

Buttonholes

by
Brough Hansen

“And though there are swamps and thick melancholy on earth, whoever has light feet runs even over mud and dances as on swept ice.”

– Nietzsche

“You can’t always get what you want.”

– The Rolling Stones

The Ensemble

Kaz – M

Anja – F

Walker – M

Penny – F

Teddy – M

Mark – M

Gavin – M

Otto – M

Individual actors can be any race and the ensemble can be any age as long as it reads as a group of peers.

Buttonholes should have the feel of a story devised in the moment by an ensemble of actors. Many of the stage directions are suggestions that indicate the kind of theatricality we're going for: actor driven storytelling that uses only what is essential and provides ample room for the audience's imagination. The entire ensemble is responsible for the world of the play at any given moment– setting, supporting characters, abstract moments, music, and staging– and should remain in the space the whole time. If an actor is not in a scene, he or she will watch from an 'offstage' area that's still in the room and lend attention and support to the main action.

I encourage diverse casting for the ensemble and unconventional casting, from within the ensemble, for the supporting roles.

Buttonholes.

A space.

The ensemble enters and waits for the audience to settle.

The actors take a breath and begin.

ALL

Welcome to our play!

PENNY

Title!

KAZ

‘Buttonholes.’ By Brough Hansen.

They applaud and are on the move.

ANJA

Obscure Epigraph!

OTTO

(dramatically)

‘And though there are swamps and thick melancholy on earth, whoever has light feet runs even over mud and dances as on swept ice.’ – Nietzsche

ALL

(collective sigh)

Ahhh.

MARK

Pop Epigraph!

PENNY

‘You can’t always get what you want.’

ALL

(singing)

But if you try sometimmes

You might find

You get what you need!

Laughter and applause. They’re having fun.

Characters!	GAVIN
Anja.	ANJA
Walker.	WALKER
Mark.	MARK
Teddy.	TEDDY
Otto.	OTTO
Gavin.	GAVIN
Kaz.	KAZ
And Penny.	PENNY
Setting!	ANJA
A small city on a lake.	TEDDY
Among others.	ANJA
Okay. Everyone ready?	MARK
Ready, yep etc.	ALL

KAZ

The year is 1990.

They sing Madonna's 'Vogue' with the famous pose.

ALL

(singing)

Strike a pose.

Strike a pose.

PENNY

The Good!

MARK

Teflon Don Gone!

TEDDY

Mapplethorpe Cincinnati Scandal!

OTTO

T-Rex found in... South Dakota?

Applause.

WALKER

The Bad!

ANJA

Leonard Bernstein Bows Out.

TEDDY

The Cold War Continues!

MARK

The Gulf War Gets Started!

KAZ

Plainfield Tornado Terrorizes Prairie State!

An actor starts spinning, a tornado. He or she spins and spins and the ensemble is caught in the wind and they spin— it may even become fun, with laughter and play and joy— until there is carnage and destruction.

ANJA

The year is 1990 and we're graduating from high school!

The ensemble cheers and throws their hands in the air, tossing graduation caps.

They shake hands and hug; they sing the chorus to 'Pomp and Circumstance.'

ALL

(singing)

Land of Hope and Glory, Mother of the Free,
How shall we extol thee, who are born of—

PENNY

It's the night of our high school graduation.

The scene shifts.

KAZ

Kaz and Anja's parents rent a park by the lake.

TEDDY

A crew installs a large wooden dance floor.

GAVIN

Surrounded by Chinese lanterns that glow with white light.

MARK

It's a formal affair.

OTTO

Black tie.

ANJA

For friends and family of the graduates.

MARK

A live band plays old standards.

PENNY

There's a fireworks display.

ALL
(watching fireworks)

Oooo. Ahhh.

WALKER
Walker sneaks in a flask.

TEDDY
Everyone has a drink or two.

OTTO
Not too much.

ANJA
Just enough that we all...

She looks to the others for the right word.

KAZ
Lift.

ANJA
Yes. Lift.

GAVIN
Up and up.

TEDDY
It's on nights like this that real magic happens.

GAVIN
Secrets feel safe and come out of hiding.

WALKER
The Old evaporates and the New springs into being.

MARK
Love, usually shy, puts on her finest dress and greets the moon.

PENNY
And Chaz Laughlin streaks across the dance floor.

Chaz runs by and they all shield their eyes in disgust. They
laugh.

Music begins to play softly. 'Moonglow' or something like it.

They come together in pairs and dance. Scenes break off from the central party.

Mark approaches Teddy.

MARK

Checking out the water?

TEDDY

Getting some air.

They look out at the lake.

TEDDY

How's the punch?

MARK

It's pink lemonade and I detect a hint of pineapple.

TEDDY

Fancy.

A pause.

MARK

Congratulations. On the—

TEDDY

Huh? Oh. Thanks.

MARK

'The John F. Marshall Award.' You're the MVP of Debate.

TEDDY

There are worse things to be.

MARK

Anyway. I wanted to say congratulations and... It's been fun arguing with you these last four years.

TEDDY

You too.

An awkward pause. Mark starts to leave.

TEDDY

Do you really believe the world is six thousand years old?

MARK

Six thousand four hundred and twenty seven years old, actually. Plus or minus a century.

TEDDY

Why?

MARK

I could explain the math, but it would take a while.

TEDDY

It's not the— I don't understand. You're so smart. How can someone with your intelligence actually believe something that... I'm sorry.

MARK

I'm used to it.

TEDDY

I do want to know.

MARK

Why I believe in the Bible?

(he thinks)

Let me ask you this. Why do you believe in science?

TEDDY

Because it's testable.

MARK

You're not a scientist.

TEDDY

No, but—

MARK

You trust scientists.

TEDDY

Yes.

MARK

Why?

TEDDY

Because I believe in their Method.

MARK

So, it's like this. Imagine that the world is a big experiment and the Bible is notebook of the One conducting the research. You could say I believe in His method.

Teddy kisses Mark.

MARK

Woah!

TEDDY

Shit!

MARK

Shoot. Shoot.

TEDDY

Shit! I'm sorry I— I've had a few drinks and—

MARK

That caught me off guard.

TEDDY

This is...

MARK

I'm straight.

TEDDY

Totally.

MARK

I'm not into...

TEDDY

No. I know. I wasn't thinking.

Beat.

MARK

I'm gonna, uh—

TEDDY

Yep. Me too. In a minute. After you, not...

Mark heads off.

TEDDY

I'm right behind you.

Teddy speaks to the sky.

TEDDY

Oh, Great Experimenter save me from thy cruel laboratory.

A twirl. A laugh. A lift. We find Anja dancing with Kaz. They smile about something only they know.

ANJA

Mom's drunk.

KAZ

I know.

ANJA

I can always tell because she starts to wink at everyone.

KAZ

She does, doesn't she? It's like:

Kaz does an impersonation of his Mom winking. Anja laughs.

ANJA

Gavin asked me why she kept winking at him at dinner the other night.

KAZ

Gavin.

ANJA

Here we go.

KAZ

He doesn't make you happy.

ANJA

I'm eighteen. I don't know what makes me happy.

(small pause)

Where's your other half?

KAZ

Ha-ha. I saw him earlier...

ANJA

There he is.

(calling)

Otto!

Otto comes over to them.

KAZ

Are you just wandering around the dance floor?

OTTO

Yeah. I don't know.

ANJA

Are you having a good time?

OTTO

Not really.

There's an awkward pause.

OTTO

Welp. See you later.

He leaves.

ANJA

He is...

KAZ

That's Otto.

They dance for a second.

KAZ

Am I doing the right thing?

ANJA

With what?

KAZ

Going to Princeton. I know I'm doing the 'right thing,' the thing I'm supposed to do—

ANJA

You mean the thing that Dad wants you to do.

Kaz is silent.

ANJA

Is it what you want?

KAZ

Honestly? I want to move to the woods.

ANJA

Are you high?

KAZ

No.

ANJA

Let me see your eyes.

KAZ

A little bit. With Otto— earlier— but I'm serious.

ANJA

You want to move to the woods. And what?

KAZ

Write. Think.

ANJA

Well... we gain access to our inheritance after college. Do it then.

Kaz is lost in thought.

ANJA

You really are the special one.

KAZ

The special one?

ANJA

They've always loved you a little bit more.

KAZ

Anja—

ANJA

It's okay. I feel the same way.

KAZ

Our parents love both of us.

ANJA

(with sad smile)

I know.

The song ends. Everyone claps.

PENNY

Dear Walker,

The dance floor clears and we're in another place with Penny and Walker.

