The Many Deaths of a Forgotten Author:
A play about vanishing

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SYNOPSIS

A playwright helps a once famous author remember the circumstances of his death; in doing so they explore vanishing as a society and person, and the myths that often replace them.

Through an unexplained connection, a playwright and a long dead writer try to piece together how he died. Through a series of adventures, some shared, others alone, they explore mysteries and personal history in a darkly comic way.

Characters:

A.B. – a half forgotten author. Male, 60s-70s.

Playwright- Inventor of worlds. Female, late 20s-late 30s.

Production Assistant /Mitchell Hedges/ Daniel/Antoine de Saint Exupéry-Male, late 30s-early 40s

Stage Manager/Pancho Villa/ Scorpion/Annie Oakley-Female, mid 30s-mid40s

Soldier 1/Butch Cassidy-Any Gender, late 20s-late 30s

Soldier 2/Sundance Kid-Any Gender, late 20s-late 30s.

Soldier3/Scorpion/Kid Curry-Male, late 20s-late30s

Note about casting: Flexible. It may be helpful to view the historical characters as a combination of A.B.'s experience with the Playwright's imagination-how she would envision them. Audience members in script become Soldiers.

Setting:

Now, then and never was. Much of the action is set in a dreamscape; the little that's semi-real is the Playwrights apartment, which consists of a couple of chairs, a couch, a table and record player capable of playing vinyl. The temple scene needs a curio cabinet. And skulls. A Halloween store will love you.

ACT 1

Scene 1

A dark stage with a long, wooden table. Dressed in grey and black, the first thing we notice about who is sitting there is his curly snow- white hair. It's gorgeous and, tactile beings that we are, the urge to touch is strong. Go ahead. He's completely ignoring you. He appears to be lost in thought, while trying to write something. It's so pretty. Lu …. Lu … oh what's the fucking word,

PLAYWRIGHT
(Voice only)
His hair was the color of a Sierra snow in the moonlight. Beyond white, it was lu … lum, you know phosph-

A.B.
Luminescent. Jesus, this is going to be a long night if I have to be a thesaurus. Will I?

PLAYWRIGHT
(Voice only)
No. The word escaped me. It happens.

A.B.
A decent writer is like a prison for whatever language he or she chooses to use. Once captive, a word must never be allowed to escape. My mind is like a god damn trap. Those bastards aren't getting away.

PLAYWRIGHT
So, you never forget?

A.B.
No. I may pick an inferior now and then, mistake, in a frenzy, one for the other-

PLAYWRIGHT
You need auto-correct-

A.B.
I am auto-correct.

PLAYWRIGHT
Although, sometimes it picks the wrong word-wait you know what –

A.B.
Seems that I do.
(To audience)
Well, since I'm talking to one apparition, I might as well address the rest of you. Come out, come out, wherever you are. No don't bring up the lights. I don't need to see you clearly. Some of you might be quite hideous after all. Sorry, the odds are you're ugly-
(to playwright)
YOU'RE not y. o. u. r. Right? Right?

PLAYWRIGHT
Of course.

A.B.
You're erasing.

PLAYWRIGHT
No, No, we don't even erase anymore. I'm deleting and correcting
(Beat)
I do know the difference. It's just …

A.B.
That scamp auto-correct. Like I said, looooooong night. Where was I? Oh yes, the good odds that most of you are average to downright unattractive. Hence the need to touch my hair. Like the clods that go to museums and have to be told PLEASE DON'T TOUCH, it's not enough to behold beauty, you must possess it. All right, let's get this over with: Go on.
(Walks to the edge of the stage and bends down)
Women first. Any children in the audience need to keep their sticky, grimy paws to themselves. Did anyone actually bring a child to this? Damn you to hell, if you did. Well, come on, touch the beauty. You'll find its real.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Wow, this shit is so soft!

A.B.
So, your brief communion with my locks caused you to compare it with a bowel movement? Lovely.

PLAYWRIGHT
Wait! I thought you said you –

A.B.
They are distant ships in a fog. It's only important they see me and believe. I know they aren't real. Just like you and I aren't real to each other. I'm an idea barely come to fruition. Something to exploit and throw back. Between never and now, you'll refigure me a half dozen times. You're my wish, my vanity speaking, and since here, I'll make good use of you.
(To the audience)
All of you.

He stands at the foot of the stage and seems to randomly point at audience members, asking them if they know who he is. How many? Dunno. Let's see.

A.B.
Are we all met?
(Pause)
I think so. My name is … A.B. for now. If I feel like you've earned it, I'll tell you my full name by the end. I won't learn yours. All right, let's start.

PLAYWRIGHT
We need a title.

A.B.
That's so pedestrian-

PLAYWRIGHT
I can't write without a title.

A.B.
This is dictation. My memory prompted by imagination (as most are), your fingers.
(Beat)
I shall throw you a bone: *In Search of a Good Death*

PLAYWRIGHT
Yeah, that's vague enough. Ready when you and they are.

Light dim as A.B. continues to chat with the audience.

END OF SCENE

ACT 1
SCENE 2
Death No. 1

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Hey, I know who you are. Mark Twain, right?

A.B.
No. Any more guesses?

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Do I get paid for this? I should at least get reimbursed the price of a ticket

A.B.
Not my concern, figment.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
What did you call me?

The STAGE MANAGER walks in carrying various props costume pieces.

A.B.
Excuse me, can I help you?

Stage Manager
Nope, just bringing what was requested.

A.B.
Requested by-

STAGE MANAGER
Now let’s go over the lighting cues-

A.B.
The what?

STAGE MANAGER
GIVE ME DESERT SUN!

The stage goes very bright.

A.B.
Very nice. A favor? Just a hint of blood orange.

STAGE MANAGER
I'll make a note of it. MOONLIGHT!

Light changes

PLAYWRIGHT
Wait! Moonlight?

A.B.
Hmmm. Could I see a sunset instead?

Behold: a sunset.

A.B.
Let's go with this and keep the moonlight in your back pocket.

Stage Manager exits

AUDIENCE MEMBER
So, are you the director?

A.B.
Of sorts. You see I've forgotten how I died and since that's the case, I'm going to use you all to recreate my sojourn to Mexico. You and this wisp of consciousness to whom I have been so carelessly connected.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
How do you forget how you died? How do you remember?

A.B.
I need 3 soldiers. You, you and … you'll have to do.

As by osmosis, they seem to know how to begin. Each grabs a stick from the pile of props. They then begin to march.

A.B.
Christ almighty, relax a little. These were boys. Peasants.

They start to nudge each other and whisper, pointing toward A.B. Soon the whispering becomes laughter. Not mean precisely, but they're obviously making fun of him.

SOLDIER 1
Hey, old man. You ever shot a rifle before?

A.B. has pulled a journal out of his pocket and is scribbling something.

SOLDIER 2
Grampa! Let's see what kind of shot you are. You fight with us, right?

SOLDIER 1
Don't be scared. We can show you how to shoot if you promise to make us famous.

PLAYWRIGHT
Hold up! Why are they speaking English?

A.B.
Because, presumably, this is an English language play.

PLAYWRIGHT
It's not authentic. They have to speak Spanish.

A.B.
How will I know what they are saying?

PLAYWRIGHT
You speak … spoke Spanish, right?

A.B.
No. I don't believe so.

PLAYWRIGHT
You went to another country without learning the language? Even a little? Wow, talk about entitled-

A.B.
As consumed as I am by your opinion of my linguistic etiquette, my cultural faux-pax as it were, could we make a decision and proceed?

PLAYWRIGHT
I just did.

A.B.
Enlighten me.

SOLDIER 1
No tengas miedo. Podemos mostrarte cómo disparar si prometes hacernos famosos.

A.B.
You're, (that is apostrophe R E) such a pissant.

SOLDIER 3
Deja en paz al viejo americano. Necesita un bastón, no un arma.

They laugh and then take turns shooting: throwing rocks in the air, aiming for birds, rabbits, hooting in derision or appreciation with each hit or miss. Soldier 2 takes a silver coin out of his pocket.

SOLDIER 2
(Turning to A.B.)
Puede que no necesite esto pronto y me siento muy generoso. ¿Tu lo quieres?
(Holds the coin out to A.B.)
Ven, la moneda no muerde

A.B. hesitates, not sure what to do. He awkwardly grins and refuses the coin, but now all 3 men insist he take it.

A.B.
(Reaching for the coin)
I'm assuming there's a catch.

The soldier snatches it back, throws it in the air, and with a blast, wings it on a corner.. He picks it up, and with a look of triumph, shows the damage. Applause and laughter from the others, but A.B. appears nonplussed. Without a word, he removes a coin from his coat pocket and grabs a rifle. He tosses the coin high in the air and: BAM!!! It's like a cannon went off. The silver orb dances in crazy flight before spiraling in a deathspin to the ground, rolling back to its assailant. A.B. picks it up and displays the hole: dead center.

SOLDIER 3
Madre de Dios!

All 3 soldiers congratulate him when then a trumpet is heard, followed by a faint but insistent drum. The men jump on the table, rifles in hand, and, after a moment, motion for A.B. to join them. With a bounce in his step, the old sniper joins them as they await an unseen signal.

SOLDIER 2
Lo siento, nos burlamos de ti, abuelo. Eras un soldado?

A.B.
(Beat)
Yes. I served with the Union.

A LOUD TRUMPET BLAST! HERE WE GO!

ALL 4
VIVA VILLA!

They start to charge an unseen enemy when:

CUT!!!!

The PRODUCTION ASSISTANT walks in.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
Okay, going to have to call it a day, fellas. We just ran out of film, and as per our agreement with Mr. Villa, all battles, gunplay and mayhem must cease until the next day's filming. Okay? Thanks bunches.

The men stare at him.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
Oh, sorry. Voy a tener que llamarlo un día, amigos. Simplemente nos quedamos sinpelícula y, según nuestro acuerdo con el Senor Villa, todas las batallas, tiroteos y caos deben cesar hasta la filmación del día siguiente. ¿Okey? Gracias montones.

Without a complaint, all 3 soldiers nod and exit as does the production assistant.

A.B.
Wait! What!? Just a second, just a god DAMN second-

Shot rings out. A.B. keels over.

BEAT
BEAT
Production assistant runs out. Very angry.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
Okay, Jesus Christ, how many times do we have to say- this is a direct violation of the contract. NO SHOOTING WHEN NOT FILMING! Somebody's head is going to ROLL on this one, and it sure ain't going to be mine. Get this old clown out of here… Now! Before anyone sees.
(*Beat)*
I want to go home.
(G*estures and snaps his fingers*)
Por favor!

