

TRIANGLE

A full-length play

By Judy Klass

Synopsis: Three people work on a documentary film about the persecution of gay men during the Holocaust. Each of them suffers from attraction to one of the others. Nora has had a lifetime of ambivalent attraction to Harry. Harry is attracted to Luke, a younger man from a very different background who has come to NYC from the South. Luke is attracted to Nora, and wants to "save" her from Harry. All three passions are thwarted.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

HARRY: Thirties, white, Jewish, cynical, laconic New Yorker with a lot of nervous energy.

NORA: Thirties, white, Jewish, cynical New Yorker -- a little softer than Harry, but with flashes of force and anger.

LUKE: Early twenties, white: a wide-eyed, good-hearted Southern Baptist.

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in the main room of a suite of rooms in Manhattan. There are doors which face the audience and lead to two smaller rooms, never seen. The front door to the suite is in the wings on one side of the stage.

TIME

The play takes place during the summer of 2018.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

HARRY sprawled in a chair, is interviewing LUKE, who also sits. NORA is off to the side, listening to their exchange.

HARRY

Yeah. So, I want to be sure you understand -- it's a thankless job. We're it, the three of us. We'll be completing a documentary that a whole crew of people should be working on.

LUKE

Sure, I get that.

HARRY

You don't get paid, we don't get paid, it's completely unglamorous and Sisyphean work.

LUKE

(confused)

It's ...

NORA

It's like the guy in Hades in Greek mythology who keeps rolling a rock up a hill and getting plowed by it.

LUKE

Oh. I'm sure y'all have thought about this but -- would a Kickstarter campaign maybe --

HARRY

No. Crowd-sourcing is not the answer. No one would give money to a film like this. It's a downer in every way possible.

LUKE

Well, I know the Holocaust is a really serious subject, but I still think there are people --

HARRY

It's not just that it's about the Holocaust -- Luke? Your name is Luke?

LUKE

Yeah.

HARRY

Luke, it's important that you understand what a rotten, stinking, asinine job you're stepping into. This is not some documentary about noble, martyred victims and Holocaust survivors. This is a documentary full of interviews with Holocaust survivors who talk about how everybody in the camps, including Jews and other persecuted inmates, dumped on gay inmates. It's about how wearing a pink triangle made you even more of a pariah than if you wore a yellow star. In fact, some gay gentile inmates tried to pass as Jewish, to be hated less. Sometimes the Nazis gave political prisoners a pink star just so the other inmates would think they were gay, and beat them. Do you understand? We've got interviews with gay men who survived, and other people who survived, and the picture they paint of what went on is not pretty.

LUKE

Oh. Okay.

NORA

There are some who will say we shouldn't even be making a film like this. People like my father.

HARRY

There are a lot of people like her father who will feel that way. That we're attacking the Jewish community and the memory of the Six Million who died. That we're creating opportunities for bigots who find fault with one Jew, or a group of Jews, and use it to tarnish Jews everywhere, and to negate or to justify the Holocaust and the whole history of anti-Semitism.

LUKE

But you -- I mean, the two of you are Jewish, aren't you?

HARRY

Yes, we are. Are we the first Jews you've ever met?

LUKE

Well. I guess. I mean, the first people that I *knew* were Jewish.

HARRY

(dry, ironic)

Oh, how exciting for you. I should clarify: Nora is Jewish on both sides. I have a Jewish father. But in any case, in terms of the film -- this won't be the first time in my life I'll be called a self-hating Jew.

NORA

He thrives on it.

HARRY

I don't *thrive* on it -- but I accept it as something that happens when I discuss my views on the Middle East, or suburban New Jersey Hebrew schools, or various other sensitive topics. And it will happen again with this film. People will say I'm washing the Jewish community's dirty laundry in public, and re-victimizing people who were already victimized and who died horribly ... and I don't care. I believe in sunlight reaching into dark places, and in correcting the record, and preserving history. It's all part of the Shoah. Right?

LUKE

Um. The Shoah?

HARRY

It's all part of bearing witness to the Holocaust. Accurately. It's important for us not to suppress things that seem complicated or inconvenient, and it's important to have an open discussion of what happened. Don't you think?

LUKE

Sure.

HARRY

And as it also happens, I'm a gay man, and I think the victims of gay-bashing and gay genocide, Jewish and gentile, who were persecuted during the Nazis' years in power, deserve to have their stories told, and everyone who feels smug and comfortable with their sense of the history of that time needs to be made *uncomfortable*, and needs to think a little harder. 'Cause thinking hard is good, right?

LUKE

You bet.

HARRY

If gay men in Nazi Germany had their testicles boiled off, and were sodomized with brooms and used for target practice, and no one has wanted to include their stories in the narrative of the Holocaust until now -- that in itself should give us food for thought. And if gay Jewish boys were persecuted by their families, and then saw their whole society --

NORA

Easy, Harry, easy. This is a job interview. Save it for your voice-over narration on the film.

HARRY

(to LUKE)

Well. You get some idea of the kind of film it's going to be.

LUKE

I guess. It sounds important.

HARRY

And the whole gay thing doesn't throw you? I'm thinking Queer Studies and Jewish Studies weren't a big part of what you were doing at -- your Baptist college?