PENNY

I've always been the fat girl. Or at least the chubby girl. It was worse freshman year cause I grew my bangs out over my eyebrows and decided it would be a good idea to wear sweaters to class and play the tuba in the marching band. Mistake.

(beat)

You didn't notice me freshman year, which was okay with me because I was preoccupied with my boyfriend. He was pretty scrawny. Played flute in the band. We were like some modern day version of Jack Sprat. We would go over to his house and watch anime on cartoon network and I even let him touch my boobs, which was fun even though he had cold hands, and I taught him all about Marilyn Monroe movies and how to cook a mean cheese casserole. He dumped me for a cellist that was also in math club or whatever they call it. Anywho, this is a letter about you and me and how I feel about you.

(to ensemble)

What do you think so far?

They shake their heads 'no,' cut throats, give thumbs down etc. Walker listens.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Second draft.

Dear Walker,

Remember that party we went to in that barn at that kid's place that lives in the boonies and we all went outside to where they had the fire set up and you brought the handle of Captain Morgan and we passed it around and you did an impersonation of your wrestling coach that killed us, just killed us, and me especially and we sipped luke warm bud light from those red plastic cups and you threw your arm around me and said 'you're cool' and my toes curled in my boots and you gave me a cigarette and I lied that I smoked and I coughed and you smelled like tobacco and wet grass for some reason and you passed me the handle without looking at me and our fingers touched and and and and *God*. That *night*. Do you remember that night?

The ensemble performs an abstract dance while singing a doo-wop style love song.

PENNY

Do you ever think— here's a question— do you ever think that all the secrets of the world are locked away some place, in some secret, circular safe at the center of the earth, like they're at the exact center of the world, and even though they're all locked down there and nobody knows about them, we actually do know about them? Don't we? We already know everything. The way I've always known you and when I met you and felt that tingle in my groin and up my spine and in my mouth and under the soles of my feet I wasn't feeling love, no, but recognition. Yes! That's what love is, recognition of something we lost a long time ago that we forgot we ever had, like I always knew you were meant for— to be— us. We. Are.

I want to curl up into a ball that you could put into your pocket like a watch on a chain.

All of me, all of me is yours.

I'm yours.

I'm yours.

I'm

yours.

She is lying on the ground muttering 'I'm yours.'

WALKER
Penny? You okay?

PENNY
The world is spinning.

WALKER
Uh-oh. You throw up yet?

She shakes her head no.

WALKER
First of all, you're on your right side. You need to flip onto your left.

PENNY
Why?

WALKER
You'll see.

He helps her flip. A beat.

PENNY
How'd you do that?

WALKER
It's a trick.

Brief pause.

PENNY
My foot is numb.

WALKER
It fell asleep?

PENNY
No. Sometimes it goes numb.

She burps.

PENNY
Why aren't you drunk?

WALKER
I'm drunk.

PENNY

No you're not.

WALKER

I'm tipsy.

PENNY

You don't have to throw up. You don't have to fl- (hiccup) flip onto your left side.

Gavin and Anja pass arm in arm. Walker watches them.

PENNY

Where'd you go?

Penny sits up and sees Anja, notices Walker looking at her. She flops back down.

PENNY

Fucking Anja.

WALKER

I thought you two were friends.

PENNY

I lost weight and we became friends.

WALKER

You think she's shallow.

PENNY

I'm stating a fact. That's not my point.

WALKER

There's a point?

PENNY

Yes. Fucking Anja. Because it's like the same with every guy. They hold her up as this like Perfect Woman.

(impersonating guys)

Dude, she's so hot and so chill, she's so creativvvve and doesn't have to wear makeup and listens to Phish and plays the harmonica-

WALKER

She plays the harmonica?

PENNY

Barf. And I actually have to barf.

WALKER

Sit still.

She does.

PENNY

She's an excuse. You don't have to get serious about any other girl because you're longing for Anja. It's safe. It's a safe (hiccup) crush.

(beat)

I'm gonna puke.

Walker holds her hair. She pukes in the grass.

PENNY

Gross.

Walker lets her hair down. She sits up.

PENNY

I love you. You know that. Everyone knows that. I wrote you a letter about it. Here.

She hands him the letter.

PENNY

I know you like, *like* Anja or whatever, but I think you should give me a chance. I think we'd be good together. There.

(beat)

I don't have to puke anymore. Huh.

Walker offers her a hand.

WALKER

Ready to get back to the party?

PENNY

That's okay. I think I'm going to si (hiccup) sit for a minute.

Walker starts to leave. He stops.

WALKER

What are you doing tomorrow?

PENNY

I dunno. Sleeping.

WALKER

You wanna hang out or something?

PENNY

Hang out? With you?

(smiling)

I'd like that.

WALKER

Cool.

They watch each other for a second. Walker leaves.

PENNY

(celebrating)

Yes!

MARK

The year is 1995!

The ensemble sings the a cappella opening of 'Kiss from a Rose' by Seal.

ALL

(singing)

Ba ya ya ba da dup ba da da da ba ya ya.

PENNY

The Good!

WALKER

Toy Story Terrific!

ANJA

Bye Bye Bosnian War!

WALKER

Space Shuttle Atlantis docks with Mir Space Station!

The ensemble forms the space shuttle and the space station. It docks. They clap.

PENNY

The Bad!

MARK

O.J. Simpson Trial of the Century!

GAVIN

‘If the glove don’t fit–’

ALL

‘You must acquit!’

KAZ

Saldívar Shoots Selena.

PENNY

Actor Christopher Reeve paralyzed in horse riding accident.

A somber pause.

KAZ

Oklahoma City.

In this section, and sections like it, assign lines to accommodate staging.

At approximately 9am on the morning of April 19th, 1995

a veteran of the Persian Gulf War named Timothy McVeigh

parks a Ryder truck armed with a three ton, ammonium nitrate fuel bomb

near the day care center of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building

in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The explosion occurs at 9:02 a.m.

One hundred and sixty eight souls meet their end that day

including nineteen children.

A seismometer at the Oklahoma City Science Museum five miles away registers the blast a 3.0 on the Richter scale.

McVeigh wears a t-shirt that day.

‘Sic semper tyrannis.’

Thus always to tyrants.

The words of Brutus.

The words of Booth.

He says he did it for liberty.

He says he did it for revenge.

For Waco.

And Ruby Ridge.

The Jury deliberates for twenty three hours.

Guilty.

Guilty.

Guilty.

Guilty.

Guilty.

Guilty.

Guilty.

Guilty.

Guilty.

Guilty.

Guilty.

There's one holdout. After a moment of pity, reluctantly:

Guilty.

He speaks no last words before they fill his veins with poison
while the victims' families watch with tired rage from a closed circuit television.
Timothy James McVeigh leaves this world on a summer day in Terre Haute.
The seismometer at the Oklahoma City Science Museum
doesn't register a blip.

LAMARC

Otto! Otto! Where is that boy?

Big shift. A bustling office. Paul Lamarc, a manically fast-talking billionaire inventor, tears onstage.

OTTO

Yes, Mr. Lamarc?

LAMARC

It's Paul, Otto. Paul. Mr. Lamarc was my father's name. And my grandfather's name. And my uncle's name. I guess my family's full of Mr. Lamarc. Our great downfall. Ha-ha!
What are you working on?

OTTO

Um—

LAMARC

Drop it. I'm putting together a new team for a chip design and I want you on it! What do you know about photons?

OTTO

Otto graduates from Cal Tech and begins working for Paul Lamarc, the self-made billionaire inventor who's early innovations in microchips single-handedly made Silicon Valley.

LAMARC

Microchips are faster than ever before. Why?

OTTO

Because—

LAMARC

Because we're cramming more processing power into less space. Less is not more: *more* is more— in less space! You follow me?

OTTO

Uh—

LAMARC

It's *Moore's* Law, my boy! Moore's law! They say there's no limit, but there is! And when we reach that limit, Lamarc Technology is going to be one step ahead. Why?

OTTO

Photons?

LAMARC

Light, Otto, light! And what's faster than light?

OTTO

Nothing.

LAMARC

Ha-ha!

OTTO

Every year top graduates from the best universities in the world vie for an entry level position at the company's headquarters outside Palo Alto. Otto had only been working there for six months when one day, out of the blue—

LAMARC

You.

OTTO

Me?

(to us)

Lamarc sized Otto up and spit out a mathematical riddle.

LAMARC

Imagine you have seven prisoners awaiting execution...

OTTO

Otto could barely take in what he was saying. The great Paul Lamarc was talking to him! Otto! A lowly first year employee!

LAMARC

...If each prisoner can only wear one colored hat, what method can they devise to save themselves? You think about it and get back to me—

OTTO

You can use modular arithmetic.