Exits. 2 of the soldiers slowly trudge on and drag A.B. off. Drag. Not a lot of ceremony or respect for the dead involved. Lights slowly dim and

END OF SCENE

ACT 1
SCENE 3
Death No. 2

A.B. rises from the dead, slowly moving across the dark stage.

A.B.
Hello? Hello! I don't think your taking this very seriously.

PLAYWRIGHT
You didn't like it? It seemed a little legendary to me.

A.B.
I've no interest in liking. "Like" grins with yellowed smiles, peers with rheumy eyes at the object of its affection, begging for approval by giving it. I've never begged for anything but to be alone.

PLAYWRIGHT
That's going well, I think.

A.B.
It takes a long time to alienate; when I put the most effort into it, got the least return. You have to trust your gift. I see things as they are, not as they ought to be, which puts me at odds with almost everyone. That death was an ironic punchline. It did not strike me, in your words, authentic. We continue.

PLAYWRIGHT
I'm just picking your consciousness.

A.B.
Perhaps we should aim for the low hanging fruit first.

Lighting changes to sunset.

A.B.
Ah, very nice. Sunrise or set? Sunset.

The stage manager pushes a rolling ladder to CS and A.B. begins to climb.

A.B.

The Grand Canyon is the only place in the world where I have ever felt … not a god or any sort of religion but something unearthly. Another hand at work, far superior. My last look will be of admiration. Very well done, indeed.

(Takes out an old pistol)

In the beginning: there was fear. The two legged fish that ran out of an oozing sea, straight into the claws or jaws of the shore, soon learned that fear was a constant and trusted companion. No other emotions need apply. But then the fish had the temerity to try its hand at thought and with it the hell of wanting something more. Soon fear cleaved itself into anger and sadness and thus began the journey of being human. Happy, if you're wondering, came much later, probably by accident. Oh look, no one trying to eat or kill me, no one I care about has been eaten or killed … we'll call this happiness. The male of this species gravitated to anger, the female sadness. Make of that what you will, but I believe it to be true. Women learn from sadness, men use anger. Oh, there's bound to be some mixing of the two, but generally, a man converts his sadness into anger. Life obliges by giving you an almost inexhaustible supply.

(Puts pistol to his head)

Age robs a man of his anger. We were not meant to be tranquil … not meant to be SAD. If I cannot be angry, I will be immortal or part of a great nothing.

(*Pulls the trigger. Click. Nothing. Pulls again. Yep, nothing.)*

Damn you to Hell!

PLAYWRIGHT

I'm sorry, but that just feels really lame.

A.B.

Perhaps you're right. Let's try this-

He tosses the gun, spreads his arms and without a word jumps off the ladder. BLACKOUT. We hear footsteps and a scuffle. LIGHTS UP. A.B. is being dragged off by the soldiers.

A.B.

No, NO! That was fine! A little mundane in the jump, but perfectly acceptable when considering it was into the arms of a natural wonder.

PLAYWRIGHT
I thought we were going for something more. I mean, acceptable doesn't work for me. Or you.

A.B.
YOU! What do-

SOLDIER 1
Cállate viejo!

The soldiers fling A.B. into a chair at the table. They speak rapidly and overlap.

SOLDIER 1
¿Por qué quieres conocer a Villa?

A.B.
Villa? He's here?

SOLDIER 2
Nosotros encontramos estos!

He puts the pistol and an old map on the table.

SOLDIER 3
Nosotros encontramos estos! Qué es lo que estabas buscando?

A.B.
The map? I was trying … Does someone hear speak English? My Spanish is rather-

SOLDIER 3
(Grabbing pistol)
¿A quién planeabas disparar?

SOLDIER 1
¿Estás espiando para los federales? Creo que eres un asesino!

PANCHO VILLA enters .

VILLA
¿Eso realmente te parece un asesino? ¡Dejarnos solos!

The soldiers leave and Villa sits across from A.B. LONG PAUSE

VILLA
I hate silence and don’t trust quiet.

BEAT

VILLA
That was a hint. The last you’ll get.

A.B.
You speak English. I was told-

VILLA
That I only speak through interpreters. Yes, most of the time. It is very helpful in negotiating with Americans. You speak no Spanish?

A.B.
I am embarassed to say I do not. Maybe a few phrases but …

VILLA
So, you are not a spy. A spy would have taken the time to learn some of the language. My men, bless them, are so stupid some times. They told me that villagers spoke of an old American asking where he could find Pancho Villa. They assumed … When was the last time you fired a gun?

A.B.
In the Civil War.

VILLA
The American Civil War. Union.

BEAT

VILLA
All right. We will kill you. I have no battles scheduled for today-it will have to be the firing squad.

A.B.
Thank you.

VILLA
I will tell them to aim straight for your heart. They can be careless

He whistles for the soldiers.

VILLA
Pon a este anciano contra una pared y dispárale en pedazos.

The soldiers grab A.B. and shove him against the wall.

VILLA
¡listo!

A.B.
That didn't take long-

VILLA
¡Apuntar!

A.B.
It would have been nice to die for a cause-

BEAT

A.B.
-but you can't have everything.

VILLA
Disparar!

PLAYWRIGHT
Hold on!

The soldiers shoot at A.B. like he's target practice. Reload, shoot, reload shoot. He's being blown to bits but he's not dead.

PLAYWRIGHT
Hold on! Stop! Stop!

They freeze.

PLAYWRIGHT
This! This is how you want to go?

A.B.
Yes, it's fine. A bit gory-

PLAYWRIGHT
I'm deleting. We're going back. Let me-

A.B.
This is my death!

PLAYWRIGHT
We're still connected!

A.B.
Let them finish!

PLAYWRIGHT
This is so fucking boring! So cliche! Old man wants to die, old man wants to die heroically-

A.B.
This is what I was-

PLAYWRIGHT
You have no imagination-

Soldiers take aim again.
POP*! Sounds like bubbles.*

A.B.
Damn you!

PLAYWRIGHT
I said no!

Soldiers drop their guns and grab A.B.

A.B.
What's going on?

They drag him off stage. In a moment, they return carrying a young woman and put her against the wall. Guess who?

PLAYWRIGHT
What the Hell!

VILLA
¡Listo!

PLAYWRIGHT
Nooooo fucking way!!

VILLA
¡Apuntar!

PLAYWRIGHT
Please stop! Stop!

VILLA
i Disparar!

BLACKOUT.
END OF SCENE.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2: Me, Mitchell and The Crystal Skull
SCENE 1

Still in blackout. Almost imperceptibly, we hear it: the sound of a biplane, roaring and sputtering like an old, consumptive tiger. Lights come up back of the house; the sound now becomes louder. The audience sees an old bicycle for two (cleverly disguised by our imaginations as a biplane) roar onto the stage as it becomes fully lit. As Villa yells "¡Disparar!," the soldiers scatter and take cover. A daring hero, of some sorts, jumps out of the plane and starts wildly shooting, while motioning for the playwright to join him. She crawls overs as the bullets fly. Using the plane as a shield (geez, it must be shot to hell by now) the pilot starts to move the bike forward. The playwright follows suit, and in one motion they hop on and ride offstage. The soldiers, including Villa, stare after them and then applaud. Blackout. END OF SCENE

ACT 2

SCENE 2: Getting to know you, getting to know all about you.

Night, maybe a few stars and a cloud or two. Our newly joined adventurers circle the audience at a leisurely pace, the plane purring. MITCHELL HEDGES begins to sing a rousing version of God Save the King.

MITCHELL
God save our gracious King,
Long live our noble King,
God save the King!
Send him victorious.
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the King!
(Beat)
In the back-join me!

PLAYWRIGHT
Huh?

MITCHELL
Come on now!
O Lord our God arise,
Scatter our enemies-

PLAYWRIGHT
I am afraid I don't –
(Starts to sing)
And make them fall!
Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks,
On Thee our hopes we fix,
God save us all!
(Beat)
Wow. I guess I do.

BOTH
Not in this land alone,
But be God's mercies known
From shore to shore!
Lord make the nations see,
That-

MITCHELL
-men should brothers be,

MITCHELL(CON'T)
And form one family,
The wide world o'er.

PLAYWRIGHT
-all should siblings be,
And form one family,
The wide world o'er .

MITCHELL
Excuse me?

PLAYWRIGHT
Dude, this song excludes half the world. Plus, a family that's all male would eventually go extinct.

MITCHELL
Well, we wouldn't want that.

PLAYWRIGHT
Do you mind me asking who you are?

MITCHELL
Mitchell Hedges, at your service! And you are?

PLAYWRIGHT
My name is … Jesus … ummmmm … well this is a little embarrassing-

Mitchell
May I be so bold as to offer a choice?

PLAYWRIGHT
(Doubtful)
Yeah … sure, go for it.

MITCHELL
You are either: Lady Richmond Brown, my benefactor, co-adventurer and lover or Harriet Chalmers Adams, the famed explorer and writer-

PLAYWRIGHT
Her! Yep, let's go with her.
(note to actor: if you go with Lady Richmond Brown, you're on your own.)
Sorry, but we just met, so I don't think it would be appropriate-

MITCHELL
Understood.

PLAYWRIGHT
That was amazing back there. I mean, thank you so much.

MITCHELL
Your most welcome. Danger is my ALLY!

PLAYWRIGHT
Really? What does that mean, exactly?

MITCHELL
That we have an agreement of sorts. He … oh sorry, but I do feel as though danger is a he, puts me in the hands of death, and then just as the old bugger is about to put me under his robe, faster than a scorpion's strike, snatches my life back. Good fun, cheating his nibs.

PLAYWRIGHT
So, it's a game.

MITCHELL
Wouldn't say that really, Mrs. Adams. It's life as it should be. Take a look around you-the stars, the dog's kiss you get as we go through the mist, the tiny pins of light below that are someone's home-

PLAYWRIGHT
You don't have to sell me. Maybe later in the story, if things start to go to shit, you can. If I need it.
(Pause)
That was amazing back there. All that shooting. Yet … did you hit anything?

MITCHELL
Sometimes, the best marksman is the one who knows when to miss.

PLAYWRIGHT
I'm sure I'll have more questions later, and I get the feeling you'll have more daring and mystery, but I'm getting sleepy. Ok to take a nap?

MITCHELL
Leave the flying to me.

PLAYWRIGHT
It is a beautiful night. Where we are going?

MITCHELL
The year 1923.

PLAYWRIGHT
The year … ? Sounds good.

She closes her eyes as Mitchell continues to fly(pedal). Lights slowly dim. He begins to sing again:

MITCHELL
men should brothers be,
And form one family-

Pause. He looks at her.

MITCHELL
-all should ***siblings*** *be,*
And form one family,
The wide world o'er .

Thy choicest gifts in store,
On him be pleased to pour,
Long may he reign!
May he defend our laws,
And ever give us cause,
To sing with heart and voice,
God save the King.