LUKE

Belmont University. And yes, this'll be a change of pace for me -- but that was kind of what I was looking for when I moved to New York.

HARRY

Technically, I'm bi, of course. Just like technically I'm half-Jewish. You see, I'm a double agent in every aspect of my life. I play for both teams, I want it both ways, I annoy both sides and I arouse suspicion and enmity wherever I go. I hope that won't be unnerving for you.

LUKE

Hey, I -- don't see why it should.

NORA

Harry, stop being a self-congratulatory dick, and stop baiting him.

HARRY

Am I being a dick?

LUKE

Oh, I wouldn't say that.

NORA

I would. Tell him more about the thankless, lousy job he'll be doing for free, and give him lots of room to get out of it, once he understands what he's getting into. Give him a window of time to think it over.

HARRY

Nora is absolutely right. I'll tell you about the job, in all its dreary horribleness, and then you should take a day or two to think about whether it's for you. There's equipment you'll be using in the nasty, windowless, cell-like room over there.

(points)

And that's where you'll be spending your time when you're here. Have a look.

(LUKE opens the door to the room, peers in, and then closes the door.)

HARRY (CONT'D)

I'll be working in that room there.

(HE points to another door.)

HARRY (CONT'D)

And -- you know how you should never break up with someone via text message? You can break up with us via text message. You can send a message saying it's not quite what you had in mind, and that'll be it.

LUKE

I don't think I would --

HARRY

You haven't heard about the job yet.

LUKE

It's working on sound, right? My background is mostly in sound.

HARRY

It's sound and visuals. What I inherited -- the special little gift that started this whole project -- was several boxes full of interviews shot on reversal stock in the 1980s by a film-maker named Ira Rosenblatt -- ever see his stuff?

LUKE

I don't think so.

HARRY

He made some good documentaries. One about New York City government under Mayor Beam and how fucked up it was -- anyhow, Ira interviewed all these men, and a few women, about the situation of gays in Berlin and in the camps -- mostly in the camps. And then he never made the movie. Probably for the reasons we've discussed. It probably filled him with despair and disgust and futility -- not everyone gets off on those things the way I do. So, some of the interviews are just audio, but most are shot on reversal stock, and he did transfer it all to standard definition video in the 1990s. But now it has to be re-transferred and re-synched -- all for hi-def video, which is a royal pain in the ass. Another reason why he probably never finished the project. Ira died a few years back. I heard about the footage, and his widow was generous enough to dump it all in my lap.

LUKE

So, the re-transferring and re-synching will be up to me.

HARRY

Pretty much, yeah.

LUKE

Well, I did study some of that at Belmont. Mostly, I worked on sound.

HARRY

There's peripheral junk noise on some of the interviews it would be great to lose, but that won't be your main job.

LUKE

Okay. Well, I think it will be a great learning experience for me. And a nice credit for a guy getting into film production.

HARRY

Again -- this could be a pariah film project. We could be hated far and wide.

LUKE

Well, then, I'll be starting my career off with a bang.

HARRY

The film is going to be called Triangle. The main symbol on the poster will be a pink triangle -- it'll look to some people like we're stealing the logo from the AIDS crisis for "Silence = Death." It will offend and annoy everyone.

NORA

Or, so Harry is dearly hoping.

HARRY

I'm making the film I need to make, with the title and the iconography that make sense for it.

NORA

Absolutely.

LUKE

What does Nora do? If you -- don't mind me asking.

HARRY

Nora? Tell the man. So he doesn't think he'll be aggravating over the transfer and the sync while we just lounge around and watch porn on line, all day.

NORA

My workspace is out here. Less claustrophobic. I'm coming up with visual images, especially for the interviews that we just have as audio tapes. I've got some photographs of the people who were interviewed, before and after the war. Some of the pictures I got from contacting third cousins, all over the world, to see if they have photographs.

NORA (CONT'D)

There are pictures of gay life in Weimar Germany, and some film footage -- and then the kinds of pictures and footage we've all seen before from when the camps were liberated. But I've got to figure out what's in the public domain that we can use without getting sued, and what's worth paying a little money for --

HARRY

Out of our non-existent budget.

NORA

And I'm trying to learn some basics of entertainment law and copyright law -- with mixed results. I've been meeting and corresponding with lawyers about rights to pictures and footage, and making sure our ass is covered.

HARRY

And I spend my time on translation. Once you're done with getting all the footage on hi-def, I'll be adding subtitles.

LUKE

Are the interviews in -- Yiddish?

HARRY

Some of them. And I don't speak Yiddish, never heard it growing up. I did hear German. My father was a German Jew. His family got him out of Nuremberg when he was nine, before it all went down. His father and grandmother didn't make it out. So you see, that's why I'm such an arrogant bastard; German Jews look down our noses at scruffy, low-class Eastern European Jews.

NORA

(raises a hand)

That would be me.

HARRY

But if you have German, and some Hebrew, then Yiddish is not all that hard to master. As for the interviews in French and Polish -- I'm working with others to translate them.

NORA

More money out of our nonexistent budget.

HARRY

But I don't trust my translators. I don't trust anyone, and I'm trying to learn a bit of each language to double-check on what they're telling me the survivors are saying. That may sound self-indulgent, but I consider it necessary.

LUKE

Sure.