LAMARC

(surprised)

Show me.

OTTO

Otto scribbled the answer on a scrap of paper and handed it to Lamarc. He read it over... And Otto got it right. Lamarc said he was impressed with Otto's 'processing speed,' a trait he considered indicative of 'a first rate intellect.' Otto decided not mention that he'd heard the riddle before.

LAMARC

You stick with me from now on. Don't speak or ask questions, remember everything you see and hear and you'll be fine.

OTTO

Fine for what, sir?

LAMARC

For life, my boy, life!

OTTO

Jean Paul Lamarc grew up in Lincoln Nebraska, the only child of a French immigrant and a Midwestern farm girl. His first invention was a remote control helicopter. He crashed into the electrical wires above his parents' house and caused a neighborhood-wide blackout. He was twelve years old.

By the age of twenty, he had started and sold two companies. Ever restless, he developed an endless series of hobbies: he became a biathlete, designed and self-tested a rocket car, and earned a PhD in physics from the University of Nebraska on the side. By twenty five, he was a millionaire.

His greatest contribution to the world is the microchip. Microchips are the beating heart of every modern technology. Lamarc's are the fastest in the business.

LAMARC

Otto, I broke the land speed record.

OTTO

Congratulations, sir.

LAMARC

I told my wife and she said, ‘along with the speed talking record.’ Ha-*ha*! Oh, that got me.

OTTO

Otto spends five years absorbing every word Lamarc says. For some reason Lamarc doesn’t allow him to take notes, so every night Otto writes down every word he can remember in a vain effort to consolidate Lamarc’s relentless brilliance. It fills notebooks.

LAMARC

Damn it! Some Italian beat my record! I was anticipating this. Otto! You’re coming with me to Salt Lake. I have a trick up my sleeve. A rocket car that I haven’t shown to anyone, including my wife. Time to teach these Euros about American speed! First place in business, first place in rocket propelled vehicles! Ha-*ha*!

OTTO

They fly to Utah and meet a Guinness judge on the wide, starched plane that is the Great Salt Lake. It’s dusk. The sky is violet and a faint, pink halo encircles the horizon on all sides. Distant, snow-capped mountains look on like drowsy giants. It feels like a different planet.

LAMARC

Otto, take the time. I don’t trust these Guinness judges as far as— what’s the expression? Shooting star!

Lamarc points to the sky. They all look.

OTTO

The star burns out and Lamarc is in the car.

Lamarc gives a thumbs up. Otto and the judge hold out their timers.

GUINNESS JUDGE

Timers ready? Three, two...

Stillness.

OTTO

It happens so fast. A tumble. An explosion. Mouths screaming silence. All under that alien sky in the middle of No-Place.

Lamarc and the judge leave the stage.

OTTO

With Lamarc gone, a power struggle ensues at the company. Business sags. Stock holders lose confidence. Its value plummets. Properties are sold to pay off debts. Employees can be heard in the hallways whispering dirty words like 'liquidation' and 'aggressive takeover.' Bankruptcy. The ravenous free market swallows it whole. All that remains are a handful of patents and a holding company, half digested detritus in the gut of the capitalist shark.

Years later Otto reads through his old notebooks on Lamarc. He types them up and pitches the idea of a biography to a few publishers, but nobody's interested. The world is looking another way, distracted by cellphones and computer screens, the very devices Lamarc helped create.

The Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. materializes: a wall of actors whispering the forgotten names. Mark sits nearby eating lunch and listening.

MEMORIAL WALL

(whispers)

Robert Morton Kail, Frank Melvin Kaiser, Charles Manuwahl Kulani... Dionisio Sanchez-Ortiz, James Edward Sand, Joel Alexis Sandberg... Richard Monroe Dykes, Alfred John Dymersky, Charles Franklin Dyson...

Teddy walks by.

TEDDY

Mark?

MARK

Teddy?

They aren't sure what to do by way of greeting. They shake hands, laugh.

TEDDY

What are you doing in Washington?

MARK

I work on the hill. I'm an intern for Tim Pitt.

TEDDY

The congressman? That's, uh—

MARK

What about you?

TEDDY

I'm a reporter for the Post.

MARK

Ah.

(hands up, joking)

No comment.

Polite laughter turns into polite smiles. A pause.

TEDDY

Do you always eat lunch at the Vietnam Memorial?

MARK

Sometimes. Off season it can be nice. It's...

TEDDY

Solemn.

MARK

Quiet. And look at this.

TEDDY

Charles Franklin Dyson.

An actor steps from the wall and salutes.

MARK

Uncle on my Dad's side.

He fades back into the wall.

MARK

It's silly, but I like to eat near him.

TEDDY

You mean 'near his name.'

MARK

No, near him. Near his soul.

TEDDY

That's cool. I totally respect that.

MARK

You haven't changed at all.

A pause. To their mutual surprise, they're comfortable together.

TEDDY

It is quiet. It's nice.

Teddy checks his watch.

TEDDY

I have to go. I'm on assignment. We should—

MARK

Do you want to go to a country show with me tonight?

TEDDY

Like a concert?

MARK

Have you heard of Wanda Lark?

TEDDY

Uh, no.

MARK

She gave Congressman Pitt backstage passes for her show. He can't make it so he gave them to me and I was going to take a friend, but she bailed. Are you free?

TEDDY

Me at a country show?

(beat)

Why not? If only because I'm a fan of irony.

The ensemble erupts into applause. A concert forms around Wanda Lark, a larger-than-life Texan.

WANDA

How y'all doin' tonight, Washington D.C.?

Cheers.

WANDA

I don't know how ya'all live here. You got Slick Willy in the Oval Office.

Boos.

WANDA

And a congress that's broke as my first truck.

Laughs.

RANDOM AUDIENCE MEMBER

I love you, Wanda!

WANDA

Another man I used to date.

Laughs.

WANDA

This one is from my latest album, 'Tennessee Valley Authority.' One, two, three, four!

DORKY ASSISTANT

Great show, Wanda!

The concert's over and we're backstage. Random people mingle.

WANDA

Get me a shot of tequila will ya, sugar?

Wanda makes a bee-line toward Mark and Teddy.

MARK

She's coming this way!

WANDA

(to Mark)

And who might you be?

MARK

Me?

WANDA

No, hon, the other prettiest boy in the room.

MARK

Mark.

WANDA

Mark. You with the press?

MARK

Puh— puh— Pitt.

WANDA

Pitt what? Pittsburgh? Arm *pit*—

MARK

Pitt, um— uh—

TEDDY

Tim.

MARK

Tim. Tim Pitt.

WANDA

Ol' Pitty! You don't say? I heard he might be comin' tonight. I don't mind that he sent you instead. Mark.

Mark swallows.

WANDA

Listen up! I want ya'all out, ya hear? I've got business to take care of.

Nobody moves.

WANDA

Out. *Now!*

The others leave.

WANDA

(to Mark)

Woah, where do you think you're goin'?

(Calling off)

Paige!

The dorky assistant enters.

DORKY ASSISTANT

I'm sorry, Miss Lark I couldn't find your Tequila—

WANDA

Can it, sugar. I want you to keep...

TEDDY

Teddy.

WANDA

Ted here, company. I've got some policy suggestions for Congressman Pitt I want to share with Mark. I'll be in my dressing room.

Wanda pulls Mark away. Teddy and the dorky assistant are alone.

TEDDY

So... Where's the bowl of green M&M's?

DORKY ASSISTANT

I'm sorry?

TEDDY

Never mind.

She reaches for Teddy's belt.

TEDDY

What are you doing?

DORKY ASSISTANT

Miss Lark told me to keep you company.

TEDDY

Honey, you are barking up the wrong tree.

Mark sprints in pulling up his pants.

WANDA

You queer! You little faggot! Security! Security!

MARK

We gotta go!

TEDDY

What happened?

MARK

Go go!

WANDA

I'm gonna cut your winky off!

Two security guards appear.

WANDA

Get 'em boys!

They chase Teddy and Mark all around the space.

TEDDY

Wait– they're gone.

Teddy bends over and catches his breath. Mark walks it off.

TEDDY

What happened in there?

MARK

She... tried to... and I...

TEDDY

Oh.

(beat)

Don't worry about it. She's a star and you got nervous. It happens.

MARK

It wasn't that. I've never been with a woman.

(short pause)

Why is everybody so obsessed with sex? It's like everybody. Everywhere. All the time. I see it on television, I overhear conversations about it in restaurants, on the streets, in restrooms. 'How much are you getting laid?' That's all that matters. How much are you getting laid? How much is Bill Clinton getting laid? What about Hilary? Magic Johnson? The Pope! My *grandmother*! It's all we think about in this godless country, all we talk about. Sex! Sex sex sex sex sex sex sex sex sex sex sex sex sex sex *sex*! It's like a *swarm*. Every step I take, everywhere I go, I can't escape it! I'm so *sick* of it. Ugh!