Lights almost out.
END OF SCENE.

ACT 2
SCENE 3: The Landing

We see a sunrise as the 1923 looms in the distance. Mitchell takes out an enormous pipe as the plane reaches the stage and stops pedaling. The old girl knows the way. The warm smell of cherry tobacco reaches our sleeping playwright.

PLAYWRIGHT
(Awakening)
Are we there yet?

MITCHELL
Well, we reached the decade about an hour ago, so by my calculations we should be there sometime between eventually and soon. Enough time to have a good smoke.

PLAYWRIGHT
Did you lose your accent? You sound very American.

MITCHELL
I'm bidialectal. The art of currying favor by emulating the speech of your environment, to make you and those around you more comfortable.

PLAYWRIGHT
You mean like when my dad used to go visit relatives in Texas and he'd come back with a twang y'all?

MITCHELL
Exactly.

PLAYWRIGHT
(*Quietly)*
Or maybe it's just indecision.
(To audience)
I was a wandering kid. Always getting lost. Let go of my hand, turn your back on me for a second and I was gone. Not out of a desire to get away from anything(or anybody) but just to see what else was around. Never knew exactly where I was going and always ended up not knowing where I was, and it didn't matter as long as it smelled right. My parents learned not to panic. If in Macy's chances were: harassing a sales clerk to spray me with perfume or trying to hide in a rack of leather coats. At the mall, well you had a lot of choices: inhaling at Cinnabon, sniffing the chocolate

PLAYWRIGHT(CONT'D)
at Godiva, or being the only person standing in line at the movie theater just to get some popcorn. It TASTED terrible, so I just put my nose in the bag. The rare time they couldn't find me, my father's *Polo* and mom's *White Diamonds* led me straight to them. "How'd you find me baby?" "I smelled you, daddy."

(Pause)

A pipe though? Why? It's such an artifact. I don't know anyone who smokes … period. Do they still smoke pipes or just collect them, you know, like beer steins or beanie babies? It smells so good: warm, dangerous, sweet … and a little old.

(noticing a bag in back of her seat)

Ooooh, what have we here?

(*Pulls out an old map on the verge of disintegration}*

Oh, wow. I sure hope there's a copy of this somewhere.

(Puts map back and pulls out a safari hat)

Ha! Does it even fit? Shit, it does!

(Pulls out what looks like a toy space gun}

Did someone go to ComiCon?

MITCHELL
Please be careful with that.

PLAYWRIGHT
Oh really? Why? What does it do?

MITCHELL
Well it can-

PLAYWRIGHT
(Playing with buttons)
This is some kind of-

ZAP!

Luckily, she was aiming straight up. Immediately, what looks like a prepared turkey or duck … or vulture falls from the sky, into her lap.

PLAYWRIGHT
What the fuck!

MITCHELL
I wasn't going to hunt until we landed. I hope you like vulture.

PLAYWRIGHT
Gross!
(Tosses out of plane-bon appetit below!)
What is this?

MITCHELL
It is the Tesla Self- Tanning gun. Although, he really needs to change the name.

PLAYWRIGHT
To what-the Tesla Deep Fryer? Who would use-

MITCHELL
You'd be surprised how many wealthy people want to look healthy, without ever going outdoors. He never could get the calibration quite right. Good thing most people who want a fake tan aren't very likeable. He actually got quite a few thank you cards from some of the relatives. Still, he didn't have much use for it, so I took it off his hands.

PLAYWRIGHT
He just gave it to you?

MITCHELL
I borrowed it … without his consent.

PLAYWRIGHT
You stole-

MITCHELL
It all goes to state of mind. Because I didn't ask him, he sees it as stealing. Because I have every intention of giving it back … one day, I feel it's borrowed.

PLAYWRIGHT
And the British accent is back.

MITCHELL
Just aiming to please. Oh, do you mind deciphering that phrase on the map?

PLAYWRIGHT
Well, let's see. Hmm ...it's very faint … Este mapa é para ... aqueles que perderon o Camiño.

MITCHELL
Spanish, I presume.

PLAYWRIGHT
Galician. It means “this map is for those who have lost their way.”

MITCHELL
We shall see. Hang tight, it looks like that buzzard you fried has some friends.

Here come the angry birds, fast and furious and noisy. They attack the plane and its occupants.

MITCHELL
Mrs. Adams, use the tanning gun!

PLAYWRIGHT
No! I don’t want to kill them!

MITCHELL
Do you mind if i do?

PLAYWRIGHT
Yes! It’s like a storm. A storm of birds! Just fly through them!

MITCHELL
All right, hold on!

The stage almost goes dark with the shadows of angry birds.

PLAYWRIGHT
I can’t see anything!

MITCHELL
I’m going to try and get lower.

The plane goes in to a dive.

MITCHELL
Damn!

PLAYWRIGHT
Pull up! Pull up!

MITCHELL
I see a clearing! This might be close.

PLAYWRIGHT
Jesus!
(Closes her eyes)

PLAYWRIGHT(CONT'D)
And the two plucky explorers, thrown together by a whim of ... chance, hurtled with frightening speed to the ground. No, ... ground? To the lush green of the jungle, forever to be swallowed, Jonahs to its hungry whale.

Blackout
END OF SCENE.

Act 2
Scene 4: The Temple of the Skull

Is that somebody's phone? C'mon wasn't there an announcement? Wait … it's coming from somewhere offstage. Soon, the sounds of the jungle start and slowly drown it out. Lights up on Playwright-or is she Mrs. Adams now, and Mitchell trekking about the theater. They don't look too bad for people who have just survived a near death experience.

PLAYWRIGHT
(A little Katherine Hepburn)
Not too shabby, Mr. Hedges, not too shabby at all.

MITCHELL
The old girl came through for us. That landing was as soft as butter. Maybe old Death took a holiday or maybe, just maybe, he knows better than to pick on us.

PLAYWRIGHT
Oh, let's not get too cocky and just be grateful. It's a wonderful day for a walk in the jungle. Away from all the things you know *and* places you've seen over and over again.I'm not sure I'm ready to call danger an ally, but adventure and I are becoming, at the very least, good acquaintances.
(Beat)
Listen. That's nature's way of saying, "I'm still here mankind. Conquer the roads will You? Command the skies and the sea? You'd think the Titanic would've showed you-I'm still the Queen!"

MITCHELL
Disagree with you there. God made us in his image so we must have dominion over all. I know that's in the Bible somewhere.

PLAYWRIGHT
You read the Bible, Mr. Hedges?

MITCHELL
I'm sure I have. Once.
Does that map say anything about how to actually get there?

PLAYWRIGHT
Well, I'm afraid in all the excitement, you've forgotten to tell me where, geographically and specifically, we're going.

MITCHELL
I was waiting for the right moment-
(Ominous music)
-and there it is-we're in search of the Temple of the 13th skull.

PLAYWRIGHT
Sounds frightening enough. So, forgive me but if this is the thirteenth, what happened to the other 12? Are you going after those as well?

MITCHELL
No. Those are in private hands.

PLAYWRIGHT
Really? Whose?

Silence.

PLAYWRIGHT
Well, that was a bit eerie and a tad melodramatic. Seems nature is a bit of a dramatist. Proceed, Mr. Hedges.

MITCHELL
I can't. I've said too much-

PLAYWRIGHT
No, you've been doing a good job straddling the line between taciturnity and loquaciousness. If ever you have to choose, go with the former as I really can't stand a chatty man. But, neither can I abide a dishonest one; tell me the truth please, what are you withholding?

MITCHELL
It's a long story.

PLAYWRIGHT
We may have a long walk. Condense it enough so I don't get bored, but add enough detail to make credible.

MITCHELL
Very well. Before time as you and I know, the gods Babalon, the mother of all, and her consort, Chaos, beget 12 tribes of humanity. Those 12 were each gifted with a crystal skull of immense power. They could communicate with each other over long distances, have conversations with the dead and destroy a threat with a single invocation. They may have been able to control the weather, but the ancient writings are inconclusive in that regard.

PLAYWRIGHT
Really? How old are these writings?

MITCHELL
No one knows for sure.

PLAYWRIGHT
The language?

MITCHELL
They are written entirely in Enochian. I doubt your familiar, linguist that you are. It is thousands of years old, spoken by the gods and handed down to humankind by the angels.

PLAYWRIGHT
So, the 12 tribes originally spoke Enochian.

MITCHELL
Yes. But then they began to drift apart and develop their own languages, which supposedly angered the gods. Soon, the only way they could communicate was through the skulls. The priests of the 12 claimed only they could interpret their meanings and thus was born religion. Babalon became enraged and commanded Chaos to lay down with her and thus beget the Beast. He who consumes worlds.

PLAYWRIGHT
I'm sure my Sunday school never mentioned this. They just called him the Beast? What's in a name be damned, that seems rude and more than a bit neglectful.

MITCHELL
Well, to make a long story short, the beast attacked the tribes. In a fit of regret, seeing all their handiwork go to hell, the two created a 13th skull, more powerful than all the rest. Chaos united all the skulls and in a great battle defeated his son-

PLAYWRIGHT
The Beast? And what happened after?

MITCHELL
Babalon ordered her lover to scatter the skulls to the winds.

PLAYWRIGHT
Well, that's the first mistake. They should have been destroyed.

MITCHELL
Maybe. But perhaps they were thinking man would someday be worthy of them.

PLAYWRIGHT
Ha! I'll wager you're about to tell me that whoever has the 12 is an absolute scoundrel.

MITCHELL
You'd win that bet. It isn't really one person. They've been working for a long time to find these skulls-and if they get the 13th ….

PLAYWRIGHT
What?

MITCHELL
The Beast is at their command.

PLAYWRIGHT
The prodigal returns.
(Beat)
Who is this "They"?

MITCHELL
The Order of the Golden Dawn. Led, at the moment, by your President Coolidge.

PLAYWRIGHT
What? I'm sorry, I believe him to be beyond reproach.

MITCHELL
(*Darkly*)
I'm sure President Harding thought so.
(*Seeing something)*
Mrs. Adams … you did bring the self-tanning gun, right?

PLAYWRIGHT
Yeeess.

MITCHELL
I think we're going to need it. Give it to me.

PLAYWRIGHT
All right.
(Hands it to him)
What's wrong?

Out of the bushes(or the audience) jump two enormous scorpions menacing our adventurers with their claws, stinger at the ready.

MITCHELL
Get behind me!

He steps back and readies the self- tanning gun .

PLAYWRIGHT
Is that really necessary?

MITCHELL
It's us or them!

