me! I'm petrified...come rescue me! How long will it take? How fast can you get here? But I'm afraid to stay on too long, he might...*I have* to? Is that the only way you can trace us? Oh fuck, I hope he doesn't come back right away! What? (Beat.) I know it wasn't your fault—I know you'll try harder next time and you didn't really mean to--- A few more minutes? Well then I'll cross my fingers. The shack? I think a little bit outside of Brainerd. No—he isn't all that bad...In fact, I think it's quite possible he didn't actually do it. Are you sure? I wouldn't assume—Oh no, I couldn't do that. I just couldn't. (Beat.) Will you really take me to Brazil again and hold me hand the entire way—like you did 20 years ago! Yes I will! Yes, I do understand! ...Fuck—I hear something—I think he might be...Just a few more seconds? Well then, I'll cross my fingers... Oh fuck, I think I hear him coming back! I gotta go. You got it? Great! What? Yes, I love you too!

(SHE puts the phone back in the same position on the table, and rushes back to Her chair. SHE gets there and manages to sit down just as ELIJAH is returning from the porch. HE's walking backwards, slowly, still facing the porch—with His gun pointed low—so HE just barely misses seeing Her return to Her seat.) (HE slowly turns around, and then drops His gun at His side. HE sits down again at the table and presses three fingers into His forehead, and continues to rub His forehead for a few more Beats.)

(The noise of the cars slowly drifts away, until there's complete silence both outside and inside the shack.)

(A few more Beats.)

MARIN

You know, part of me hopes you rot in hell for what you put me through. But use your brain. Give it up and live to fight another day. Don't waste what's left of your life.

ELIJAH

Fight? Hard to do in a cage. Now you asking me to be the coward you was cussin' out before.

MARIN

Well...Something like that.

ELIJAH

Well if it makes you happy, I is pretty terrified. But sure as there is a God in heaven—and I ain't no believer—one minute is gonna follow the next. And there's no way to turn the clock back and start over and have my life back again. (Beat.) I don't know what a man should do, but I don't see anything else but playin' out the hand.

MARIN

(Trying to lighten His mood) You've used about four mixed metaphors in that little speech!

ELIJAH

Here's another one for you. Let's see if my two pens is stronger than their guns! (HE picks up two of his pens, then points them at Her and shoots:)—Bang, bang!

(MARIN stares at him, unsure what HE's getting at, and what SHE should say next to calm Him down)

Find a way to let me know, ha, ha, if my work gets published. Publish or perish!

MARIN

Elijah—surely a man like you—

ELIJAH

(Interrupting) You carry your cross and I'll carry mine!

MARIN

But—but—

(ELIJAH's cell phone rings. HE answers it)

ELIJAH (Speaking into the phone)

...I thought you was drivin' down to *Los Cabos*...Then why you suddenly decide to complete the job? Yeah, bro. I always DID instruct you on that. That right. You always finish what you start if you wanna hold onto your self-respect...Damn! I guess I underestimated you. Spoken like a Master of the Tao!...What you sayin'? (ELIJAH's voice is getting louder) You went BACK to the *Amoco* to grab the phone, and there was some *white guy* followin' you? (Sarcastic now) So now they can trace us *before* you find a tree to piss on? (2 or 3 Beats.) (ELIJAH's voice grows calmer) Okay, chill out, man. I ain't gonna go to work on you again and act like a fool second time. I'm quiet and respectful now. All ears and no mouth (ELIJAH sighs): like the *Tao* says...I 'preciate that, man...No, don't worry, man,...I'll be all right. Old Elijah can take care of his-self. (Beat.) I'm getting ready for the climax of the story: the crucial juncture, the a-fore-said turning point—and after that, the (HE uses the French pronunciation:) *de-noue-ment!* You said it, bro'! And I'm doing my best to develop the through-line! You too, bro.' Keep the faith!

MARIN

(Struggling to gain control) I knew it! So you are a sentimentalist under that scruffy exterior!

(ELIJAH stares straight ahead again, with the same vacant, depressed look That He had on His face earlier)

(Several Beats.)

(FADE-OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 6: Half An Hour Later

(ELIJAH starts packing up some of His Tapes)

MARIN

(Disconcerted) What are you doing? (Beat.) Where are you taking me?

(ELIJAH continues packing up His things and doesn't answer Her)

MARIN

But—But where in heaven are we going?

(2 or 3 Beats. while HE finishes up) (Then):

ELIJAH

WE ain't going nowhere special. I is goin' and you is stayin'.

MARIN

I—I thought we were just *beginning* to get into a (Beat.) serious discussion about how best... to handle things—and while you expressed your side of things, I was just *starting* to give mine.

ELIJAH

School's over. The bell just rang. Now shut your mouth, or—don'tchu remember--I might get violent.