(beat)

She reached in my pants and... grabbed it.

Teddy starts laughing.

MARK

What's so funny?

TEDDY

(laughing)

Nothing. Sorry.

MARK

She molested me.

This sends him over the top.

MARK

I'm out of here.

TEDDY

Come on— don't.

He stops him.

TEDDY

I didn't mean to be insensitive.

MARK

It's not funny.

TEDDY

(fighting it)

I know. It's just that...

(bursting)

Wanda Lark grabbed your johnson!

He loses it. Mark loosens up.

MARK

She did, didn't she?

TEDDY

(wiping tears)

She did, she did.

MARK

She grabbed it.

TEDDY

(as Wanda)

Mine!

Teddy has lost it. Mark laughs a little.

MARK

I get it. It's funny.

Teddy notices Mark make the effort.

TEDDY

Thanks for inviting me tonight. It was really fun. Despite—

MARK

No, yeah. It was fun.

A beat.

TEDDY

You want to get a drink?

MARK

I don't drink.

TEDDY

Jesus, what *do* you do?

MARK

I read the Bible and play penuckle. And don't call me Jesus.

Teddy laughs.

TEDDY

Come on. I'll buy you a Shirley Temple.

PENNY

The year after she graduates from college, Penny and Walker get married!

Penny and Walker kiss and the crowd cheers! They sing a brief rendition of Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March'.

They are...
WALKER

WALKER PENNY
Broke. Broke.

Everything shifts. New pacing. New Story.

Oye, vato!
CARLO

WALKER
Walker dropped out of college his sophomore year. He works for a landscaping company.

CARLO
How's it coming?

WALKER
We have a problem.

He points at the ground.

CARLO
Put a madre.

Carlo spits. Mrs. Greenblatt, an eccentric old woman, rushes toward them.

MRS. GREENBLATT
Hellooo!

CARLO
Hello, Mrs. Greenblatt.

MRS. GREENBLATT
I was watching your *conclave* from the french windows. What are we discussing?

CARLO
We cannot build your pond, ma'am.

MRS. GREENBLATT
Why ever not?

WALKER
Your property was built on a big rock.

MRS. GREENBLATT

A 'big rock.'

CARLO

It's solid granite.

MRS. GREENBLATT

Oh, dear. And I've already ordered the coy.

PENNY

Penny gets a job at a retirement home. Good morning, Mr. Weber.

Penny helps a very old man into a wheelchair.

MR. WEBER

Penelope, have I ever told you how I used to work on Madison Avenue?

PENNY

Clifford R. Weber Junior. He always addresses Penny by her full name.

MR. WEBER

I was a numbers man. Nixon hired me to work on his campaign, you know.

PENNY

Penny likes to sit with him on her lunch break.

MR. WEBER

I wanted to fight Hitler. They sent me to the Pacific instead. I was part of the force that was going to invade Japan— that is until Truman dropped those bombs. They say he saved millions of American lives.

(beat)

Hard to measure human life. It's not like baking. Half a cup of Penelope, a table spoon of old man Weber.

Penny laughs.

PENNY

Some nights, after she's put everyone else to sleep, she goes to his room and he tells her stories from his life.

MR. WEBER

I was on leave in San Diego...

He darts up, young again, and meets his sailor friends.

SAILOR 1

Heads up, boys.

Across the room they see a group of women. They wave at the men, giggling and flirting. Vera, played by Penny, smiles coyly at Mr. Weber.

SAILOR 1

Woah, Momma! I think she likes me!

SAILOR 2

Not so fast. She's looking at Cliff.

The others disperse and Vera and Cliff meet in the middle.

MR. WEBER

Cliff.

VERA

Vera.

The ensemble hums an old love song, maybe a reprise of the standard we've already heard. They dance.

VERA

Anyone ever tell you that you look like Cary Grant? Only...

MR. WEBER

Shorter?

VERA

I didn't want to say it.

MR. WEBER

Anyone ever tell you that you look like Rita Hayworth? Only...

VERA

Go on.

MR. WEBER

Only you're more pretty.

She spins back into Penny.

MR. WEBER

Every Sunday we met in town for a date. We'd walk along the beach and hold hands. It was old fashioned, you know. Courting.

PENNY

A lost art.

MR. WEBER

We married after the war. Moved to New York. I got a job at a big agency. Worked there my whole life. How many people can say that today? Vera's gone. My children have moved all over the country. You're all I have in the world.

(a pause)

Goodnight.

Mr. Weber leaves.

PENNY

In some, small way, she loved him.

Penny collapses on the ground.

PENNY

Ah! Walker? Walk?

Walker rushes on.

WALKER

What happened?

PENNY

I can't feel my leg.

WALKER

What do you mean? Does it hurt?

PENNY

It's like it's not even there.

WALKER

I'll call an ambulance.

PENNY

Wait.

She feels her leg.

PENNY

It's gone.

Walker helps her up and the rest of the ensemble rushes onstage.

OTTO

We now present:

ALL

Kaz's Trip Around the World!

Kaz graduates from Princeton

and his inheritance legally transfers to his name.

Now he's

well

loaded!

So he takes off

to South America!

He lands in Buenos Aires at midnight.

He showers and shaves and walks to a club.

He catches a conquistadora giving him eyes from the bar.

All it takes is the smattering of AP Spanish that he remembers

and within an hour they are on their way back to the hostel.

Nights have taste. Did you know that?

Some nights taste like butterscotch.

Some like bourbon.

Some nights taste like salt.

Blood.

Semen.

Earth.

Kaz's first night in Argentina

like a good malbec

is a mixture.

His lips touch the skin of that Spanish Goddess

he inhales her hair and neck

and he tastes

unwashed strawberries

mixed with soap

and coffee.

Fresh ground coffee.

He likes Buenos Aires.

He spends six weeks in South America. It's a land of

pueblos with stucco churches and stone plazas

barefoot kids playing soccer and happy-sad families

melancholy malls hawking first world fragments.

He listens to the roaring vortex of Iguazu Falls

the gaping wound that God left

when he tore out the heart of the world.

He skis the metal mountains of Bariloche

gets so drunk in a pool bar that he kisses a man

and wakes up in a cabin on a lake.

The hangover feels like two steel thumbs pressing into his temples.

That morning, out on the balcony

he watches the ghost dawn spill over the water

and a peace enters his heart.

The peace that comes from being

lost

from non-being

from being...

Held

in the arms of The Land of

Incas

and Olmecs.

Conquest.

Caballeros.

Gringo tourists.

A land with the fair skin of the Old World

and ancient, Indian eyes.

Where I?

Me here.

Up next: *Europe!*

He flies to Rome.

The way the light hits the buildings,
the whole city looks covered in gold.
Cities have smells. Did you know that?
And Rome smells like
warm dust
on a book
in an Alexandrian library.
He sees the sights!
The Colosseum!
The Sistine Chapel!
The Trevi Fountain!
The Parthenon!
He travels the countryside.
Faster!
Pompeii!
Ashes preserve corpses of the screaming dead.
Sienna!
Wine and wheat and medieval towns.
Cinque Terre!
Candy colored villas overlooking the Mediterranean
a sunlit, sapphire sea.
Italy tastes like...

Pizza.

Seriously?

He doesn't get lucky.

No.

Sex only finds people that want to be found.

And Kaz

our lovely, lonely Kaz

is hiding

in this land of tourists and time.

He visits Germany

and Amsterdam

Paris

and Portugal

Munich

and London.

How long in Europe?

Too long.

Europe chips away at Kaz

like a sculptor shaping his finest work.

The weeks drag on

and no new form emerges.

Michelangelo rescued David from a block of marble

but by the time that continent had its way with Kaz...

He heads east

like Marco Polo

from the West to the Orient.

He has a cup of coffee in Moscow

snaps a photograph of Mumbai

and lands in Seoul, Korea.

He discovers an amusement park set in a jungle.

It could be a Six Flags

if not for the sea of black hair

and a surrounding forest that shaded empires.

He flies to Tokyo

Australia

New Zealand

Hawaii.

He couldn't tell you anything about them.

If you travel too long

countries come and go like...

like...

strangers passing on the street.

Somewhere along the way,

Kaz finds what he sought all along.

A Truth:

the world

is the world.

It's as happy or sad as the witness.

The one thing Kaz had always known

and had never dared admit

is that he is sad.

Quite sad.