HARRY

Then will come the fun of editing the film together. I'm getting to work on that now with the old video transfer -- so that the final cut will go smoothly and quickly, once you've finished. If you finish. If you decide you want to work with us.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

LIGHTS UP on HARRY, alone on stage. HE addresses the audience directly.

HARRY

I was named for Heinrich Heine. Named for my dead grandfather Chaim, called Harry all his life, and he was really named for Heine. Heine was called Harry by his family, but he called himself Heinrich, and eventually he converted to Lutheranism. He said he never would have done it if he could have stolen silver spoons. There was nothing more farcical, self-destructive and pointless than Heine's conversion, for which he loathed himself. Heine was born in Düsseldorf, and had some education in Jewish and then Catholic schools, and when Napoleon took over the city and implemented the Napoleonic Code, Jews could be people for a while. But by the time Heine was a young man, Düsseldorf was Prussian, and officially Jew-hating again. Jews weren't allowed to teach at universities, and Heine thought if he converted he could get a teaching job -- but he was a leftist, and they wouldn't hire him anyway. All it did, he said, was make him hated by both Jews and Christians. He had a rich uncle he hoped would help him get ahead. Heine got his heart broken by his uncle's older daughter, who married someone else, and he used the experience to create a cynical, Byronic persona and write witty poems attacking love. He may have even fallen for the girl's kid sister, who looked like her, and he may have really loved these girls -- it wasn't all about wanting his uncle's money. He loved Germany, he hated the anti-Semitism and barbarism he saw in Germany, he was a Romantic poet, and he hated and feared the nationalism of the Romantics. He was the celebrated wit of his age and he knew he was so brilliant he was almost a god -- and he hated himself for his conversion, his failure to win the woman he loved and a dozen other reasons. He remained poor. He said he was becoming a true gentile; he sponged off rich Jews. He laughed at Reform Judaism with all its Christian trappings. He called it mock turtle soup -- turtle soup without the turtle. Heine wrote an attack on a university that disciplined him for dueling, and a tangentially homophobic attack on a gay German count who wrote poetry mocking Heine for being a Jew. Heine mainly satirized the aristocratic count for worshiping and imitating Greek forms in literature, and for attempting to be like Aristophanes as he went after Heine, and for failing. Heine decided to show him how to be crude and subversive, like the real Aristophanes. He presented the count's gayness as one more affectation of a reactionary man trying to live like the ancient Greeks -- he thought the count's gayness lacked sincerity. The piece does not contain the intrinsic homophobia that would cause me to hate Heine. And the real Aristophanes made fun of gay and effeminate Athenian men like Cleisthenes and Agathon in the *Thesmophoriazusae* without any real enmity toward them.

(beat)

No German poet had more of his verses set to music than Heine. He wrote travelogues. He wrote an epic about Moors in Spain tortured until they converted, and having their books burned, and he wrote that once they start burning books, soon they will burn men.

HARRY (CONT'D)

He went after another converted Jew with ferocity, and he had enough self-awareness to know that his attacks on that man were really indirect attacks on himself. He wrote a poem about a Jewish Marano or Converso knight in Spain, seducing a woman who was an anti-Semite and not letting her know he's a rabbi's son until after he's banged her. He was the heir of Goethe, and he was repelled by Goethe's conservatism in old age. He was an idealist and a nihilist. He struck socialist poses, but he'd send up socialism as well, in passages so ambivalent and ambiguous and clever that no one knew when he was mocking and when he was sincere. Heine may not have always known, either. He admired Hegel but he came to distrust all utopias and visions of an inevitably wonderful future. He was as ambivalent, ironic, and as wary of all groups and doctrines as any thinking man should be. Heine moved to Paris and hoped to influence German thinkers to embrace the spirit of revolution from France. He married his mistress, a French Catholic woman of no intellect named Mathilde, when he had to fight a duel, which he survived -- but in case he didn't survive, he wanted to provide for her. He wrote pieces explaining French news to the Germans, and explaining German culture and thought to the French. He warned people of the conflagration that would occur if Christian Germany fulfilled the savage promise of its pagan past -- it would make the French Revolution seem like a happy little story. As the Nazis rose to power, Heine freaked Thomas Mann out with how prophetic Heine's understanding of the German nationalist, war-loving soul had been. In his forties, Heine was stricken with terrible pain and paralysis -- possibly due to syphilis, but perhaps due to something as random as lead poisoning. He mused on how Jews had lost Jerusalem, The Temple and the Ark of the Covenant, but they still had the Bible and that book was their fatherland. He admired them but he said he'd always been more Hellenic -- more Greek -- by temperament. He wrote his memoirs and some bitter, funny, ironic final verses from his bed. He wrote that there would be no Mass or Kaddish when he died, but his plump pigeon Mathilde, carrying flowers for him through Montmartre, might wind up with tired ankles. He advised her to get in the carriage instead of walking. Freud wrote about Heine and identified with him, since they suffered from the same disease of being Jewish. And there is no one I would rather be named for than Harry, or Heinrich, Heine.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

LIGHTS UP on NORA working on a tablet or laptop. LUKE comes out through the door of the room where he works.

LUKE

Nora?

NORA

Hey, there.

LUKE

You mind me hanging with you for awhile?

NORA

No, it's all good.

LUKE

You getting permission? From image owners?