(ELIJAH goes over to MARIN and ties Her hands up with cord)

MARIN

(Frightened) But I thought we'd agreed on--

ELIJAH

That's right. You *thought* we'd agreed on--

(MARIN tries to quell her anxiety, but it's starting to get the best of Her)

MARIN

Are you playing with me? (Beat.) Will you come back? (Beat.) And where are you going?

(ELIJAH'S finishes packing up His Tapes. Then HE grabs them and walks over to the door and opens it.) (Beat.) (HE turns around to face Her.)

ELIJAH

Depends.

MARIN

(Standing up, but not walking to the door yet) On what?

ELIJAH

I'm going down to Crocus Hill, and beat the crap outta him—as you suggested.

MARIN

(Mocking him) So, you've chosen the *heroic* thing to do!

ELIJAH

(Pseudo-politely) Correct me if I'm wrong, please...but wasn't it you that lectured me earlier to take the bull by the horns? One on one? Man to man?

MARIN

I didn't mean it literally—I only was trying to—

(HE turns away from Her, and puts His hand on the doorknob.
Then HE leaves, and shuts the DOOR.)

(2 or Beats.)

(Then His cell phone rings)

(After 5 or 6 rings, HE opens the door, and comes back inside
The shack. HE puts the Tapes down on the table and then HE
answers the phone.)

ELIJAH

(Speaking into the phone) Well ain't that a co-in-cidence. Now we finally one-on-one. I wuz just gonna call your junkie mama and let her know I was gonna eat you for breakfast with my bacon and low fat buttermilk pancakes. No, fucking slime ball—you listen to ME. Now I'M at the control board of this DC7 and I'm getting ready to fly into the wild blue yonder. (Beat.) And if I don't get an APOLOGY, I don't play ball--and then you don't get your girl. (HE uses a German accent:) *Verstehst?* (Beat.) That no good, dickhead. In case you didn't know it, The BATTLE just TURNED in the OPPOSITE DIRECTION. Like General Grant's troops at the BATTLE of SHILOH, when they ratcheted up their OFFENSE.

(Beat or 2)

Now I ain't the Hurricane Carter type—one of those Christian believers—I'M ELIJAH, the atheistic Bullshit Artist—but I got God on my side cause HE know I'm RIGHT. And HE's given me the powers to do the Lord's Task: to rescue his people out of slavery AGAIN, and to LEAD THEM BACK INTO THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY! And

if you don't A-POL-OGIZE on KATP on the Five O'clock News—and I don't get that call from MINDY VELASQUEZ in twenty *minutos*, promising me she'll run your APOLOGY. And that the show will go on—well, YOU know what will happen to your *dearly beloved!*

(HE hangs up. Then HE grabs a few more pills and downs them with a swig or two of beer. Then HE sits down at the table and waits.)

(FADE-OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 7: Twenty Minutes Later

(MARIN is in the bathroom, and ELIJAH
Is guarding the door with His gun)

(Several Beats., then we hear the toilet flush, and MARIN comes out of
the bathroom.)

MARIN

Thank you, I appreciate—

(HE cuts Her short by gesturing for Her to go back to Her chair.)

(SHE sits down in the chair and HE at the table. Then there are several
Beats. of silence. They both sit tensely, as they wait for Mindy Velasquez'
call. After a few more Beats., ELIJAH gets up, and starts pacing around
the room. HE walks over to the door leading out to the porch and looks
out, just standing there for several Beats. Then HE goes and grabs the
cord on the table and walks over to MARIN. As HE's bending down so
He can tie up Her feet, His cell phone rings. HE straightens up, walks back
to the table, and answers the phone.)

ELIJAH

(Beat.) I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU—Outside? You think I'm a fucking moron?—For
your information, I just looked out there. (2 or Beats.) Tell it to your junkie-slut mama.
(A Beat. or 2, then we hear several police sirens coming closer and getting louder--until
all the cop cars are surrounding the shack. Then the sirens abruptly stop.) Yeah, that
convinces me, but I got a little plan of my own that's tailored made just for you, you
motha'fucking little shit. No—that's non-negotiable. (A few more Beats.) You sayin' that
despite all that fire power out there that could blow up Saint Paul in 3 fucking minutes,
fucking *nothing* is gonna happen to me? (HE starts laughing hysterically) (Playing Uncle
Tom:) No, sir, yes sir, MIS-TAH D.A. (Then:) You think I'm a dickhead?—Send yo'
mama instead. (2 or 3 more Beats.) (HE hangs up)

(HE turns to MARIN, who has been trying to control Her anxiety)

ELIJAH

Okay woman, it's crunch time. You right. I'z half a man. I was more than that once, but I
don't even know what that means anymore. So you can tell me now, with all your
fucking wisdom, all your fucking whininess, how would you slug this one out?