He always had been

and always would be.

That thought

ironically enough

makes him smile.

He flies home direct from Honolulu.

And as he descends below the clouds over that final airport

sinking into the overcast ocean of late summer gloom

eyes vacant

too-long beard

head full of empty

moments from walking the streets of America

banal, brutal, beautiful America

he looks out the window

and bursts into tears.

Kaz smiles sadly.

The plane touches down

and he knows

he will ever be the same.

No.

Not ever.

Never again.

KAZ

Dear Anja,

The world's too

I'm going away.

For a while.

I don't know when

KAZ (CONT'D)

Please tell Mom

And Dad

I am

Love

Us

ANJA

Intermission.

The ensemble leaves the space.

Act Two.

The ensemble enters. The audience settles. Gavin and Anja begin.

GAVIN

Gavin and Anja graduate from college and move to California!

Cheers from the ensemble.

ANJA

Anja begins work on an organic farm.

GAVIN

Gavin joins a venture capital firm named Chelsea and Associates.

ANJA

Anja's job doesn't pay much, but she has help from her inheritance.

GAVIN

Gavin needs to make money.

Shift. A chaotic atmosphere.

GAVIN

It's the beginning of the dot com bubble. Nerd is the new cool. CEO's are ex-geeks that wear surfer shorts and longboard to work. Companies like Chelsea are cutting million dollar checks for the next Big Idea. The competition is fierce, the prize high. It's the wild west.

Gavin's recruiting class is a vicious snake pit of Ivy Leaguers that sharpened their fangs working for investment banks and consulting firms. The atmosphere is cut throat, to put it mildly. He has one advantage over all of them.

At the age of ten, Gavin caught a case of bacterial meningitis. It was so bad, the doctors told his family he wouldn't make it. He was bedridden for months, experiencing the worst pain of his life. It felt like a thousand mealworms gnawed on his insides while orange-hot needles stabbed him in the spine. The pain was so intense and lasted for so long that eventually... he got used to it. The worse it got, the more impervious he became. And as the months of unceasing agony wore on, a surprising thing happened. He began to love it. The experience taught him an invaluable secret about life: that underneath the mangled surface of the worst sensations a human can experience— pain, nausea, exhaustion— lays a hidden aquifer of pure, black *endurance*. Gavin can outwork anybody.

GAVIN (CONT'D)

They promote him to junior vice president!

Cheers, high fives.

GAVIN

Gavin wants more than money. He wants influence, to be a Titan of Silicon Valley! He wants colleagues to quake in his presence, heads to turn when he sits down at a restaurant, mouths to whisper while he waits in line for a hot dog at a Giants game.

BASEBALL FANS

Who is he? Do I know him? Who is he?

GAVIN

One day, he gets his chance. A guy named Otto sends him an email.

OTTO

Otto says he went to high school with Gavin.

GAVIN

Gavin doesn't remember him.

OTTO

Otto has an idea.

GAVIN

They meet at *Zane's*, a popular fusion cafe.

They sit at a restaurant.

OTTO

Otto shows Gavin the blueprints for his new invention: a photon microchip.

GAVIN

I'll need to take this to some people to confirm.

OTTO

Absolutely not.

GAVIN

Chelsea's not going to blindly invest in an untested technology.

OTTO

I'll prove it works.

GAVIN

Gavin find himself in Otto's garage, which he's converted into a makeshift lab.

Four actors, that will play the microchips, stand across from each other in pairs.

OTTO

This is a standard silicon microchip. Watch the speed of the connection.

Otto nods to the first pair and one of the actors raises an arm. A second passes. The other actor raises an arm.

OTTO

This is my photon microchip.

Otto nods. The second pair of actors raise their arms at the exact same time.

GAVIN

It's...

OTTO

Light speed.

GAVIN

Gavin tells Otto not to seek venture capital. He has a better idea: he's going to be Otto's partner. That night, he speaks with Anja.

Anja sits reading a letter.

GAVIN

You can read it a thousand times. It won't change anything.

She doesn't respond. He crosses to her.

GAVIN

I've been thinking...

He gets on his knee.

GAVIN

Will you marry me? Anja?

Pause. She doesn't look at him.

GAVIN

It's time to move on with your life.

He searches her face for an answer. Anja lowers the letter and looks at him.

ANJA

Anja and Gavin get married!

Anja and Gavin kiss and the ensemble cheers! They sing a brief rendition of Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March.'

ANJA

They go to Cabo San Lucas for their honeymoon.

GAVIN

They drink margaritas under the sun.

ANJA

And make love under the moon.

GAVIN

They play drunken Marco Polo in the hotel pool.

Marco.

ANJA

Polo.

GAVIN

Marco.

ANJA

Polo.

GAVIN

Marco...

ANJA

Gavin gets a full-body sunburn.

She touches him and he winces. They laugh and kiss.

GAVIN

The day they return, Gavin dips into their joint account and cuts Otto a check for one million dollars.

OTTO

Otto rents a warehouse and hires a handful of technicians to start churning out prototypes.

GAVIN

Gavin rents an office in downtown San Francisco. He buys a mahogany executive's desk and fills the liquor cabinet with scotch and crystal glasses. He blankets the entire floor with Turkish carpets and covers the walls with original abstract art. He has the company name printed in elegant, black typeface on the front door:

OTTO/GAVIN/ANJA

Photon Investments Incorporated!

PENNY

The year is 2000!

The ensemble sings 'Thong Song' by Sisco.

ALL

(singing)

That thong th— thong thong thong!

TEDDY

The Good!

OTTO

Y2K A-OK!

GAVIN

Yankees beat Mets in Subway Series!

TEDDY

Same sex civil unions in Vermont!

WALKER

Unemployed... get employed!

Applause.

TEDDY

The Bad!

WALKER

Bush v Gore.

ALL
(communal disgust)

Ugh.

MARK

Charles Schulz passes.

ALL

Awww.

OTTO

Microsoft releases Windows 2000.

They laugh. Applause.

TEDDY

It's the year 2000 and it's our ten year high school reunion!

Big cheer! Shift.

MARK

It's Labor Day weekend.

ANJA

Anja's parents rent an enormous tent by the lake.

OTTO

They *pack* it full of food.

GAVIN

Kegs upon kegs of beer.

WALKER

And buffet tables for miles.

ANJA

A few teachers stop by. Hi, Mrs. Newburg!

TEDDY

Some of the boys rent jet skis.

Actors motor by on jet skis. Everyone waves and laughs.

PENNY

And Chaz Laughlin streaks the party.

Chaz runs through and everyone groans and covers their faces.

ANJA

Wearing a Mexican wrestler mask?

WALKER

Some things don't change.

KAZ

Some do.

Everyone stops and sees Kaz.

ANJA

Kaz doesn't show up.

He smiles and leaves.

PENNY

We're older.

MARK

Not *old*.

TEDDY

Our lives are not withered—

ANJA

They're beginning to turn like...

WALKER

Like...

MARK

Fall leaves!

Groans of cheesiness, awws, laughter.

The scene settles into the group of old friends conversing and drinking.

ANJA
Do you enjoy living in
Washington?

MARK
You're investing in software
companies primarily?

TEDDY
I do. Everyone calls it a
company town.

GAVIN
Well—

ANJA
Mm-hmm.

MARK
Or is it like internet startups?

TEDDY
And it can be a bit straight-
laced, but I don't mind it.

GAVIN
We specialize in computer
technology.

Walker wheels Penny in on a wheelchair.

The conversation hushes.

Anja walks over to Penny.

ANJA
You haven't changed a bit.

PENNY
Get over here, bitch.

They hug. The event breaks the tension and the rest of the group
greet Penny and Walker.

WALKER
Who wants to do a keg stand?

The guys cheer.

PENNY
You are a loser.

ANJA
Seriously?

WALKER
Otto, you're up!

OTTO
Yes! Who's got my feet? Gav man?

GAVIN

On it, buddy!

The ensemble leaves. Teddy is alone, praying.

TEDDY

Our Father, who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy Name
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in...

God enters. Teddy rises. He searches for words.

TEDDY

I need.

God opens his/her mouth. God closes it. God is gone.

Mark approaches.

MARK

Teddy, you want anything? Ted?

TEDDY

Huh?

MARK

You want something? I'm going to get another Coke.

TEDDY

Uh, no. Thanks.

DAUGHTER

Daddy! Daddy!

Mark's daughter tugs his pants.

MARK

Yes, pumpkin?

DAUGHTER

Look what I made!

MARK

Cool. What is it?

DAUGHTER

Kiss it.

He does. She looks at Teddy in the way that kids do. She scampers off.

MARK

No running!