NORA

Yeah, for some pictures. Even when the family says sure, go for it, Harry says that we need it spelled out in writing. Of course, for some of these photographs, no one seems to know who owns them, and everybody's got a different idea about fair use ...

LUKE

Sounds frustrating.

NORA

How's it going for you? With re-synching the old footage.

LUKE

Well, no big surprises. Same old same old. But I had to take a little break 'cause my eyes were glazing over.

NORA

Is your job as tedious and obnoxious as Harry says it is?

LUKE

Sure, in some ways it's challenging, 'cause my background is more in sound, so I'm stretching myself. But after a point, it doesn't feel like a challenge, it's just slow-going and frustrating, it's making the sounds coming out of their mouths sync up with their lips moving ... It might be better if I could understand the interviews. You know?

LUKE

If I could get what these old men are saying. I try to figure it out, and I guess when Harry puts in the subtitles, I'll know for sure. There was one man interviewed in English -- I found that really interesting. He was never in a concentration camp. He lived in Berlin and he was arrested and held in jail a few times during the 1930s. Some of what he said was pretty intense. The Nazis castrated his best friend ... This man promised he would change his lifestyle, and he laid low, and got out Germany after the war. Moved to England.

NORA

I'm not sure it was all that much better there, considering what they did to Alan Turing.

LUKE

Who?

NORA

A Brit who helped break the code the Nazis used -- helped us find where the Uboats were. The British did nasty things to Turing after the war 'cause he was gay and knew all the government secrets. They chemically castrated him, which is not as bad as what the Nazis did, obviously, but still.

LUKE

Oh! Wasn't there a Benedict Cumberbatch movie ...?

NORA

Yes, I think so. You're right. I saw part of it. They invented a female best friend for him, 'cause they couldn't bear to tell a gay man's story the right way.

LUKE

But -- they showed that she could be strong too, and good at math.

NORA

Yeah, but I think they kind of made her up.

(beat)

So, what exactly were you studying at ...?

LUKE

Belmont University. I was at the Mike Curb College of Entertainment and Music business. A lot of the focus is on mixing sound for music. You know, a lot of people who work on Music Row in Nashville get their jobs right out of Belmont.

NORA

No, I didn't know.

LUKE

Sure. Musicians, and sound engineers -- and also A&R people, people running record labels and publishing companies. And artists. Brad Paisley went there. And Josh Turner. And Chris Young, and Trisha Yearwood and Lee Ann Womack ... and Florida Georgia Line -- both of them!

NORA

I don't ... I don't really ...

LUKE

Country music doesn't really do it for you?

NORA

It's -- not the music I reach for. I mean, I may have heard of a few ...

LUKE

Well, it's what I was raised on. My daddy's a preacher in Alabama, and he frowned on rock and roll and rap, he didn't want us listening to any of that. But country music just seemed to flow into my life in all kinds of ways when I was growing up. It was mixed in with faith, 'cause a lot of country artists also record sacred songs, sometimes whole albums of sacred songs, and then it was mixed in with my classes at Belmont, and also with having fun on the weekend. I just figured everybody liked it. But, I tell you what, it's exciting to be someplace different, where people are into other things. I feel blessed to get a chance to learn something new. So, what kinds of music do Jewish people listen to, growing up?

NORA

Um.

LUKE

I mean, country music -- kind of goes hand in hand with being a Baptist, almost, and making a joyful noise, so I just thought --

NORA

There's not -- I'm not a particularly religious Jew. I'm sure that Lubovitch and ultra-Orthodox Jews ... they have their music in synagogue, women aren't allowed to sing it. But average, bored, secular, suburban New Jersey Jews like me and Harry? I mean, I guess my parents maybe liked Neil Diamond and Billy Joel and Barbra Streisand more than the average person? But -- maybe not. They basically listened to everything. And so did we. I mean, Harry's father was a snooty old German Jew, it was classical music for him all the way.

LUKE

So, there's no really Jewish kind of music ...

NORA

Well, there were a lot of Jewish songwriters. In Tin Pan Alley. You know, Irving Berlin. And it was mostly Jews in the Brill Building, writing doo wop and for girl groups. With Phil Spector lurking around and being scary. There were a lot of Jews who wrote musicals. Rodgers and Hart, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe ... the great early musicals were written by Jews and by gay men. And by Jewish gay men, like Stephen Sondheim and Jerry Herman and Kander and Ebb. But -- I'm not sure you'd call that "Jewish" music. Exactly. Or connect it with faith. I mean, I guess there are conservative and modern Orthodox synagogues where they sing songs by Debbie Friedman. She wrote in English and Hebrew, she kind of comes out of the folk tradition -- there are lots of Jewish folk singers also ...

LUKE

Boy, you know, this is so interesting, I could sit and listen to you all day.

NORA

Are you -- being sarcastic?

LUKE

(surprise)

No. Uh uh, I mean it. In fact, I think you're gonna have to make me a mix-tape.

NORA

Of -- Debbie Friedman? Of folk music, or show tunes?

LUKE

All of it! Put a bunch of those things on the play list!

NORA

I ... don't even know how that would work. Harry knows more about that stuff than I do. Jews and music from fifty or a hundred years ago. The Gershwins, Country Joe and the Fish. You should ask him. Most of what I know about Broadway musicals I've learned from Harry. He bullies me into liking his favorite show tunes and lyricists and composers.