PLAYWRIGHT
They're actually rather cute in the right light. I'm sure they must be very rare if not unique.
(*Addresses scorpions)*
Now listen you two … This is the kind of behavior that can give a species a very bad name. We've no quarrel, but if you insist on acting this way, Mr. Hedges here will zap you to kingdom come. I've no desire to bring anything one step closer to extinction, so for God's sake let us pass. I'm no good to you as dinner; all skin and bones and to tell the truth, a little salty. Mr. Hedges looks to be a fine specimen, but I'm sure you'll find that liver has seen better days.

The scorpions ponder this for a moment, then wander off in search of an easier prey.

MITCHELL
That was remarkable.
(Peering into the near distance…i.e., on the stage now.)
Maybe, that's what they were guarding.

BEHOLD: The ruins of the Temple of the 13th skull. It actually looks a lot like a big curio cabinet. Each shelf Holds several skulls. On top of the cabinet reads a sign: **Máakalmak ku t'aan?**

PLAYWRIGHT
Enochian?

MITCHELL
It is? I mean, probably.

PLAYWRIGHT
So …?

MITCHELL
I’m very rusty. In fact, I relied on a trusted scholar to interpret the sacred writings for me.

PLAYWRIGHT
Actually, oh I’m such a silly goose-this is Mayan! Talk about rusty … give me a second …”Which is the brightest?”

MITCHELL
(Points to the one in the center)
That one is glowing. Come to papa!

He takes it out of the cabinet and stuffs it into a bag.

PLAYWRIGHT
I guess Mr. Coolidge will be sorely disappointed.

MITCHELL
Oh, not so at all . He’ll be getting it in a couple of days.

PLAYWRIGHT
What?

MITCHELL
A new era will begin very soon! The era of The Order of the Golden Dawn. Thank you for your help-I would get better with languages, but why bother when there’s people like you. Needless to say, you can’t come back with me.
(Pulls self-tanning gun)
I’ll leave you to your friends, the scorpions. I hope, for your sake, they’ve dined elsewhere.

He leaves.

PLAYWRIGHT
“Condense it enough so I don’t get bored, but add enough detail to make credible.” Or so I know it’s a lie. Enochian, thousands of years old?! Why everyone knows it’s 400 at best.
(Reads inscription)
Which one **speaks**? Well, let’s see, shall we?

Lights slowly dim as the plucky explorer rolls up her sleeves and …
END OF SCENE

ACT 2
Scene 5: Needle in a haystack

Skulls, skulls everywhere. Okay, maybe not everywhere, but a great many that were in the cabinet are now on the floor. Guess our adventurer hasn't found the one that speaks: to her, to us or anyone.

PLAYWRIGHT
So, I've almost moved on from the idea that the meaning is literal. Which one speaks? To what? To who? Am I supposed to start the conversation, and then one of these guys will chime in? Am I supposed to feel one? A vibe? Which one … Maybe it's an ancient prank, I'll go through them all and on the very last one will be written "Ha, ha, made you look!" Except, you know, written in Mayan. I don't know what that would be anymore-I think Harriet has left me on my own.
(Looks at the remaining skulls in the cabinet)
Like looking for a needle in a … okay, who the fuck has ever done that? If I wanted to find a needle it would be right where I put it-in a sewing box, if I sewed. If you want something, put it where you can find it. Sure, you toss your keys down someplace in your apartment, but you know they're in there. Things of value don't get lost-taken maybe, but not lost.
(Beat)
Nothing disappears unless you … or they want to.
(Stares harder at the skulls)
Why is this one winking? Maybe not … winking, but buddy you look like you got a secret.
(Takes skull out of cabinet)
This one, looks almost real. C'mon, spill your guts.

On cue, the skull's jaw opens.

PLAYWRIGHT
Holy shit!

Oh look! Inside the jaws of this ancient wander is a small, rolled parchment. Nervously the Playwright unrolls and reads:

PLAYWRIGHT
"Since I couldn't be blown to bits against a stone wall, I sought immortality. You can see how that worked itself out. I'll keep searching if you will. A.B."
(Beat)
What!

The skull starts to glow. Then another, then another, soon all of them. The light seems to engulf our Playwright. As the light gets brighter, we hear the phone again: once, twice–

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE
END OF ACT 2

INTERMISSION

ACT 3
Scene 1: Perchance to Zoom

We hear the strains of the Indiana Jones *theme. Voice: "We will return to the TNT adventure marathon in just a moment." Stage dark, cell phone ringing: once, twice, three times and stop. Lights slowly up to reveal Playwright sleeping on the couch in her apartment, COVID mask on. Phone starts up again, waking her.*

PLAYWRIGHT
Oh, shit. Ummmm,
(*Answers phone)*
Hello? Mom? Mom … yes … yes, I'm fine, no fine, I just fell asleep.
(*Beat)*
You didn't! Mom, say you didn't-
(Beat)
Thank god! I'm fine, I just fell asleep!
(Beat)
Watching *Indiana Jones …the* …the first one. No, no not the one with Sean Connery.
(Beat)
Eww, mom ….eww, gross. He's dead. Yes, I'm sure he's dead. No, Harrison Ford is still alive.

Pause. The torrent on the other end continues.

PLAYWRIGHT
Yeah, I've been just sitting around all day. Not writing … just … doing nothing really. What! I do not have my mask on.
(notices she has her mask on)
Ok, ok, I'm taking it off. Fuck, I keep leaving it on!
(Beat)
I dunno why …mom…. MOM! No, I don't have it again. I'm just so used to …
(Beat)
No, I know that's why you call. Oh, shit I gotta go_
(Beat
No, I love that you call but I gotta go-
(Beat)
I have a Zoom with someone.
(Beat)
Well, they're an hour behind.

Pause. The other end goes silent for a second, then a burst.

PLAYWRIGHT
Yea*h,* I'd rather not talk about-what? No, just a friend.
(Beat)
No, you're right. I … don't want to talk about it with you. 'Cause I know what you'll say. WHAT you've been saying-
(Beat)
It's not disrespectful! Mom, … love you, ok. I'll talk to you later-no, I promise I'll call or text.
(Beat)
-you don't like it. Love you. Bye-MOM! Bye.

She hangs up the phone and seems to be composing herself. Like a reflex, she puts the mask back on and then clicks on the laptop. She's really nervous and then:

PLAYWRIGHT
Hello? Oh, hold on- can you hear me? Click on audio-

VOICE
Can you hear me?

PLAYWRIGHT
Yes!

VOICE
Never done this before-

PLAYWRIGHT
You've never Zoomed?

VOICE
No. You have?

PLAYWRIGHT
Oh yeah.

Pause. Make it long, make it awkward.

VOICE
Well … this is … Daniel. Everybody calls me Dan.

PLAYWRIGHT
Hi.

VOICE
Hello. Hate to say … you know, since I knew, I've been practicing what-say, do you mind me asking … is something wrong?

PLAYWRIGHT
No, I mean-why-

VOICE
Your mask. You have your mask on. Is-

PLAYWRIGHT
Oh! I'm sorry-

VOICE
You all right?

PLAYWRIGHT
Yes. Yeah, I was just telling … someone that I keep-
(*Loosens mask*)
-leaving it on for no good reason.

She takes mask off.

PLAYWRIGHT
Here I am. This is me.
(Beat)
Amy.

A shy smile as the lights dim.
END OF SCENE

ACT 3
Scene 2: Forget me not

Lights dark on stage. A.B. slowly wanders through the audience looking substantially worse for the wear. Is he wearing leopard skins???? That better be fake. On second look maybe that's just some really tattered fabric. He has his old clothes peeking out of an ancient leather case with a sticker that says "Immortality or bust".

A.B.

Heaven and Hell. Lighthouses which guide those determined to believe that their actions reverberate beyond their dust. The hope of eternal reward with fear of perpetual punishment. The ultimate carrot and stick. En masse rushing on Sunday to pray they are worthy of one, only to spend the rest of the week earning the other, then back on knees to ask pardon for the weapons aimed and bleeding they provoked. But what of those who look to neither light, who search only themselves and the material world on how to proceed? A Christian would say I was not entitled to see God; to me,not blind enough to want to. Hell might be an option, but I have no fear of the devil. I was in the war you know. Perhaps I would be slow cooked in Purgatory until the sword of Gabriel- or Michael ?-or some imps pitchfork determined I was done-one way or another. Limbo might be appropriate; I have been described as a lost soul, but never been good with children, unbaptized or otherwise.

(Beat)

Having been denied an execution befitting an old soldier, I was compelled to seek some ending even if it meant being swallowed by the desert sands. If my old anger hadn't deserted me, I'm sure I would have been a candidate for spontaneous combustion, departing like a disdainful wizard, leaving nothing behind but perhaps a hole in someone's rug. I'd hope it was Oriental and … expensive. But alas, no such luck, so after being expelled from my own story, I wandered into an old library. Not the sort housed in marbled halls, bought by a robber baron seeking to pay for the good opinion of those he stole from, but a humble wooden abode, lined with exhausted shelves carrying ancient tomes losing their contents to time and indifference. Does a book exist if it is never read? Does the story end when the paper rots and blows away, or will the dust find a way into another imagination? Frankly, I didn't give a damn. I was bored and my lack of Spanish consigned me to studying the covers rather than contents. I noticed a leather bound, rather slim volume with an engraving of a pyramid guarded by a monstrous crab. Intrigued I opened it and an advertisement

of some sort fell out. Mysteriously or conveniently enough, it was written in English. " To whom it may concern: We are looking to fill the vacancy of God. The one we have does not hear us and we can't get in touch with them at the most inopportune times. We are not seeking omniscience or omnipotence but just someone who will listen, give advice when they can, be still when they should and provide solace to those whose relatives have been devoured. We provide shelter, food and admiration. If interested, follow directions provided by the engraving which is also a compass. Many thanks, the 12th tribe."

(Beat)

Hmmm. I'd never been a god before. The idea of being worshiped was appalling; the thought of admiration exhausting, there's too much work involved, BUT …free food and board? Even in this netherworld that seemed vaguely attractive and more importantly I now had a destination. So, foregoing troubling the snoozing librarian for a loan, I pocketed the book and followed the aforementioned compass all the way to a romance of tropical wilderness. Upon sighting the signs of a civilization, I half expected a race of bird like humans to greet with chirps and whistles, gentle Lilliputians circling me with joy and gifts. No. Not at all.

(GROWL)

My welcome consisted of doubt and an odd sound, emanating from everywhere in particular, like a stomach growling. Then, I beheld the temple in front of me, and with it, an odd rustling. Step… Rustle. Step. Rustle. Step, rustle, step, rustle, step, rustle, STEP, RUSTLE! STEP-And then she appeared.