Mark's wife, Kim, walks over to them.

KIM

What's she holding?

MARK

Some thing she made.

Mark and Kim kiss. An actor makes a phone ringing sound.

MARK

(answering cellphone)

Hello?

Mark leaves to take the call.

DAUGHTER

Mom, look what I made!

KIM

Neat! What is it?

The daughter doesn't hear her. Mark hangs up his phone and plays with her.

KIM

Sweet aren't they?

TEDDY

Hm?

Kids.
KIM

Oh. Yes.
TEDDY

Short pause.

How's work?
KIM

Good. Busy.
TEDDY

Are you seeing anyone?
KIM

No.
TEDDY

Why not? You're a real catch.
KIM

The daughter cries.

Uh-oh. We have tears.
KIM

They jog over to her.

What happened, baby?
KIM

DAUGHTER
(crying stuttering)
I- fell- and- hurt- my- arm- /and-

MARK
We were goofing around and she fell.

Ohhh, come here.
KIM

She hugs the daughter who only cries louder.

TEDDY

You hurt your arm, huh?

DAUGHTER

(sniffing)

Uh-huh.

TEDDY

I'll show you a trick my Dad showed me. I'm going to take the hurt from your arm and put it in my hand. Ready?

Teddy touches the daughter's arm and 'absorbs' the hurt into his hand.

TEDDY

Ow, ow, ow, ow! It's in my hand! It's in my hand!

The daughter stops crying and watches him.

TEDDY

Ow, that hurts! Where should I put it next?

The daughter hesitates.

TEDDY

Hurry! It hurts! Ow, it hurts!

She tentatively points to Teddy's knee.

TEDDY

My knee?

The daughter nods. Teddy touches his knee with the 'hurt' hand. He immediately falls over and grabs his knee.

TEDDY

Ow, my knee! The hurt's in my knee!

The daughter giggles.

TEDDY

Why'd you do that?! I need to get it out of my knee! Put it somewhere else! Put it somewhere else! Hurry!

The daughter touches her own head.

TEDDY

My head?!

The daughter smiles mischievously.

TEDDY

Are you sure? That's really going to hurt!

The daughter nods and giggles.

TEDDY

Are you sure?!

She nods and jumps up and down.

TEDDY

(feigned resignation)

Okayyy, if you say so.

With a dramatic flourish Teddy brings his knee to his head. He makes contact and lets out a mock cry of pain. He flops around on the ground, holding his temples.

TEDDY

Aaahhh! My head! The hurt's in my head!

The daughter laughs and claps. Mark puts his arm around Kim and they enjoy the moment.

The family floats away and Teddy continues to writhe on the ground. The pretend pain morphs into something real. He screams like he's being tortured before our eyes. This lasts for an uncomfortable amount of time.

The actor that plays God enters. God touches Teddy's head and relieves him instantly.

ANJA

Woohoo!

GAVIN

Steeerrrike!

Anja and Gavin double high five. A new scene forms. They're bowling with Walker and Penny.

GAVIN

You're next, Penny.

Penny wheels up to the lane.

WALKER

Remember, if you bowl a strike there's no way they can come back. Knock 'em all down and we win.

GAVIN

Boo! Boo!

ANJA

Jinx jinx jinx jinx!

PENNY

I think they're scared.

WALKER

Take 'em out.

She bowls and hits the strike.

WALKER

You did it! You did it! Game over!

PENNY

Yes! Yeah! We win! We win!

Laughs and groans of defeat, all fun.

ANJA

I'm going to the ladies' room.

PENNY

I'll come with.

They leave.

GAVIN

Might as well finish out.

Gavin bowls the last couple of frames.

WALKER

What do you do again?

GAVIN

I own a venture capital firm.

WALKER

Wow. You're the owner, huh?

GAVIN

The main man.

WALKER

Haha. Watch out!

GAVIN

Haha, that's me.

(beat)

Are you still in, uh—

WALKER

Yep, still in landscaping. Landscape architecture really. More design than anything. Yep... yep yep yep.

ANJA

How are things?

Penny and Anja touch up their makeup in the bathroom mirror.

PENNY

Things are good.

ANJA

You and Walker?

PENNY

Good.

ANJA

What?

PENNY

It hasn't been easy on him.

ANJA

It hasn't been easy on you either. You have a...

Anja lifts an eyelash off of Penny's cheek with her finger.

ANJA

Make a wish.

Penny thinks for a second. She blows the eyelash.

GAVIN

This is a dive bar.

Quick shift.

ANJA

How'd you hear about this place?

PENNY

Walker's friend moonlights here.

WALKER

Yo, Carlo!

Carlo gives him a thumbs up.

ANJA

It's raunchy isn't it, baby?

She kisses Gavin's neck.

WALKER

I'm gonna hit the juke box.

ANJA

Me too!

Walker and Anja head to a jukebox across the bar.

GAVIN

Buy you a drink?

PENNY

A gentleman.

(to Carlo)

Rum and coke.

GAVIN

Two.

The jukebox plays a song. Anja and Walker dance.

ANJA

You have moves.

Cotillion.

WALKER

Shut up. How many years?

ANJA

Sixth through ninth grade.

WALKER

Were we in the same one?

ANJA

We were.

WALKER

He twirls her.

Lookin' good!

PENNY
(across bar)

They acknowledge Penny.

She loves you a lot.

ANJA

I love her a lot.

WALKER

Pause. They sway.

We danced once.

WALKER

We did?

ANJA

You had on a light blue, kind of shiny dress with a matching bow. And you were wearing those white gloves—

WALKER

The white gloves!

ANJA

WALKER

That all the /girls had to wear.

ANJA

That all the girls had to wear. That's right. You have a good memory.

WALKER

For some things.

Their eyes meet. The song ends. Gavin and Anja leave. Walker and Penny arrive home.

PENNY

That was so fun.

WALKER

Mmm.

PENNY

How fun was that?

WALKER

Fun.

PENNY

(beat)

You're drunk.

WALKER

No I'm not.

PENNY

How much did you have?

WALKER

Barely anything.

PENNY

Well. It was great to see them.

(brief pause)

Walker? I hate to ask...

Penny shrugs sheepishly.

WALKER

I hauled stones up a hill all morning. What's one more?

PENNY

You calling me a stone?

He lifts her and carries her to a chair. He supports her weight while he unzips her pants and pulls them to her ankles. He sits her down.

PENNY

TP?

An actor hands Walker a roll of toilet paper. He gives it to Penny.

PENNY

I spoke to my Mom today.

WALKER

How's she doing?

PENNY

Fine. She said to say hi.

WALKER

Hi, Mom.

Pause.

PENNY

Oh, I have some sad news. It's tragic. Are you ready? My last pinky toe lost feeling. I know, I know. We were hoping he would stick it out. The 'last man standing.' We should hold a candlelight vigil. Remember when we had a benefit for him? With a celebrity chorus holding hands and singing, 'Save Penny's Pinky Toe.'

Penny laughs. A pause.

PENNY

I never asked you— how'd that job go this morning?

WALKER

Oh man, that. It was at this mansion? This was a cartoon mansion. The thing had columns. So we're hauling these stones to build this wall along the, uh...

WALKER (CONT'D)

We arrange them and everything and it takes all morning. We finish and I knock on the back door and this kid answers. He's about my age. I tell him we're done and he invites me in. The *inside* of this place.

He takes me to the kitchen and hands me a check his Mom wrote him. It's time for me to leave. Something inside of me... I don't know what possessed me. The words come spilling out of my mouth. 'What do you do?' I say to him. Like, 'what do you *do*?' And the kid kind of looks at me and blinks and... and he says, 'whatever I want.'

(pause)

Whatever I want.

Penny finishes.

PENNY

All done.

Walker dresses her and lifts her.

PENNY

I need to take a bath tomorrow.

He brings her to the bedroom and lays her down.

PENNY

You coming to bed?

WALKER

I'm gonna to stay up. Watch some T.V.

PENNY

Okay. Night.

WALKER

Goodnight.

Penny sleeps.

TEDDY

Walker sits in the dark for a long time. A solitary car passes. He decides to go for a drive.

There's a loneliness peculiar to the American Town at night. Walker drives past abandoned shopping centers and empty parks, houses in comas and sidewalks that mock dancing. Streetlamps illuminating the Void.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

He stops thinking. His body takes over. He turns onto a highway.

PENNY

(waking up)

Walker?

(beat)

Walker?

A long pause.

Walker appears.

PENNY

Hi.

WALKER

Hi.

They watch each other.