MARIN

(A Beat or two) Don't go out there—alone. We'll go out there together, just the two of
us. With our hands up in the air. Then they won't shoot at you.

ELIJAH

Just the two of us? (Sarcastic) You mean like when the hunter in your dream told you to leave the plantation and go on your way, so he could shoot the (HE draws out the next few words) poor, unsuspecting Negro?

MARIN

Okay, we won't go out there together. But don't even contemplate going out there yourself! You don't know Josh. Look, whatever I said—I know the man. He only weasels when he needs to. You will be dead before you take 3 steps.

ELIJAH

Weasels weasel. I know that, but I will take down as many cops as I can! Both guns blazing!

MARIN

You only have one gun.

ELIJAH

But you are worth ten cops to him.

MARIN

Listen Elijah, you're not making any sense. Just give yourself up. Go through the trial, do the time.

ELIJAH

You know it's almost worth it getting killed—seeing that look on your face. All that gut-wrenching, heart-rending liberal guilt, leavened by your need to be politically correct! (Beat.) (Starting to pace again as HE talks) So...what to do...Okay, the scum bag did not apologize. So...maybe before I go out, I should have a one-on-one man's *tete a tete* with him. (Beat.) I don't go, and you will be a bad memory, if he can't look me in the eye.

MARIN

Remember the Tao! The Master bends, but never breaks, and He uses all opportunities! Give yourself up!

ELIJAH

(In disgust) You messed that one up too, just like Hikmet. What's wrong with you? Can't you ever get your lines straight?

(Silence for several Beats., as ELIJAH continues to pace)

(Finally HE stops pacing)

ELIJAH

They say the pen is mightier than the sword. Does it go against a 32? (Beat.) Uhm. (Beat.) Maybe I need 2 pens. "*2 Pens Elijah*"—Yessiree, that gonna be my new handle,

build me some street creds. (A Beat or 2) Yeah! I'm gonna go out, both pens blazing. And you know someone, not named Josh, will read my poems and believe my story an' spit on his grave.

MARIN

(Starting to get up) Give me that phone—I'll talk to Josh. I'll *make* him listen. An ultimatum—

(HE motions with His gun for Her to sit down)

ELIJAH

(Ultra sarcastic) Surely a strong woman like yourself wouldn't crawl back to your shit of a husband. I'd rather be half a man than live with a scum bag like that.

(HE puts down the gun on the table, and picks up one of His pens, and then the other pen. (Beat.) HE turns around and faces the porch. Then HE bends low and points both pens in the direction of outside, *as if* they were guns.)

(Beat.)

(Then HE turns around to face MARIN again)

Good luck with the remaining 30 years you have remaining, I'm not so sure what I woulda' done with mine anyway.

MARIN

But you're out of your mind! You need to—

ELIJAH

You think you can prevent me from embracing my destiny...and living out my fate? You don't trust me to go out there and get myself killed—for the sake of a Higher Purpose? You don't picture me as a literary martyr?

(HE crouches down again, then HE walks towards the door with His two pens in His hands, pointed straight in front of Him, as if they were guns)

(HE gets to the door, and then turns around one more time.)

ELIJAH

Oops. I forgot. (Beat.) I got a little something I need to leave with you'all before I go out there. (HE starts to reach into His pocket.)

MARIN

(SHE runs over to the table, grabs the gun, and points it at Him). Take your hand out of your pocket! I warn you!

ELIJAH

(In disbelief) Whaddaya' think I'm gonna do to you—lady? Rape you and assault you with a deadly weapon?

MARIN

I'm SERIOUS! TAKE YOUR HAND OUT OF YOUR POCKET!

ELIJAH

(HE laughs) You not allowing me to take two giant steps forward? (HE laughs some more) Hell, Mrs. D.A., this ain't the way we used to play the game.

(HE takes two steps forward)

MARIN

Stop it right there! Don't take another step, or I'll—

ELIJAH

(Taking another step) or you'll what? (Beat.) All your bullshit, white woman's empathy and compassion is suddenly flushed down the drain now, ain't it? You really don't trust me after all, do you? (Beat.) You mighta' danced to The Temptations but you sure enough didn't listen them, did you now? (HE starts to sing the opening bars of "Smiling Faces," by Smokey Robinson:) "Smiling faces sometimes pretend to be your friend/ Smiling faces show no traces of the evil that lurks within/ Smiling faces, smiling faces sometimes/ They don't tell the truth uh.../"

MARIN

But—but I have to protect myself! (Beat.) Out of your pocket—I warn you--immediately!