LUKE

I'd rather hear the people you like yourself.

NORA

Oh, who knows, at this point, if I have any tastes of my own, I've been bullied by Harry for so long. I disagree with him about folk music. He likes Bob Dylan a whole lot more than I do. Speaking of conflicted Jews.

LUKE

Bob Dylan is -- that's right, he's Jewish. Or, wait, didn't he --

NORA

Yeah, he got Born Again, who knows if he's Jewish or Christian or what this week. The whole issue, which some people like to ponder and argue about, bores the crap out of me, to be honest. He was never my Messiah, so I don't care what he believes. I mean, obviously, Dylan has written some amazing songs.

LUKE

You know, he's been writing some hit country songs lately with Old Crow Medicine Show. Like, the song "Wagon Wheel" ...

NORA

He kind of caused the Sixties to happen, he made all those wonderful Brill Building songs sound inane, he got the Beatles to get away from "Love Me Do" and explore other things ... but he could also be such an arrogant, sneering bully. And he was mean to Phil Ochs, a folk guy, a songwriter Dylan hung out with in the Village who kept on writing topical songs when Dylan went electric and started writing about lousy relationships. Dylan was writing these songs attacking one woman or another, but it was all a metaphor for attacking the folk community he was leaving behind ... And he was getting all mystical and poetic and obscure, and telling Phil Ochs, once Dylan turned his back on the topical songs, man, you're just a stand-up comic, just a guy writing about yesterday's headlines. Harry thinks Dylan was so right. Me, I like Phil Ochs better. Maybe just to annoy Harry. But, no -- I'd really rather listen to his songs. Phil wrote more abstract and poetic things later on -- I like those and I like his topical stuff also. He wound up killing himself.

LUKE

Was he Jewish? I mean ...

NORA

Yeah, he was. He got a nose job, early on. He wanted to be a star. But you know, Bob Zimmerman got a name job, Phil Ochs got a nose job. Same kind of deal. They both wanted to be Woody Guthrie. And be of the common people. Real Americans.

LUKE

It's all ... so new to me. When you say the "Village" you mean Greenwich Village?

NORA

Yeah, they both hung out there -- then Dylan moved on. He'd been launched, he'd taken what he needed.

LUKE

I really feel like there's so much you can teach me.

NORA

Um. Like I said, Harry's the main music maven around here, not me. Actually, maybe we should get back to the grindstone, each of us.

LUKE

Right. Sure.

NORA

But you haven't really done stuff with visual images before, just sound?

LUKE

Well, no, I knew I was interested in film, so I took film school courses. Belmont has a film school. So, I have a sense of what I'm doing, I promise, I'm not going to mess up the transfers --

NORA

No, I wasn't saying that.

LUKE

There was a lot I liked about Belmont, and it was a pretty good fit for me. But there were things I didn't like so much. There was a lesbian coach who got fired when her wife was pregnant -- a lot of students thought that was wrong. Some students protested. And I've heard stories ... I heard that Belmont doesn't hire Jews, for example.

NORA

Seriously?

LUKE

And that just seemed wrong to me. Someone told me about applying to teach there, online. And right at the start of the application, it asked: what church do you belong to? And the application said how Belmont wants to teach students basic Christian values like respect for others, and independent thinking. You know? It asked: how will you incorporate those Christian values in your classroom? Now, how are we gonna learn to think independently if we only meet other people who are just like us?

NORA

You're right, that's messed up. And it's possible that Christians don't have a monopoly on those values. So, that means they have, what, a Jew-free film school?

LUKE

Yeah, I guess.

NORA

Seriously? A film school without Jews is like a bagel without cream cheese -- that just sounds wrong to me.

LUKE

Oh, that is so funny! Can I quote you? Can I post that to Facebook? I have a lot of Facebook friends who went to Belmont.

NORA

Well, I don't really ...

LUKE

Can I at least use that line when I write to a few people?

NORA

Sure.

LUKE

So, I was saying, I saw at Belmont, and in my own family ... I mean, I love my family, I love the faith I was raised in, the people around me were all good people. But they had their -- limits. When it came to Jews. And Muslims. And atheists. And gay people. People in cities like this one. And so, I just felt -- I needed to *go*. I needed to break out of my bubble. And experience the Other. Meet people that my family was afraid of. You know? People they voted for Donald Trump to protect them from.

NORA

Well, here we are.

LUKE

Yes.

(HE is gazing at her intently, and it makes her uncomfortable.)

NORA

You should talk to Harry more. If you're looking for exotic, difficult city people. He would glory in being the dangerous Other for you, and he could tell you -- not just about music -- he's got all these different --

LUKE

See, why do you do that?

NORA

Do what?

LUKE

You put yourself down, you say Harry's so brilliant, he has all the answers --

NORA

Well, he's an irritating bastard, but as it happens, he *is* brilliant --

LUKE

And you act like you have nothing to give.

NORA

It's not that. It's just -- you're staring at me so ... intently, and you've kind of got me under a microscope, you want me to represent all Jews everywhere ... that's a lot of pressure. And Harry would rise to the challenge, he thrives on that kind of thing -- I don't.

LUKE

But you've also got a huge inferiority complex about him.