TEDDY

The next morning, Walker draws Penny a bath. He removes her clothes. He lowers her into the water. He feels goosebumps dancing along her arms and shoulders. He runs a sponge over her spine, her neck, her breasts. She turns good and pink. He lifts her out of the tub and wraps her in a towel. He holds her tightly, the way a mother holds a newborn baby for the first time, with a whispered promise.

I will protect you, little one. I will provide shelter from the Dangerous Vastness of this Too-big World.

MARK

We now present the story of Minoru Yamasaki!

Crickets. The ensemble gathers onstage.

GAVIN

Who?

MARK

Minoru... Minoru Yamasaki.

PENNY

Who the heck is Minoru Yamasaki?

MARK

He, um...

ANJA

Minoru Yamasaki is born on December 1st, 1912!

A beat. They look at her. They plunge into the story. Someone plays Yamasaki.

Yamasaki is the son of Japanese immigrants.

His father works in a shoe factory in Seattle.

A hard, demanding man, he pushes Yama

as he is affectionately known

to be the top of his class.

His mother makes him wear bow ties to school.

He isn't the most popular student.

Sometimes

for no reason

he lets his gaze lift

and stares at the sky.

Yamasaki looks up. The ensemble follows his gaze. They break.

In the nineteen twenties

in the Pacific Northwest

they hate the Japanese.

These odd foreign peasants

from fishing villages
and mountain towns.
There's an old air about them
like they live in a different time.
And in America
we like *new*
and *tall*
and *white*.
Not these *midgets*
with black hair
and slanted eyes.

The ensemble surrounds Yamasaki, playing a group of racists.
One of them spits.

You smell like raw fish.

They punch Yamasaki and pull at his clothes. He escapes.

Jap!

What young Yama wants
more than anything
is to be an architect!
A shaper of horizons!
A sculptor of skylines!
A merchant of Vision!

A designer of Dreams!

He enrolls at the University of Washington.

He meets a girl.

His father makes him break it off.

Dating will distract from his studies.

After college, New York!

He earns a Master's degree from NYU.

He works for the firm that builds the Empire State Building.

His career is on the rise.

In the forties

he dodges internment

death

and the draft.

Who knew that the Japanese boy with the bow tie

had a will of American Steel.

At the age of thirty seven, he founds his own architectural firm!

Cheers!

Still

sometimes

for no reason

he lets his gaze lift...

They again follow his gaze.

What does he see up there anyway?

The elegant!

The magnificent!

The sublime!

Van Der Rohe!

Le Corbusier!

Wright!

The holy reach of gothic columns

longing for infinity

and the humming serenity

of Japanese gardens.

He sees the future of architecture

cityscapes

skyscrapers

his future

to master the Majestic.

What used to take lifetimes

he'll build in mere years

with steel beams

concrete

and a smile.

One day, a man named Austin Tobin approaches him.

A polite and powerful figure

Tobin wants to build a 'World Trade Center' in lower Manhattan.

The project is ready to go.

All he needs is an architect.

TOBIN

And to take care of a few minor details.

(fast)

Seize city gut community relocate businesses force out minorities eminent domain lay waste to warehouses of bygone bye bye Radio City make way for the new sleek modern grand can't provide jobs so we'll build on *this is New York, baby* ten thousand acres of subsidized office space in the heart of Wall high should they go? How high can you build don't worry about the merchants they're no match for city council oh yes I took care of *third generation Rockefeller clout* we're talkin' Big Money Big Pies and Big Slice of course it won't actually be for world trade, stupid, don't be irrelevant.

(beat, politely)

So do we have a deal?

Yama agrees.

And

they

rise!

Wow!

out of nothing.

Look at that!

from the bowels of Manhattan

to the top of the world

like, like

flight, frozen

inevitability incarnate

like fingers

on the outstretched hand

of History.

Two Towers.

A moment of awe.

The sky gave birth to twins.

They cut the ribbon on April 4th, 1973!

Cheers!

Thirteen years later

after a life of

art and

architecture

honest work

and bleeding ulcers

Minoru Yamasaki dies in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

He is seventy three.

They lay Yamasaki to rest.

A solemn pause.

That's not the end of the story.

One sunny day in September—

An intake of breath.

Pause.

Another.

The longest pause of the play.

What did they take?

Lives.

Innocence.

A sense of—

YAMASAKI

No.

Yamasaki comes back to life.

YAMASAKI

They took Before.

They took *Before*.

And left us with

And now

SOMEONE

It will never be the same.

Yama nods. He leaves. The ensemble follows. One actor remains.

The year is 2010.

The actor looks around.

Guys?

Dejected, the actor leaves.

Light applause. Otto takes a podium and the ensemble forms an audience.

OTTO

Thank you, thank you. It's a pleasure to speak with you this evening. I was eating the salmon and I felt a bone get stuck in the back of my throat; I pulled it out and it was a tracking device.

Appreciative chuckles.

OTTO

We live in an age of information. The speed with which a nation can process that information is the measure of its strength. Who knows what, when. You are already familiar with my photon microchip. Initiate sequence please.

Two actors raise their hands.

OTTO

The information moves at the speed of light. This is the current speed limit, if you will.

I now present a prototype of my latest invention: the quantum microchip. Quantum microchips utilize qubits instead of bits, so that each unit of information can exist in superposition—

AUDIENCE MEMBER

English!

The crowd laughs.

OTTO

I'll do you one better. I'll show you. Initiate sequence.

The entire ensemble instantaneously raises their hands. Otto walks through the crowd.

OTTO

Quantum computers will not be ten times, not a hundred times, not a thousand times faster than today's super computers... they will be a million times faster. We will look back at the current technology the way astronauts look back at covered wagons.

I don't need to tell you the implications of such power. Cyber warfare. Cryptography. Data processing. Ladies and gentlemen, the world is about to leave main street and merge with the autobahn. The question is: what will the United States be driving? Thank you very much.

Standing ovation.

TEDDY

Knock knock.

The ensemble leaves. Teddy enters Mark's office.

MARK

Hey! Come in.

TEDDY

Thanks for fitting me into your schedule.

MARK

No problem. Have a seat.

TEDDY

I'm fine, thanks.

MARK

Okay. What's up?

Teddy gathers himself.

TEDDY

I'm actually here because of a story. A colleague of mine is investigating this office.

MARK

Oh? What for?

TEDDY

A former intern is claiming they had an affair with Senator Pitt back when he was a congressman.

MARK

(beat)

Who?

TEDDY

That's confidential.

MARK

I bet it's Deb.

TEDDY

Like I said—

MARK

(working it out)

Or Tara. Sonya?

TEDDY

It's not a woman. Mark.

A brief pause. Mark laughs.

MARK

What is this?

TEDDY

I told my colleague I'd ask for a comment. I wanted you to hear it from me first.

MARK

No comment.

Mark paces.

TEDDY

I'm here as a friend.

MARK

You march into my office with a disgusting lie–

TEDDY

Mark.

MARK

A rumor, that if it got out would ruin not only the Senator, but my career–

TEDDY

Mark, calm down.

MARK

It's always the same with you people.

TEDDY

(beat)

Which people would that be?

MARK

This is a typical, liberal media outlet cloaking its agenda in the name/ of reporting–

TEDDY

Oh, give me a break–

MARK

You can't launch an attack based on one person's account–

TEDDY

He has emails. Hotel receipts.

MARK

Senator Pitt is a man of principal.

TEDDY

He supports reinstituting sodomy laws! And then he goes out and–

MARK

He's a family man. He's a man of *God*–

TEDDY

Who fucks boys!

Pause.

TEDDY

Jesus. Look. I'm not here to... The story's breaking tomorrow. I thought you should know.

Teddy lets this sink in.

MARK

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get so heated. You're only trying to be a friend.

TEDDY

Thank you. And I didn't meant to—

MARK

Forget it.

They stand there.

MARK

Kim and I have an extra ticket to a Capitals Game this weekend. I know you're not big on hockey—

TEDDY

Sure. That sounds fun.

MARK

Great. It's this Saturday. We'll swing by around seven?

TEDDY

Okay.

Teddy heads towards the door. He stops.

TEDDY

Actually. I can't.

MARK

Oh. That's okay. We'll reschedule.

TEDDY

No. We won't. I think... I think I've had enough.

MARK

Enough of what?

Pause.

MARK

Ted? Is something wrong?

Teddy doesn't respond.

MARK

Alright. Um, well, if you change your mind about this weekend... You know where to find me.

Teddy nods.

TEDDY

Goodbye, Mark.

Mark watches him go.

MARK

Goodbye.

Mark thinks for a minute. He calls his secretary.

MARK

Mindy? Get me the Senator. Tell him it's an emergency.

KAZ

The National September 11th Memorial in New York City, New York.