(Beat)

At first, all I saw was the skeletal hand beckoning me to hurry, but soon followed by a shock of cobwebs seemingly sewn into her scalp, flowing around and down, forming a curtain for which the face could enter. I reached her as what felt like two knives groped for my ear and the stomach roar crescendoed-then darkness as she shoved me into the temple. I had arrived.

(*Sound does not stop but becomes barely perceptible)*

To what? To where? I did not know and the uncertainty pleased me. The temple was fairly bare: a few chairs, a few cushions which seemed to pass for beds, and the ashen remains of … humans, relatives …f ormer gods? If I was to be a god, it seemed my church would consist of only 1. There was a small dog, but he was indifferent to my presence, always. Dogs do not pray to multiple deities.

(Beat)

My host's muddy eyes directed me to an altar upon which rested a skull, rather ornately carved out of glass or perhaps crystal. So, was this whom I was replacing? She definitely seemed dissatisfied, clucking her tongue at the macabre ornament while pointing to a sign hanging above the altar. Haven't a clue what it said, of course, but it seemed very important. The next few days consisted of playing charades with the parishioner? Flock? Acolyte? While not eager to learn my duties, I nonetheless did my best to be affable, if a little distant, and she was a charming host. I washed every day in a little stream that flowed in the back, protected by an ancient fence and garden. I am a modest individual, but she insisted on watching while I performed my ablutions, not out of curiosity or(be still vanity) lust, but … fear. As the day wore on, she seemed less worried; at night when insomnia beckoned , I invariably caught her awake, listening intently. I was in a strange time and place, with a symphony of sounds and calls, she was focused on the ancient wooden door.

SCRATCH!

Like a nail being dragged across …or something else that was sharp.

(Pause)

Máakalmak ku t'aan? I think that's what the sign said. That's not Spanish? A week into my new existence, I was growing bored and impatient. Out of a desire to engage, I tried to inquire if she was familiar with the book I borrowed from the library. Perhaps she could teach me a few words? Instead, my inquiry provoked a storm in the rivers of her face; her nails, honed to razor sharpness, slashed my hand as she ripped the book from my grasp, tore the pages from the binding, and obliterated them with her feet, stomping to exhaustion.

(Beat)

DZEC! DZEC! DZEC! She screamed this over and over, pointing to the cover of the book. The Crab? Poor thing, isolation had driven her mad. Lovely. Between this and the rather limited cuisine, I had no wonder why the position had been left vacant. It's enough to hear rational complaining, but there's no pleasing the insane unless you join them. As I was about to seek the solace of the little stream, and plot some escape, a conciliatory hand gently, but firmly, grasped my wrist leading me to behind the makeshift skull altar. There, to my befuddled amazement, were two phonographs in states of disrepair. "**Máakalmak ku t'aan? Máakalmak ku t'aan?**" Her face flooded with tears. She gently picked up an old cylinder that had been placed on one-HOW! Where did these come from? She kissed it, like a saint's robe, and placed it in my hands. "Máakalmak ku t'aan?" the eyes implored. Something in me responded to be the god she

needed. This prayer will be answered. It took only a few minutes to realize that the one phonograph was nearly useless, the motor far too gone for my limited mechanical skills. The other seemed, miraculously, to be in reasonable order save for a broken crank. They weren't the same model, but I dubiously took the crank from the irretrievable and substituted it for the broken. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. It fit. GENIUS! DAMN! The juxtaposition of triumph and failure in an instant. The needle was worn to a shred. Gently searching the cubbyholes of both phonographs reduced me to mortal. All the needles were used. I eyed them for any viability and finally found two that had not committed full service … perhaps. I screwed one of them in and motioned for my host to bring me the cylinder. She held it to her bosom like a baby, whispering what I surmised was encouragement. Sliding it from her hands onto the turntable, I placed the needle. Didn't pray-that would be hypocritical, but …please.

(HE CRANKS)
(Silence)
(Popping noises)

Please.

(Popping Noise)
(Popping Noise)

Then …

CHILD's VOICE
Hola na' je'el u páajtal a tin xikin in? Je'el u páajtal a tin xikin in?
Ka'ansiken k'aay!
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in

¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal
¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal

MAN'S VOICE
Lelo' bin Jach ma'alob!
(*Pause)*
Ba'ax je'el u páajtal a tin xikin in xan? In yaakunech.

A.B.
I know the definition of rapture but seeing it left me speechless. After showing her how to play the cylinder, I went to bed. The dog joined her to listen and the child's singing ushered me to sleep. Not a sleep of contentment or fatigue but a wish not to wake up. I had a perfect moment. Let it be.

CHILDREN SINGING
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in

¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal
¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal

A.B.
I dreamed, damn it. Flying, which is so mundane, but I was not Icharus aiming for the sun. Rather, I seemed to be a passenger in a plane being chased by shadows. The plane dived to avoid them and I felt a terror not known since bullets searched for me at Shiloh. As the ground loomed , I heard a high-pitched scream and … In the middle of the night and still alive.
(*Growling)*
(Growling becoming fainter)
(Sound of cylinder on phonograph)
Had I not showed her how to turn it off? I lifted the needle and noticed she was gone. As was the dog.
(Scratching. Like 2 knives rubbed together)
A nocturnal walk seemed unlikely. Off to forage for firewood? Hunting with her primitive Slingshot? She seemed so taken with the phonograph, I could not imagine what had called her away.
(Scratching stops)
Or could I?
(Beat)
Meat for my insomnia.
The morning found me alone, hungry and at a loss to correct either. I looked at the skull sitting upon the altar and it seemed to be pitying me. A wave of defiance crept over my spine, and resolve to carry on until my host returned. Opening the back door to the stream and garden, I shed my garments in preparation for cleansing only to behold … desecration. A graveyard violated in the most violent matter. Bones tossed everywhere, scattered pieces of a gruesome jigsaw puzzle. As one who has stepped over putrid

corpses, it would seem improbable that I could be shocked, but this … where had they come from? Had they been here all this time? Bodies as fertilizer. If you're shocked at that notion, you should see a battlefield in the spring. The intensity of color, the fragrance of the flowers; nature making the best of carnage, turning rot into glory.

I made no effort toward the chaos; further examination revealed some of the skulls were of the same substance as the one inside. Fabrications lying beside the genuine. Only skulls, the other bones all original compositions in various states of brittleness. I went back inside.

LOUD GROWLING!

At my advanced age, I still fancied myself as a crack shot but with a rifle not a slingshot. What was left of the garden wouldn't be enough to sustain me. This … this … this was to be my death? My heart pounded in my ear and I felt an enormous pain in my chest. Good. I lay down certain that each breath would be the last. Then it became dark, the rasping of my lungs the only company.

SCRATCH!
SCRATCH!

I decided there were worse sounds than children and struggled to my feet.

CHILD'S VOICE
Hola na' je'el u páajtal a tin xikin in? Je'el u páajtal a tin xikin in?
Ka'ansiken k'aay!

Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in

¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal
¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal

MAN's VOICE
Lelo' bin Jach ma'alob!
(Pause)
Ba'ax je'el u páajtal a tin xikin in xan? In yaakunech.

A.B.
I didn’t think she’d mind.

CHILDREN SINGING
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in

¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal
¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal

Silence
Popping Noise

A.B.
Again, if you please.

Silence

MAN’s VOICE
I’m sorry father. It hurt too much.

A.B.
?

MAN’s VOICE
It hurt so much. I’m sorry father.

A.B.
Again!

CHILDREN SINGING
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in-

A.B.
No! No, no no, no NO!

Sound of needle being lifted abruptly.
Silence.

A.B.
Where IS IT!?

CHILDREN SINGING
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol

Bey in uok´ol chichán pal
¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán

MAN's VOICE
I'm sorry father-

Silence
Silence

A.B.
I tried to replace the needle. It wouldn't play.
(Beat)
It wouldn't play. A trick of the mind-isn't all life?

Sounds of smashing. Like a cracking of the heart.

A.B.
I left the parts in the graveyard and ran toward the invisible stomach. I guess it spit me out, because here I am.
(Takes out cylinder from bag)
It wouldn't play.

A.B. spins the record in his hands and then places it back in the bag. Lights dim and:
END OF SCENE

Act 3
Scene 3: Three Horsemen This Way Come

The moment before a sunrise, when the day and night pass each other with a knowing look. Barely lit are the shadows of three men contemplating this changing of the guard. We get the sense that this has repeated itself many, many times.

NUMBER 1
So, you figure this is the one?

NUMBER 2
I gotta hunch.

NUMBER 1
Yeah?

NUMBER 2
Yeah.

NUMBER 3
You and your … hunches.

They stare out into the distance, waiting for something.

NUMBER 3
Okay then.

They walk to the back of the theater as the lights slowly come up to a sunrise.

END OF SCENE.

Act 3
Scene 4: It’s about time.

Playwright at her computer. She’s not experiencing writer’s block but indifference to her writing. Occasional, slow typing followed by rapid fire deletion. A.B. slowly walks in. He seems more unsure than she, perhaps because this is her “turf.”

A.B.
I hope I’m in the right place.

PLAYWRIGHT
Well, since I’m not screaming or throwing things, you probably are. Congrats, you’re the first person who’s been in this apartment in a long time. Long being subjective.

A.B.
Yes. It took me a while to find you.

PLAYWRIGHT
Because I didn’t want you to. I got your note. I’ve been trying very hard to sever …whatever the fuck this is. Sorry, If we’re going to be spending time together, you better get used to hearing “fuck.” Or shit. I don’t use damn much-

A.B.
I do. It comes in handy, as it were.

PLAYWRIGHT
There you go.
(Beat)
How can I help you, Ambrose? I googled you.

A.B.
I’m afraid to ask.

PLAYWRIGHT
Like … a detective. You know, what was their name …

A.B.
Pinkerton’s?

PLAYWRIGHT
Yeah, I guess. Nobody gets away from Google.
(Notices she has her mask on)
Oh shit, sorry, no I’m not a robber-

A.B.
I thought it might have to do with illness. Perhaps your own, or a preventative measure-maybe both. I myself have been feeling-

PLAYWRIGHT
Whoa, if you-

A.B.
I doubt it's something you could catch. What I have is old, in the core of me, perpetually caught in a cycle of cause and effect or infect. It seeks no other. Will you come with me?

PLAYWRIGHT
Where?

A.B.
On a train.

PLAYWRIGHT
To?

A.B.
I've no idea.

BEAT

PLAYWRIGHT
I've got a job, you know.
(Pause)
I'm not getting much done here. Maybe, this is what I need. BAD DECISION written all over it but okay. Let's go. How do we do this?

He picks up a chair and sits across from her. She places hers so their knees are nearly touching.

PLAYWRIGHT
What are we-

Sound of a train. He nods.