NORA

Well, sure, to some degree --

LUKE

And you shouldn't. I tell you what, I get tired of seeing women defer to men all the time. I got real tired of seeing it at home, where they believe in these "complementarian" roles for men and women, each of them in their special, separate sphere -- but they really mean that men are everything and women are nothing. And men get a ton more options. I hate that way of thinking. And I'm -- frankly -- surprised to see it here.

NORA

Well, look, Simone de Beauvoir was a pretty feminist woman, right?

LUKE

Who?

NORA

I mean, she wrote *The Second Sex*. She came at Existentialism in a feminist way.

LUKE

You know, I love talking to you, Nora, but half the time it's like you're speaking a different language.

NORA

Sorry. But, you know. Maybe that's a sign that -- we don't have a lot in common. Our reference points are really different. And things get lost in translation.

LUKE

No. I want to learn something new. Teach me about ...

NORA

Simone de Beauvoir.

LUKE

Right. What you said.

NORA

She talked about woman as Other and man as the default setting. She knew what men can do to women's sense of self. And she knew she was smart. But when she hung out with Jean-Paul Sartre -- she'd say: sure, I'm smart, but Sartre's a genius. And that annoyed a lot of women. They thought she shouldn't put herself down that way. But, hell, what was she going to say? She thought that was the difference between them -- so she said it.

LUKE

Okay, that's fine, but I want you, right now, to tell me something amazing about you that has nothing to do with Harry. Just leave him out of the conversation.

NORA

Something amazing?

LUKE

Some talent you have, or something you know about ...

NORA

Well. Okay. Huh. I think I'm a pretty good writer. Harry makes good documentary films, he's a good debater, but he's not much of a creative writer. He can critique works by other people --

LUKE

I said leave Harry out of this.

NORA

I'm proud of things I've written. Fiction, and some scripts.

LUKE

Screenplays?

NORA

Yes, and stage plays.

LUKE

So, tell me about something you're writing. Maybe I can help you make the film.

NORA

I've been trying to write a stage play.

LUKE

Tell me about it.

NORA

I was going to call it "Triangle," actually. Then Harry got back in touch with me, and he's working on this film called "Triangle," so I'll probably call the play something else if I ever finish it.

LUKE

Nope, no, uh uh. No talking about Harry! Just you. Now. Is your play about gay people during the Holocaust wearing pink triangles?

NORA

No, not at all. It's about -- I was trying to write a love triangle play. I mean, plays with three characters, that's difficult, that's always an interesting dynamic. Like, Yasmina Reza's play called *Art*. Or Athol Fugard -- this white South African guy -- his play from the Apartheid era, *Master Harold ... and the Boys*.

LUKE

I don't know what the heck you're talking about, and it sounds great, keep talking.

NORA

Are you sure? It doesn't really seem worth ...

LUKE

I'm loving it. Keep going.

NORA

Well, with a three-character play, you're not writing dialogue in the same way. It's more like trialogue. And there's often one person who becomes the jester, trying to lighten the mood while the other two fight, they grandstand, or one person becomes a football kicked back and forth. And with love triangle stories -- usually, one person loves another person, who loves somebody else ... but I wanted to write a perfect triangle play. A loves B, but B loves C, but C loves A. You know? Or at least, A wants to get it on with B, and B is hot for C, and C is hot for A. Maybe one of them actually loves, it's not just sex ... I wanted to keep all the unrequited love and misery in-house, among the three characters. 'Cause I see that kind of *amour fou*, that kind of crazy love story where everyone falls in love with the wrong person, it's a masochistic thing -- I see it as a metaphor for the human condition. I like the futility of it.

LUKE

And it's never been done before?

NORA

Well. Noel Coward's *Design For Living* has two guys and a girl. They all wind up sort of married. But Coward has to be pretty discreet about implying that the guys might like each other, as well as the girl. Or, there's Sartre's *No Exit*. I don't know why I keep banging on about Sartre, I'm not an Existentialist or anything. But that's basically a three-character play.

LUKE

Okay. I still have no idea what you're talking about. I mean, stage plays ... I've seen *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Annie 2* --.

NORA

Well, those are musicals.

LUKE

I've seen holiday shows with kids, I've even been in some at my daddy's church. You know, and we read *Romeo and Juliet* in high school. But that's kind of as much as I've read. And I don't know this guy ...

NORA

Sartre. Are you sure you want to? Really, Luke. I probably sound like a pretentious jerk to you, and that's probably what I am.

LUKE

Uh uh. Keep talking. Sartre. He was with that other lady.

NORA

Simone de Beavoir. Right. He was her -- boyfriend. So, he's this philosopher, and he more or less stood up to the Nazis, but he was too willing to give Stalin a pass. He said we're the sum of our actions, it's not about what we say we are or our good intentions, they don't matter. It's bad faith when we pretend we can't make decisions for ourselves. And he wrote this play *No Exit*, about three people in Hell. No flames, no devils torturing them. The point is that Hell is other people, they're stuck in a room together and they see through each other's pretenses. They're saying oh, I have no idea how I landed in Hell, and the others are like: Yeah, right. And the lesbian is hot for the coquettish younger woman, and the younger woman, the blonde, flirts with the guy ... but it's not a love triangle and nobody's really in love. So, I think, what I'm talking about, with this play I want to write -- it's never been done before.