The September 11th Memorial appears. Kaz wanders the grounds.

MEMORIAL

(whispers)

Catherine A. Nardella, Mario Nardone Jr., Manika Narula... Dennis Michael Edwards, Michael Hardy Edwards, Christine Egan... Lawrence Don Kim, Mary Joe Kimmelman, Heinrich Kimmig...

KAZ

Dear Anja,

I've spent my life listening.

He closes his eyes.

MEMORIAL

(whispers)

Beth Ann Quigley, Lt. Michael Quilty, James Francis Quinn... Christina Flannery, Eileen Flecha, Carl Flickinger...

KAZ

It's amazing what you can hear if you listen.

I've heard

Stones cry.

Rain laugh.

Stars jingle.

The Moon flirt with a Mountain Range.

The Earth whisper fables to the Sky.

He listens.

MEMORIAL

(whispers)

Dennis O'Berg, James P. O'Brien Jr.... Vicki C. Yancey, Shuyin Yang...

KAZ

Sometimes, when it's very quiet and I stay very still

I can hear

Atoms kiss.

Oblivion sing a cappella.

Time tell its favorite joke.

It only knows one.

He walks.

KAZ

They built two waterfalls in the footprints of the towers.

The sound of waterfalls.

KAZ

It's the loudest place I've been in a long time.

Kaz listens. Actors speak for the dead.

forty two divided by seven is ummm

allocation for your retirement

girl if you don't dump

most beautiful moment of my

chuck would a wood chuck

team recommends a thorough

Izzie? It's me, our plane has been

Mommy and Daddy and Lilly

Merry Christmas ya big

so nice this time of

Corinthians verse green line

apples, peaches, pears and plumbs

mi abuela

may I go to the

had a nickle

hold on, Ma wants to speak

need all press off the

the freaking Mets

a sheet I shit

as outlined on slide

should we jump?

February, March

daughter lives in

this is our wedding

the beginning there was

yes

and Grandma and Grandpa and

Robert?

fired me we'll be okay no we won't they fired

another g.d. parking

guess what? You're an

elle me manque

flying direct

June, July

Robert?!

look at Dad's

Fuck you!

and Cat and Fish

will you marry

graduates of the class of nineteen eighty

Fuck you!

cold is it today?

stunning tonight

what'd she say?

no

we need to

Robbie!

August, October

Dad? It's me

to propose a

time for work

change all four

bye, hon

been more

mandatory company

remember

have a good

looks like

November

venti double

bye, babe

what'd you forget?

ba bye

thanks for

give me a

see ya

has daycare

pick up

bye now

love ya

bye, Daddy

you out?

close the

kiss kiss

Sweetheart?

love you

where's my

Mom!

don't forget!

you

goodbye

you so

later gator

hate to see

hasta

I love

bye for

love you

I'll see you tonight/ see you tonight/ see you tonight/ see you tonight/ see you tonight/ see
you tonight/ see you tonight/ see you tonight/ see you tonight/ see you tonight/ see you
tonight/ I love you/ I love you/ I love you/ I love you/ I love you/ I love you/ I love you/ I
love you/ I love you/ I love you/ I love/ love/ love/ love/ love/ love/ love/ love/ love/ love/
love/ love/ love/ love

The voices merge and become unbearably loud.

KAZ

Shut up!

Kaz covers his ears and flees the stage. A tourist finds a police officer.

TOURIST

Officer, officer! Come quick! A man jumped in!

OFFICER

In- ?

TOURIST

The monument! He dove off the waterfall!

The ensemble turns into a startled crowd.

STARTLED CROWD

Oh my God! What happened? A man jumped off the edge! Somebody get some help! Did you see it? He's not moving!

They clear the stage.

A silence.

Kaz returns.

KAZ

It's so quiet.

He leaves.

Walker pushes Penny in on her wheelchair. She is motionless and staring into the distance.

He shivers and rubs his arms. He covers Penny's legs with a blanket.

Teddy approaches.

TEDDY

Walker.

WALKER

Teddy!

They hug.

TEDDY

Thanks for meeting me. I don't know anyone around here anymore.

WALKER

It's good to see you.

TEDDY

How's she doing?

WALKER

Ask her.

TEDDY

(to Penny)

Hi, beautiful.

Penny's pointer finger moves. Teddy squeezes it. He and Walker look out.

WALKER

The lake's starting to freeze. It's officially winter.

TEDDY

There are still a few leaves.

Anja runs past.

TEDDY

Is that Anja?

WALKER

Yeah, it is.

(calling)

Anja!

Walker catches up to her.

WALKER

Anja wait!

ANJA

Walker?

WALKER

Hi!

ANJA

Oh my— Walker! It's been so long!

They hug.

WALKER

How long have you been in town?

ANJA

I just got here.

WALKER

You're not wearing a jacket.

ANJA

I'm moving to South America!

WALKER

What? What are you—

ANJA

I left Gavin. Yesterday— today— this morning. I took the red eye. I've never done anything... it almost felt like it wasn't me—

WALKER

Slow down. Here, take my coat.

ANJA

Look at the lake! And those trees! Have you ever noticed that on gray days orange leaves look brighter than ever? Why is that?

WALKER

Why don't we get you somewhere warm.

ANJA

You're so kind. You've always been so... You should come with me!

WALKER

To South America?

ANJA

I've got money. Loads of money. I'm going to start a farm—

WALKER

Anja—

ANJA

There's no time. We don't realize. Remember our high school graduation party? With the fireworks display over the lake... I saw the last one explode and by the time it burned out I'd lived half my life.

WALKER

You're talking strange.

ANJA

We can start over. Think about it. Why not?

WALKER

Penny.

ANJA

(brief pause)

Penny.

Anja notices Penny.

ANJA

(confused)

Of course... I'm sorry I...

Anja goes to Penny and kneels in front of her.

ANJA

Hi, bitch.

Penny's finger moves. Anja places her hand on it. She laughs.

ANJA

I have to— I have to go now. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

She runs off.

TEDDY

Is she alright?

WALKER

She left Gavin.

TEDDY

Oh. Is she moving back?

Walker stares in the direction of Anja.

TEDDY

Walker?

WALKER

Um. No. I don't think she knows what she's doing.

TEDDY

Who the hell does?

They chuckle. They fall silent. They look out over the lake.
Teddy takes a deep breath and exhales.

TEDDY

I don't think it's winter. Not yet.

Tableau.

The rest of the ensemble applauds and joins them onstage.

MARK

That's our show!

ANJA

We hope you enjoyed it.

OTTO

We enjoyed putting it on.

GAVIN

We now present:

ALL

The epilogue!

KAZ

The year is 2020!

GAVIN

The year is 2020 and Anja has started a farm collective in Peru.

Impressed oos.

GAVIN

It attracts a loyal following of artists and expats. Once a year she hikes to the top of Machu Picchu!

ANJA

(flexing)

Yeah!

Laughs and claps.

ANJA

The year is 2020 and Gavin is filthy rich.

Whistles, claps.

ANJA

He gives sizeable donations to charity. He never remarries and the paparazzi frequently find him sunbathing on his yacht with very thin, very beautiful women.

Ooh-la-las, laughter, clapping.

MARK

The year is 2020 and Teddy and the love of his life have settled down in a small, New Hampshire town. They own a hyperactive labradoodle and they adopt a set of twins that they name Eleanor and...

TEDDY

Guthrie.

Laughs and claps.

TEDDY

Why not? The year is 2020 and *Mark is the President of the United States!*

Huge reaction, laughs, snaps.

MARK

God help us all.

Laughs.

KAZ

The year is 2020 and Otto's microchips live in computers around the world. He marries his chief financial officer, a woman with a crooked nose and a warm sense of humor. She's smarter than he is and never lets him take himself too seriously.

Nods, smiles.

OTTO

Thank you, sir. The year is 2020... and Kaz is sitting with the Poets among the stars.

Smiles, tears.

PENNY

The year is 2020. Walker remarries and has a son named Axle, whom he teaches to hunt and fish. Axle will grow up to be the spitting image of his Dad. He'll even have the same big laugh.

WALKER

Ho ho ho.

Laughs.

WALKER

The year is 2020 and Penny... Penny is somewhere, dancing.

A beat.

PENNY

I'd say it's about that time.

I propose a toast.

ANJA

She reaches into the air and wraps her hand around an invisible glass. The ensemble does the same.

To life!

ANJA

Life!

ALL

Love.

WALKER

Love!

ALL

Goodwill.

MARK

And best wishes.

KAZ

To you and yours.

PENNY
(to audience)

Cheers!

ALL

They raise their glasses.

Blackout.