PLAYWRIGHT
Cool. Who am I supposed to be?

A.B. does not answer. They both lean back in their chairs as the train whistles and the lights dim.
END OF SCENE

Act 3
Scene 5: Will you be my Etta?

Sound of the train chugging along in the dark; our two passengers appear to be sleeping. We dimly see three shadowy figures move from the back of the theatre. They move in and around the audience, warning them to be quiet. They creep closer to the stage and then:

KABOOM!!!!

The train screeches to a halt, throwing the two passengers against each other. The three men leap on stage. Lights up.

KID CURRY(Harvey)
All right all of you listen-

BUTCH CASSIDY
I'll handle this Harvey-

KID CURRY
It's Kid Curry-

BUTCH CASSIDY
It's Harvey. Kid Curry's just a nickname you gave you. Never made no sense-

KID CURRY
That man was like a brother-never mind! C'mon, let's get what we came for!

A.B.
(Confronting)
Which is?

BUTCH CASSIDY
Well, it ain't you Ambrose!

A.B.
?

BUTCH CASSIDY
Yeah, I know all about you and your little search-

KID CURRY
So, you a journalist? Maybe we can do some business after-

A.B.
After what?

KID CURRY
Sundance, you wanna hurry this along? Grab her and let's go!

BUTCH
Hold on a second, HAAAAAAARVEEEEYYYY! He's got to find out if she's the one.

PLAYWRIGHT
What? She's the one what!?

SUNDANCE
(simply)
If you're my Ethel. My Etta
(*Looks at her like someone really trying to see something)*
Eyes a little different. Hers held a lot of secrets, mine and her own. I don't see mine in there anymore-

KID
So, you mean to tell me-

BUTCH
He ain't done yet Harv! Go ahead Sundance.

SUNDANCE
Skin's the same, so's the hair. Chin looks just as stubborn. Let me see your hands-

PLAYWRIGHT
No, get away from me!

A.B.
Gentlemen! Whatever I have is yours-

KID
Shut the Hell up!

BUTCH
Give us a minute, sir. Honey, let him see your hands.

PLAYWRIGHT
No!

BUTCH
I got all day.

KID
No, we fuckin don't-

BUTCH
We got all the time in the world.
(Beat)
(To Kid)
And you know it.
(*To playwright)*
Honey-

PLAYWRIGHT
Stop calling me that. Get the fuck away from me.

BUTCH
What should I call you?

SUNDANCE
Ethel.

PLAYWRIGHT
I'm not-

BUTCH
(*Leaning in, whispering*)
Amy. Right?

Silence

BUTCH
How DID I know that?

PLAYWRIGHT
How. Did. You?

BUTCH
Let's have a little talk.
(To Sundance)
That okay with you? I won't keep her long. Me and sis here just gonna catch up a bit.

Takes Sundance aside.

BUTCH
What'ya think?

SUNDANCE
I don't know, Butch. It's been such a damn long time.
She don't seem to know me.

BUTCH
She's scared. Let me talk to her. Hell, she's probably just so excited to see you 'gain, she just don't know what to say. You know how it goes-
(points to Sundance)
Some boys excite women-
(takes a bow)
-and some calm 'em down. I think I might be like opium.

They laugh. Kid fumes.

KID
You two fuckin lovebirds done?!

BUTCH
Don't get jealous HAAAAAARVEEEEEEEYYYY.

KID
Well, why y'all talk, me and Mark Twain can get acquainted.

A.B.
I'm not-

KID
Your whoever I say you are.
(*Punches A.B.)*
Ya got that.

PLAYWRIGHT
Stop it!

KID
(*Pulling A.B. up)*
Tell me a story grampa.
((face to face)
Make me laugh.

BUTCH
Harvey-

PLAYWRIGHT
Leave him alone, asshole-

BUTCH
(*To KID)*
-I'm doin business here!

SUNDANCE
Etta, don't-

PLAYWRIGHT
Jesus, stop-

KID
DON'T call me Harvey!

BEAT

KID
I ain't been that name in a long time.

A.B.
What draws more flies than honey?

KID
WHAT?

A.B.
You, when you open your mouth. When silent it's a draw.

PLAYWRIGHT
Ambrose-

SUNDANCE
Don't pay the old man any-

A.B. stomps hard on Kid's foot.

A.B.
What's the difference between an outhouse and Harvey, here?

BUTCH
Friend, you need to shut the hell up!

Kid punches A.B.

A.B.
Harvey's more full of shit!

Kid jumps on A.B. and wildly punch him. Butch and Sundance try to pull him away while Playwright grabs A.B

BUTCH
Jesus Christ, Harvey!

PLAYWRIGHT
Could you try not to be so fucking obvious?

KID
Lemme go or I'll –

A.B.
What do you mean?

BUTCH
It's always the same-

PLAYWRIGHT
It's not gallant, it's not brave-

SUNDANCE
You let him get under your skin like-

A.B.
I think it's very … oh what's your word-

KID
Damn right! Both of you can go to-

PLAYWRIGHT
-it's pathetic!

BUTCH
Harvey, ah fuck it, KID!

A.B.
AUTHENTIC!

Kid freezes.

KID
You ain't never called me that.
(Beat)
What's goin' on?

BUTCH
Things might be changin' a bit. Do me a favor? Take a walk.

KID
How long a walk?

BUTCH
Just give us a few minutes

KID
If you gone when I get back … I'll find you. All of you.

BUTCH
We're not runnin' from nothin'. Got nowhere to go.

KID
See that cactus over there? I'm gonna take a piss on it. Then I'm gonna walk back.

BUTCH
Thank you!

KID
(walks down center singing)
"On the way back to Texas they robbed
the U.P. train,
And then split up in couples and
started out again.
Sam made it back to Texas all right
side up with care;
But Jackson's in the bushes trying
to get away …
Oh, I've got to ride,
ride like the wind!"
**Sam Bass-traditional cowboy song* *

BUTCH
(as the singing trails off)
Now then, c'mon sis let's talk while Sundance and your friend stretch their legs

A.B.
I'm fine here.

BUTCH
Old man, I'm more of a gentleman than you. So's Sundance. Go on and walk now. Maybe some of that'll rub off on you, same as you can teach him a few words from the dictionary. He runs out sometimes. Try to get back before Harvey's through makin' water.
T
They leave to right of audience.

BUTCH
(Singing)
"She lives in a mansion of aching hearts,
She's one of the restless throng,
The diamonds that glitter around her throat,
They speak of both sorrow and song,
The smile on her face is only a mask,
And many the tear that starts-
**The Mansion of Aching Hearts- Von Tilzer and Lamb, 1902*

BUTCH(CONT'D)
Damn! Why'd I start singin' that?

PLAYWRIGHT
I don't know.

BUTCH
You sure?
(*shrugs*)
All right … so Amy … damn you look so much like her.

PLAYWRIGHT
I don't feel like an Esther.

BUTCH
Why? Name ain't good enough for you?

PLAYWRIGHT
What?

BUTCH
Oh, you got that slightly snooty way she had, when she didn't know you. Once she trusted someone though … yeah, I never thought she was much of an Esther either.

PLAYWRIGHT
What's in a name?

BUTCH
Not much when it comes down to it, which is why I'm gonna ask you to forget yours.

PLAYWRIGHT
And why would I do that?

BUTCH
Shit, look at me, all nervous like a virgin with his first whore. Not sure how to start, hopin' she likes you … and then you just plunge in like jumpin' into a river you gotta cross. When you look back, you see she's still on the other side.
(*Beat)*
A thousand trains ago we found her, but she'd gotten fat ... and mean. Time before that, he saw too much innocence left, and last time, oh about a dozen back, she just didn't want to go. Said she hated us for loving us. I knew what she meant and he pretended.

PLAYWRIGHT
I won't be your … or his –

BUTCH
Listen to my offer first. You might find you LIKE being Esther more than Amy. Plenty of people leave their selves to become somethin' else … why not you?

BEAT

PLAYWRIGHT
Go on Jimmy. I loved the way you talk.
(*Pause)*
I don't know-

BUTCH
Only a passport ever called me that.

PLAYWRIGHT
Make the pitch. Tell me your offer, but be aware he's going to have to speak for himself. Cyrano was a pussy, loving through another man. If that's the case here-I would have punched that asshole right in his nose!

BUTCH
That sounded like her.

PLAYWRIGHT
So?
(She moves to him)
Tell me. Tell me, Butch

BUTCH
Don't get the wrong idea.

PLAYWRIGHT
Which is?

BUTCH
It wasn't like that between us. You … she belonged-

PLAYWRIGHT
Bad choice of words-

BUTCH
Oh, to hell with that! Don't pick apart everything I say. Yeah, sometimes people do belong. I ain't talkin' about ownin someone,

BUTCH(CONT'D)
I'm talkin' about wantin' to be there. He wanted you and you ...damn, she wanted him.

PLAYWRIGHT
What about you?

BUTCH
I wanted …. And it's what I'm tryin to get back. A real life. Not runnin, not wakin' up with a gun to your head. Let someone else plan shits once in a while. There's two types of men in the world-

PLAYWRIGHT
Just two-

BUTCH
Stop interruptin' … please. I'm cuttin' through what I look like, and tellin' you what I am. I liked doing shit but most of what I did got me in trouble. Then you come along and I didn't care that you wanted him, 'cause you wanted me in a different way. You talked to me. Whether we were talkin about robbin' a bank, what to feed the pigs, the weather … some book. I remember you leavin' some by my nightstand. And when I'd hear you both gigglin' through the walls at night, I wasn't jealous. Made me sleep better hearin' happy. I felt … safe. Then you left and it was back to runnin and robbin'. I'd like to hear happy again. Smile over a cup of coffee. Get swatted on my head 'cause I said something stupid. Show you how to cook a cow proper-you always burned it. Have another besides Sundance know I can't shoot worth a damn and it don't matter.
(Beat)
He's comin' back with the old man. I'll let him say his piece.

PLAYWRIGHT
That wasn't bad, but I have to hear it from him. So, you just want … this sounds too obvious.

BUTCH
Ask yourself-what's better: Runnin, searchin' or we could live.

Sundance and A.B. come back.

SUNDANCE
So, what's in Marfa 'cept sand?

A.B.
Marfa? That's where we were going?

BUTCH
You didn’t know where your train was headed? Maybe this is your stop.

.PLAYWRIGHT
(grabbing Sundance by the arm)
Walk with a girl, handsome.

SUNDANCE
I just been.

PLAYWRIGHT
I want to walk in the desert sunrise with you. You can sit here with Butch and wait for that angry man to come back or-

She takes off running

PLAYWRIGHT
Catch me, catch me if you can-

SUNDANCE
Etta, wait!