LUKE

Well, then, that's great. I'd love to read it.

NORA

But in some ways it seems so glib, such a clever little exercise. Like I've come up with a gimmick, an algebra formula, and I'm trying to turn it into a play. And I just have to draw attention to it, and make it so meta, like the characters somehow know they're characters in a play, or whatever post-modernist horse-shit. Sorry. I don't know how comfortable you are with swearing.

LUKE

Oh, I don't cuss much myself, but it's all good. I know I'm in New York now.

NORA

Anyhow. I'm writing this thing, and I'm thinking maybe I'm being too cute or too cerebral about it, maybe it's not visceral enough. Like Phil Ochs' friends used to say to him about Dylan: "You write with your head, Phil, but Bob writes with his dick." And I prefer Phil Ochs, so maybe I don't actually prefer someone who writes with his dick. But Harry would say --

LUKE

Ah ah ah, no Harry! Just you!

NORA

Enough me. Really. We both need to get back to work.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

LIGHTS UP on NORA on stage alone. SHE addresses the audience directly.

NORA

I met Harry at Hebrew school. It's a Conservative synagogue in North Bergen. For most people there, that's how they pay their dues as Jews -- they belong to a synagogue, they show up for the High Holy Days, they make their kids go to Hebrew school until they're thirteen, and then they have a big, tacky bar-mitzvah or bat-mitzvah. And then the kids grow up and do the same. Harry and I were in third grade -- we went to the same public school, but we didn't see each other there or have a class together until years later. Even at nine years old he was a pain in the ass. They'd take us into the sanctuary and he'd hassle the rabbi. We had this nice Israeli lady, Mrs. Sedovnik, trying to teach us language and Bible stories -- he'd tease her so much he'd make her cry. I was shocked. I couldn't believe he was such a bad boy. I thought he was the rudest, brattiest kid I'd ever seen -- and then one day he was baiting the rabbi in the sanctuary, and asking questions the rabbi couldn't answer, and making jokes at his expense -- and I thought he was brilliant. I thought it was so subversive and cool -- those aren't words I'd have used then, but -- I thought it was this startling thing, a kid exposing an adult authority figure like that for not thinking enough. They sent us off for snacks -- we said hamotzi over the crackers and grape juice. And I went up to him and told him: you know, you're kind of a jerk, but you're smart. It was the first time I talked to him. We were both nerds, we lived ten blocks apart, and we started hanging out -- in third grade. Harry was a Star Trek nerd. I watched his obsession develop over time. He lectured me about Star Trek all through junior high. He liked the original series, but he didn't really like Next Gen. He said that by the time they made it, Gene Roddenberry was senile, and he'd been soaking in a California hot tub too long, and he'd be saying: In the future, everyone chosen to go into space will be well-adjusted, there will be no big internal issues they're wrestling with, and they won't have conflicts with each other, no bickering like Spock and McCoy. And the writers were begging him: please, Gene, it's a drama series, please allow us to put a little conflict into the show. Harry identified with Spock -- for obvious reasons. The half-breed thing. You should hear him sing the old Cher song "Half-Breed" -- he really belts it out.

(demonstrates)

"My father married a pure Cherokee/My mama's people were ashamed of me ..." And he loved every aspect of Spock. The emphasis on logic, the wry humor, the emotions beneath the surface, the suppression of sexuality, the seven-year mating cycle and how horny Vulcans get during Pon Farr, the whole homoerotic thing with Kirk ... We didn't discuss that till high school -- we found out about all these women who write slash stories about K&S, Kirk and Spock. K & S stuff actually started the whole slash genre ... These women used to write dirty stories, quite kinky, lots of S&M, and maybe they still do, but these days they make a lot of Kirk and Spock slash music videos -- go on youtube sometime. I've never written a slash story. Or made a video.

NORA (CONT'D)

But I have to say: my sexual fantasies were more about Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock than about any heterosexual encounter. That was what seemed hot to me. That was all that mattered. Getting those two guys together. Harry and I figured their safe word was Fizzbin, or Quadrotriticale. We really got in depth.

(beat)

Anyhow, Harry's theory was that Next Gen was full of Spock splinters -- Spock wannabe characters -- but they didn't quite make it. They were one-dimensional. Like Worf was a half-breed, half human and half-Klingon, but that wasn't as interesting. And Deanna Troi was alien and she couldn't do a mind-meld but almost, she could read emotions -- but it wasn't as interesting. And Data would say things like: The odds against that are five million, two hundred thousand point two, to one, just like Spock, but it wasn't as interesting. Data was Pinocchio, he wanted to be a real boy, but Spock was better. More resonant, more compelling. Harry would show me clips and whole episodes to make his point. He'd hold forth like a rabbi himself. He didn't have the shows on VHS or disk -- I don't know you could buy a box set of Star Trek back then ... He had a camera and he'd film reruns off the TV screen, and we'd watch these crappy home-made VHS recordings, for hours ... We'd watch Deep Space Nine, and he'd say oh look, Roddenberry died and they were finally allowed to create a show with messed up characters and conflict, and they went nuts. He said Odo was the one character in all the later shows that approached the complexity of Spock: a lab specimen longing for a sense of family or connection, a shape-shifter trying to find an identity, in love with Major Kira and unable to tell her, a constable representing justice, and when he finally finds his own people he realizes they have no sense of justice and they repel him ... I'd absorb whatever Harry said about these things. I'd ponder it. By the time I had my bat-mitzvah I wasn't much interested in Judaism. I tuned out the rabbi that Harry could run rings 'round in a debate. I was steeped instead, in a kind of Star Trek nerd lore, mostly of Harry's making. We both were hot for Patrick Stewart as Picard -- that was one thing we liked about Next Gen. I think Harry told me how he felt about Stewart quite early on. By fifth grade? I think that's how he came out to me. But he'd always qualify the point. He'd then point out some woman on TV he thought was hot. Gillian Anderson on X Files. It was very important to him that I understand he was bi, not just gay, but he'd talk about attractive women in kind of a dutiful, way. Tit, as it were, for tat.