(HE takes another step forward, and then SHE shoots him)

(HE falls to the floor, but then starts inching His way toward Her
On His hands and knees)

(She shoots Him again, and this time, HE stops moving, and lies
there on the floor, perfectly inert.)

(SHE stands there for a few Beats., horrified at what SHE's done.)
(His cell phone rings again, but SHE doesn't answer it.) (SHE
stands there for a few more Beats., then SHE slowly walks over to
Him, bends down over His body, and reaches into His pocket. SHE takes
out a small package, wrapped in brown paper.) (His cell phone starts
ringing again.)

(FADE-OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 8: A Few Days Later

(MARIN and JOSH's Victorian house in Crocus Hill. MARIN is in Her study, Writing at Her desk, periodically stopping To sip Her tea.)

(After several Beats., SHE calls down to JOSH.)

MARIN

Yes, dear. I'll be finished soon. I know it's almost lunch time.

(SHE finishes what SHE's writing)

(Then SHE walks over to her bookcase, and picks up a Tape Recorder and brings it back to Her desk. Then SHE goes over to Her bookcase and brings back the small package wrapped in brown paper that SHE'd taken from ELIJAH's pocket.)

(SHE sits down again) (A few Beats.) Then SHE un-wraps the package. Inside are a few Tapes, scotched together. SHE peels off the Scotch Tape, Then takes the top Tape out and inserts it into Her Tape Recorder. Then SHE presses PLAY:)

(ELIJAH's Voice On The Tape Recorder):

“(ELIJAH coughs) In lieu of my Freshman seminar and many other classes I shoulda' but couldn'ta taught, I've piled together several tapes, heretofore to be known under the appellation of my Magnum Opus, an' entitled: 'How to Stitch Together' the Body and the Soul—and How Not to Be Invisible, so You Don't Exist.' To be preserved and catalogued in the African American Archives at Princeton University, and to be annotated an' administered by Cornel West, the Distinguished African American Prophet an' Scholar. (Beat.) Finally, as a last request, I bequeath my dog-eared, chewed up, but nevertheless valuable edition of Nazim Hikmet's book of poems Things I Didn't Know I Loved, to one Ms. Marin Applegate, my hostage and companion under times of duress. (Beat.) So she can learn to memorize it accurately.”

(SHE listens to it--thoughtfully, then SHE clicks off the Tape. (Beat.) Presses PLAY again, and listens to the first few words, but then clicks off the Tape again, because SHE finds it too painful. SHE just sits there for several Beats., staring straight ahead with a vacant expression.)

MARIN

(SHE hears JOSH calling up to Her again, and SHE gets up from Her chair, and calls down to Him by the door of Her study): No—go ahead without me. I'm really not hungry. The pot roast is in the crock pot, and I washed some raw vegetables and put them in the bin. (Beat.) Yes, maybe I'll feeling like eating in a few days...I *know* it wasn't my

fault—you don't have to keep on repeating it to me. I *know* that anyone would have done the same. (Beat.) Yes--How was I to know? It looked like a gun.

(SHE walks back to Her desk and sits down, again with that same vacant look on Her face. SHE sits there for several more Beats., and Her face grows more and more “catatonic.”)

(ELIJAH quietly tiptoes into the room and stands behind Her, and puts His hand on Her shoulder. HE is not actually physically present—HE is dead, but in Her distraught state, SHE feels and SHE *thinks* that HE is)

ELIJAH

An apology. I need a fucking apology.

MARIN

Wait (getting up) I'll go get Josh

ELIJAH

Sit your ass down. I need it from you, bitch.

MARIN

But I didn't mean to—

ELIJAH

What kinda' excuse is that? (Beat.) That's what they all say!

MARIN

But I saw you reach into your pocket and I suddenly panicked. What if you were *really* losing your mind? I thought—

ELIJAH

You thought, you thought. A FUCKING APOLOGY, PLEASE. (Beat.) I thought you said your Papa rode down to Mississippi to get out the vote, and rubbed shoulders with Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney.

MARIN

He did.

ELIJAH

Well?

MARIN

Well, times are different now—more nuanced.

(A Beat. or 2)

MARIN

If I had it to do over, believe me—

ELIJAH

But you don't.

MARIN

You don't understand!! (SHE starts to cry)

ELIJAH

Either shit or get off the pot, Lady.

(HE removes His hand from Her shoulder, and then begins to walk away)

MARIN

No—Elijah, don't go! Please wait! (Beat.)

(HE continues to walk away, until HE finally disappears)

MARIN

(Beat.) I apologize. (Beat.) I fucking apologize.

(“What’s Happening, Brother,” by Marvin Gaye, begins to play, and continues to play as MARIN stares vacantly straight ahead)

(3 or 4 more Beats.)

(FADE-OUT)

(The music continues)

(END OF PLAY)