PLAYWRIGHT
You never could keep up!

BUTCH
Go get her!

*Sundance sprints after, his long legs gaining groun*d.

PLAYWRIGHT
(Laughs)
I’m getting away!

He tackles her. For a few seconds they roll for control, then break.

SUNDANCE
Short legged self.

PLAYWRIGHT
Long enough to do this.
(delivers the kick to the cajones heard round the world)

We hear a faint cackle from Butch.

SUNDANCE
(*he has temporarily become a tenor)*
That … wasn't-

She pushes him on his back with her foot and slams down hard, pinning his shoulders to the ground

PLAYWRIGHT
-Fair. I was never afraid to fight dirty.
(playful slap-not hard)
Come on-fight!

He groans

PLAYWRIGHT
I can do this for a while you know
(*pinches his nose, playful slap)*
I think I enjoy kicking your ass.

He weakly tries to buck her off but she easily keeps her balance.

PLAYWRIGHT
So, since the fight's over-at least for now, let's talk.

SUNDANCE
(Coughing)
'bout what?

PLAYWRIGHT
Well, since you're in no position-ha! to choose the subject, let me think.
(Beat)
What was it like making love to me?

SUNDANCE
What?

PLAYWRIGHT
What was it like … to … tell me. Now. Because if you loved me you'll remember. We were like this sometimes, right?

SUNDANCE
Yes. Well not like this-

PLAYWRIGHT
Tell me!

SUNDANCE
God, Etta-

PLAYWRIGHT
Just you and me-

SUNDANCE
All right. My balls really hurt.

PLAYWRIGHT
They'll be fine. I pulled my kick-sort of. You deserved it.

SUNDANCE
Okay. Well, you always did one or two things when you wanted to … when you-

PLAYWRIGHT
Yeah? What?

SUNDANCE
You'd slide your hand down my leg. Then you'd … ummm rub my back-

She pulls him to her. He groans

PLAYWRIGHT
Don't be a fucking baby.

Her hand searches for the spot on his back.

PLAYWRIGHT
Tell me when.

SUNDANCE
There. Yes … there.

PLAYWRIGHT
What else?

SUNDANCE
Your eyes would get black like a cat's when it's play fightin. And when I was about to … release, you'd get this little smile and hold my face tight …

PLAYWRIGHT
Like this. And I wouldn't let you look away because I wanted to see everything. It was like watching you die and come back.

SUNDANCE
And then you'd sigh and melt right into me, wrap me around you like a blanket.
(chuckles)
Those cold feet.

There's no one else in the universe right now.

SUNDANCE
Etta … please stay.

PLAYWRIGHT
Etta will stay. I don't think I'm an Ethel.

SUNDANCE
Is it wrong I'm kinda enjoying this?

PLAYWRIGHT
(*standing up)*
There's something I want you guys to do for me.

Helps him up.

SUNDANCE
What's that?

PLAYWRIGHT
Kill the old man. Kill A.B.

Lights out
END OF SCENE

ACT 3
Scene 6: The Road to Marfa is Paved With Bad Intentions

Dark with spotlight on Butch. He is tying a noose.

BUTCH
Gotta make a big knot for a hanging. Too small and he's just gonna strangle, too big and he'll slip right through. If you wanna do it right, ya have to care.
(Beat)
So, I think that's what this might be about: care. See, a bullet don't really take much effort. You pull the trigger and it goes to find something. *Bullets are smart.* They know what their job is. A rope is like a dumb animal. You can use it for a lot of different things but ya got to show it how. Roping a steer, scaling a wall, tying somebody up-hell sailors use it a lot, although I'm not familiar with that. I made friends with the hangman at the prison I spent some time in. That's a good man to have on your side, not that he had any direct business with me. Still, it always pays to be kind to people. He was a little pale fella, always walked with a hunch, and he showed me how to do this. "Butch," he said, "if it ever comes down to it, as long as I'm here, this is how your knot will be. It'll be quick."
(Beat)
You ready, sir? You ready boys?

A solemn march, of sorts, from the back of the theater. First Sundance appears, carrying a wooden crate. He places it next to Butch and steps aside. Then A.B., followed by Kid who is followed by his anger. Or maybe it precedes him. Butch approaches A.B., showing him the noose, and A.B. nods with satisfaction. Sundance gently pats him on the shoulder and helps him step up on the crate. Kid hangs back, seemingly distracted. As Butch starts to put the noose around A.B., Kid flashes forward, shoving Butch aside, and stabs the old man in the back, twisting for all he's worth. A.B. collapses.

Long Pause

Kid laughs while Butch and Sundance are frozen. Playwright enters; it's just a silent scream at first, then with every fiber of her being:

PLAYWRIGHT
NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!

Blackout. The scream continues as we hear the steps of someone running and running and running …

END OF SCENE

Act 3
Scene 7: Annie Oakley has your back.

Breathing. Two sets of breathing. The labored sound of someone dying, the other like a frightened animal. Gradually, the labored one goes quiet and the other seems to intensify. Lights up. Playwright on stage, almost in shock. Sundance, followed by Butch, enters.

PLAYWRIGHT
Stay the fuck away from me.

SUNDANCE
Etta-

PLAYWRIGHT
I'm not-

BUTCH
Etta, I'm sorry about-

PLAYWRIGHT
I'm NOT her! I'll never be her! Not now.
(Beat)
One thing. I asked one thing. You lied to me …

SUNDANCE
We didn't lie, Harvey done that-

BUTCH
Harvey, HAAAARRRRRVEEEEEY done that on his own.

PLAYWRIGHT
And you let him-

BUTCH
I HAD the noose ready. We was all set and then … I'm sorry.
(Beat)
That was a goddam strange thing to ask. Stranger thing to want-

PLAYWRIGHT
It's what HE wanted. It's what I asked you both to do. What would have happened if I didn't see? Would you have told me-

SUNDANCE
We … I wouldn't have lied. Look Etta-

PLAYWRIGHT
DON'T call-

SUNDANCE
I will SAY what I want. I got something to say and for once I want you to listen. Listen 'sted of havin' your mind made up. We was all set to hang your friend, but you remember Harvey, he's mean, he'll carry a grudge forever.
(Beat)
He kills for us. It's what he does.

PLAYWRIGHT
?

SUNDANCE
In all time, I ain't never killed a soul. Shot a couple, shot at a few more … Butch don't even know how to shoot, hardly. Harvey-

PLAYWRIGHT
So, he does your dirty work?

SUNDANCE
'cause he can.

BUTCH
And he wants to. Real bad. I think he was payin' your friend-

Kid enters

KID
I pushed that sack of shit over where the buzzards can have him. Whatsa matter missy? Ya got what you wanted-

Playwright lunges for him. Sundance catches her before she makes it.

KID
Ha, ha, HAH! C'mon!

PLAYWRIGHT
Get your hands off me-

KID
Before she kicks you in them balls again. Yeah, I heard you like to fight dirty. C'mon.

SUNDANCE
Harvey, will ya just-

KID
So do I little girl. I'm better at it. Let's go

BUTCH
It wasn't right leavin him out like that-

KID
WHAT DO YOU CARE? Let's go!

PLAYWRIGHT
You fucked up. All of you.
(Breaks away from Sundance)
Go find her somewhere else. Get out of here.

BUTCH
We can't leave.

KID
Take her and let's go!

SUNDANCE
She has to want to-

KID
I don't care. It don't-

SUNDANCE
I do!

BUTCH
She has to want-

KID
To hell-

PLAYWRIGHT
Leave! Get the fuck out!

KID
-with that. No more trains, no more waitin', she coming with us and then you all go your way and I'll go mine. C'mere you-

He grabs for her and she tries to kick. He's ready and blocks it. Sundance and Butch intervene. Sundance tries to protect the

playwright, while taking blows from both. Butch tries to pull Kid back when …

POW!

A rifle shot from the back of the theatre. ANNIE OAKLEY emerges and walks toward the stage. The definition of self-possessed. Butch and Sundance become almost schoolboys.

BUTCH
Miss Oakley?

ANNIE
Missus Butler most of the time. But, you're right … now I'm Miss Oakley.
(To playwright)
You can call me Annie, if you'd like.
(To Sundance)
Harry is that you?

SUNDANCE
(Smiling in spite of himself)
Yes. Yes Ma'am. Ain't been called that in a while.

ANNIE
Harry, I know you have better manners than to hold a lady against her will.

SUNDANCE
I'm not trying-

KID
Who the hell is this?

BUTCH
Harvey-

ANNIE
Mr. Curry, please mind the way you speak. Civil tones are what's needed. Mr. Parker? Can you explain why this young lady needs me?

BUTCH
She's … she's a part of us but-

PLAYWRIGHT
No, I'm not. I want them to leave.

ANNIE
All right Miss … Amy. Fellas it looks like you made a mistake.

SUNDANCE
No-

BUTCH
No Miss-

KID
Can we just go! Take her!

BUTCH
Goddam you Harvey-

ANNIE
Language! Butch? I'm sorry that's a little boy's name … Robert … tell me what's going on?

BUTCH
It'd be my pleasure if y'all will not interrupt.

PLAYWRIGHT
I don't want to-

ANNIE
Darling, let me just hear what he has to say. No one is taking you anywhere.
(Kid motions toward his gun)
Mr. Curry. Stop. I know you find it easier to shoot people than I do, but if necessary I think you'll find I'm your match. I'll just feel bad about it after, maybe. Robert?

BUTCH
Thank you. We been searching for Etta forever since she left-

ANNIE
I know I promised no interruptions but why-

BUTCH
I'm getting to that. Been so long. We'd given up the life of bandits and become A little family. But them damn detectives wouldn't leave us alone and we had to keep runnin'. Etta got tired and wanted to go … so we let her-

SUNDANCE
I took her back and left. Dumbest thing I ever done-

BUTCH
We went back to robbin'-this time 'cause there wasn't nothing else. And then …

SUNDANCE
And then ….

BUTCH
Every day we look for Etta. Sometimes we find her, but it just isn't the right one.

SUNDANCE
This time … it felt like old times.

Pause.

ANNIE
(*Sincerely)*
You poor souls. I assume Mr. Curry wouldn't come with you?

SUNDANCE
No.

KID
Hell no!

ANNIE
(Turning to Playwright)
All right. Amy, what do you want? You called me-

PLAYWRIGHT
I did?

ANNIE
Yes, honey you did, and this is your one time, so make it count.

PLAYWRIGHT
I was trying to help a … well he's not a friend but I was trying to help him find-

ANNIE
That poor unfortunate who the buzzards are circling?
(nods)
Go on.

PLAYWRIGHT
And these guys stopped our train, I mean my apart- they stopped us from going somewhere. They wanted me to be … Etta, though sometimes they called her Esther. I guess that's the same person. They wanted me to come with them. I shouldn't … but something in me did. I asked them to grant the old man what he wanted. The death HE wanted-

KID
He got the one he deserved!

PLAYWRIGHT
Shut up-

ANNIE
Amy, don't let him take you into the gutter.
(pause)
So, bottom line is you don't want to go now-

SUNDANCE
Etta, please say yes-

ANNIE
Harry, no. Her decision. She'd be no good to you or any man if she doesn't want to be there. You want history to repeat itself?

BUTCH
This time I don't think she could leave.

PLAYWRIGHT
Please. Just make them go.

ANNIE
You should do that. I'll help, but YOU should do that. Otherwise, they might come back.
(Pulls Playwright to her-whispering)
They're outlaws. That's all I'm gonna say. Did you hear me?

PLAYWRIGHT
Yes. I'll tell them.

ANNIE
I'm right here.

PLAYWRIGHT
For just a moment I wanted to. I wanted to come with you both, I'll admit that. But it's gone. I'm sorry … Harry. You seem sweet in a way. You too, Butch … Robert … I'm so confused. Please just go. I can't be Etta. I have a feeling she couldn't be either.

SUNDANCE
You may be right.

BUTCH
It's ok sis … Amy. We'll go. Damn, damn … this felt so close.

KID
Like HELL!

Kid pulls his gun and : lights out.

Silence. Then whispering. Some of it sounds like its coming from the stage, while the rest, from different parts of the theater. Flashes of lightning, no wait … that's gunfire. It too comes from all over as if belonging to not just this battle but something long ago and constant. Spotlight on Annie and Playwright:

ANNIE
Amy, stay behind me and down.
(pause)
On second thought, take my pistol out of my belt. You know how to shoot?

PLAYWRIGHT
I don't know.

ANNIE
Maybe there's a little of her still in you, or you could pretend. Go on.

Lights out. Spotlight on Butch and Sundance.

SUNDANCE
This has all gone to hell.

BUTCH
I can fix it. Let me think …

SUNDANCE
No. Time for that's done.

Lights out. Spotlight on Kid .

KID
All of you bastards gotta know that the only killer here is me. You hear me Butch? Sundance? Miss Annie, I ain't got nothing to settle with you yet-how's about we keep it that way? Huh? What'ya say?

Lights out. More gunfire, which now almost seems like lightning.

KID
I'm savin you for last Miss Ettta. I'm doin you real slow. Mebbe while the lights goin out of old Sundance's eyes.

It's like a goddamn storm .

Light flashes up- we see all three groups. Lights down.

ANNIE
Stay right beside me. Hold with two hands if you must. Slowly, squeeze-

More gunfire.

ANNIE
That's the way.

Spotlight on Playwright and Annie.

ANNIE
I'm trying to get them to do the right thing.

PLAYWRIGHT
What are-

ANNIE
Don't worry about your aim. Sometimes, it's best to know when to miss.

Lights out. The storm intensifies. Then a huge ball of light as we see Sundance rush at Kid, guns drawn.

Dark. Silence.

BEAT
BEAT

Lights slowly up. Sundance standing over Kid's body.

SUNDANCE
Maybe killin' ain't so hard after all.

ANNIE
(More to herself)
It was mercy. Like putting a rabid dog out of its misery.

SUNDANCE
(Walking toward center)
Miss Amy? Miss Amy … if you don't mind, could you bring Etta back for a minute. Or what I thought was her. I ain't gonna do nothin but say goodbye. Did it long ago but not proper. Like to try again.

PLAYWRIGHT
(To Annie)
What should I do?

ANNIE
What does she want to do?

PLAYWRIGHT
I'm coming handsome. Say what you got to say. Miss Annie?

ANNIE
Harry, I don't feel any lies in the air right now. If I do …

SUNDANCE
I know.

They come almost together.

SUNDANCE
(Looking in her eyes)
There I am. The way I used to look to you. Hadn't seen that fella in a while.
(Beat)
You remember when I took you back on that ship?

PLAYWRIGHT
Yes. What about it?

SUNDANCE
I spent most of the time hopin' it would sink to the bottom of the sea.

PLAYWRIGHT
I wish it had.

SUNDANCE
Goodbye, Etta. I won’t look no more.
(*turns)*
Let’s go Butch.

Butch and Sundance exit carrying Kid’s body.

PLAYWRIGHT
(whispers)
Goodbye handsome. Goodbye Butch.

Two gunshots.

PLAYWRIGHT
Miss Annie?

ANNIE
They were outlaws.

Annie gently hugs the playwright and then exits. Slow fade to dark as we hear the wheezing of the biplane.
END OF SCENE.

EPILOGUE:
Parting isn't always sweet sorrow-sometimes it's just goodbye.

Lights dim. Playwright alone on stage in her apartment, on the floor, head in her hands. A.B appears and sits next to her and slowly stretches out. Long pause.

A.B.
(Finally)
Well, that was interesting.

PLAYWRIGHT
How so? All the adjectives in the world and you pick …

A.B.
Enlightening, then. More accurate and more honest. They aren't always the same thing. It was accurate in that I died alone in a desert. It was honest in that I died alone.

PLAYWRIGHT
I'm sorry?
(Beat)
I'm having a hard time processing sympathy at the moment.

A.B.
Quite all right. You have an unconscious empathy that I do appreciate.
(*Beat)*
That was an awkward "thank you".

PLAYWRIGHT
Are we done?

A.B.
I think so.

PLAYWRIGHT
What's it like?

A.B.
Sobering. What's that noise?

PLAYWRIGHT
I don't-ummm … wait, look … shit, I thought this-

A.B.
This isn't you?

A biplane(ok bicycle with wings, get with the concept!) roars in front of the stage and crashes. After a moment, ANTOINE de SAINT EXUPERY emerges, sunglasses on, cigarette dangling from his lips. So ordinary, so cool.

PLAYWRIGHT
(*Running to him)*
Are you ok?

ANTOINE
This is a warning. I don’t speak English.

PLAYWRIGHT
But? Umm, what do-

ANTOINE
Parlez-vous français?

PLAYWRIGHT
Oui en fait. Je ne parle pas couramment mais je peux comprendre.

ANTOINE
C'est excellent. Alors qui est-ce que je prends ?

PLAYWRIGHT
Prendre ?

ANTOINE
Oui, quelqu'un a envoyé un signal de détresse parce qu'il se souvenait.

PLAYWRIGHT
Remembered ? Souvenir de quoi ?

ANTOINE
Je ne sais pas.

A.B.
May I ask … ?

PLAYWRIGHT
He says he got a signal that someone needed rescuing ? because they were remembering.

A.B.
So which one-

PLAYWRIGHT
You, presumably.

A.B.
That makes sense. And so he decided to crash his plane?

PLAYWRIGHT
(To Antoine)
Et votre avion ?

ANTOINE
C'est bon. j'oublierai et tout ira bien.

PLAYWRIGHT
He says he will forget and everything will be fine.

ANTOINE
Le vieil homme est le bienvenu pour venir avec moi. Nous atteindrons l'oubli à travers les lumières à l'horizon. Je suis content de partager le mien avec lui, mais il faut se dépêcher.

PLAYWRIGHT
He’s offering you a ride to oblivion. It’s just beyond those lights, apparently.
(*To Antoine)*
Que se passe-t-il une fois sur place ?

ANTOINE
La mémoire est sans importance. L'imagination est ce qui compte.

PLAYWRIGHT
I guess once you’re there, you can remember whatever you want. Invent the rest.

A.B.
And I thought there was no heaven. Can I trust him to get us there ?

PLAYWRIGHT
Mon ami pense que tu es un piètre pilote.

ANTOINE
Un piètre pilote accompagné d'un auteur oublié. Qu'est-ce qui pourrait être mieux ? Je n'aime pas son écriture.

PLAYWRIGHT
(Laughing to A.B.)
Oh, don't worry about it. You two are going to get along fine.

A.B.
(hesitating)
Well, then …

PLAYWRIGHT
It's your call.
(Beat)
I honestly can't advise you. I mean memories are who we were. I don't think they always add up to who we are. You found an answer- did you like it ?

A.B.
(Kisses her hand)
It's been a pleasure.

PLAYWRIGHT
It's been … something. Goodbye, Ambrose.

The ensemble, now in street clothes, come out and one by one shake the author's hand while Antoine readies the plane. They are genuinely happy for him.

A.B.
(Getting in the plane)
The Marfa Lights. I think that's the last thing I saw.

The plane sputters off and the ensemble run after it and exit. The Playwright follows for a few steps and then waves. She goes back into her apartment, when she notices A.B.'s bag :

PLAYWRIGHT
Shit! Wait!

She grabs the bag and considers running, but the plane is gone.

PLAYWRIGHT
What does this mean? We can't be still connected. Fuck.

Drops bag and paces, lost in thought. She picks up the phone and calls.

PLAYWRIGHT
Ummm …hello? Hello? This is a message for Daniel. It's … umm … it's a Amy. I decided that I don't want-need to meet. It's ok. So, thank you. Goodbye. Goodbye, thank you.

She looks at the bag, curiously, and picks it up again.

PLAYWRIGHT
(Reading inscription on bag)
Immortality or bust ? Geez, ego much ?
(Looks inside)
(to audience)
It's not snooping. I mean it's not like I can get it back to him. Wow, what's this ?

She pulls out the old record.

PLAYWRIGHT
Holy shit ! This is an antique. Looks in decent shape.
(*Walks to phonograph)*
Believe me, there's nothing like vinyl.
(Hesitates)
Probably won't play. Just some old opera singer or something. Maybe, I could sell It. Oh well, here goes nothing.

Puts record on. Silence. Popping Noise.

PLAYWRIGHT
Yeah, it's not going to play.

Popping Noise
Popping Noise

PLAYWRIGHT
Okay, well I-

CHILDREN SINGING
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal

¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán-

She picks up the needle.

PLAYWRIGHT
OOOHHH, that just creepy! Ughhhh, children singing, old children singing, what the fuck?

Paces a bit. Looks back at the record.

PLAYWRIGHT
(Putting mask back on)
Was that it?

With the mask on she starts to walk away, but then stops and slowly walks back to the phonograph. She puts the needle on.

CHILDREN SINGING
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Koonex, koonex, palexen
Xik tu bin, xik tu bin, yokol k'in
Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán pal
¡Eya! ¡Eya! Tin uok'ol
Bey in uok´ol chichán-

Throws up her hands and walks away.

Silence. She stops. Popping Noise

PLAYWRIGHTS VOICE
I’m sorry, Amy, it just hurt too much.

Playwright freezes. Blackout.
END OF SCENE.

END OF PLAY.