(beat)

Once we were in high school, maybe even junior high, Harry started screwing around. With guys our age. With men he'd meet in -- men's rooms, or at truck stops or whatever. He'd tell me things, and maybe he was trying to shock me and titillate me, maybe he was making some things up, but it sounded real. He was defensive about it. He kind of hated his father, as an uptight, rigid, German Jew, and a bitter Holocaust survivor who couldn't talk about a lot things, just kept it all inside. Harry's mother was this mousey, quiet woman from the Midwest and the father bullied her. I don't remember her ever saying much. She was in her forties. Harry's father was much older by the time he had Harry -- and their relationship was odd.

NORA (CONT'D)

His father loved him so much, Harry was like this miracle he had late in life. He'd had a daughter during a previous marriage, but Harry was his Kaddish, his son ... But he didn't want to accept that Harry was gay, and Harry was contemptuous of a man who had known such persecution being rigid and small-minded. Their conversations became so poisonous, it was painful to listen to. I hated to go to Harry's house, in case he and his father had any interaction. My parents reached a point where they didn't want Harry at my house. They didn't like how sour and cynical he was. They didn't know what to make of him, but they seemed to vaguely sense that he was bad for me. For two years, from ages fifteen to seventeen, we had almost no interaction. I tried to develop a more normal social life. Find a group of girls to hang out with. Look for a boy to have a crush on -- I'd try to talk myself into it ... And then Harry came back into my life, and wanted to date. He said it was time he had a relationship with a girl, and I was the logical person to experiment with. He said it in a very Spockian way. And I told him to go to hell -- and he shifted gears. He got very courtly. Even romantic. He brought me flowers. He played on our private language and in-jokes. He read me poetry. He was good, he was convincing, he even convinced himself that it was serious for a while, I think ... but it was that same old tit for tat business. It was something he had to do, like eating his vegetables. I wasn't bearding for him to make him seem straight, he never claimed to be straight -- but I was bearding for him so he could think of himself as bi. So, why did I do it? I was lonely and bored. I was as curious about sex as the next teenager. I was wary of Harry, and I still thought he was kind of a bitchy, manipulative, misogynist brat ... but I had imprinted on him, I was stuck with him by that point, I didn't know anyone who could touch him, who could come anywhere *near* him, in terms of humor and insight and intellect. And so I got involved with my best friend, even though it felt kind of weird and incestuous and wrong. We went to prom together. I bearded for him as bisexual until graduation -- and then he kind of dropped me, flat.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

LIGHTS UP on all three characters, hanging out.
HARRY is pouring drinks -- shots of Jack
Daniels.

HARRY

So, I think we're in a good place. I move that we all stop working and get blitzed for the rest of the afternoon.

NORA

Seconded.

LUKE

Well, I could have done more --

HARRY

You've done plenty.

LUKE

I just wanted you to look over this footage, what I've got so far, and make sure it's what you want.

HARRY

It's completely professional. You do quality work, as advertised.

LUKE

As advertised?

HARRY

As you said you did, when you wrote to me. I just wish I had Southern Comfort to offer you -- I should have thought to get some.

LUKE

I'm actually -- not a huge fan.

HARRY

Or something from Alabama. Jack Daniels is from Kentucky, isn't it?

LUKE

That's right.

HARRY

And you do drink, don't you? I forgot to ask, I know you're a Baptist --

LUKE

I'm happy to drink a little Jack now and then.

(HARRY hands the drinks around.)

HARRY

Well, then. Bottoms up.

(All three of them drink.)

NORA

Oh. Oh, that's actually kind of nice. I mean, it's got a kick to it ... I've tried Southern Comfort, and I agree with you, Luke, it's kind of nasty. It put me off whiskey. I didn't think I'd try it again. But this -- this is a very nice kind of alcoholic candy.

HARRY

Nora, I know you live a generally cloistered existence, but have you seriously never had Jack Daniels before?

NORA

Afraid not.

HARRY

Well, then this break is not just recreational. It's educational.

(HE pours himself some more.)

There are a bunch of country songs about Jack Daniels, aren't there?

LUKE

Well -- a few. It comes up, with Jim Beam and Jose Cuervo and the rest.

HARRY

I'd like to write a heartbreak song. With the title "They Don't Know Jack." It don't matter that you're never coming back. People tell me whiskey's not answer. They don't know Jack. Has someone written that yet?

LUKE

Not that I know of.

HARRY

I'll never write it. I get ideas for songs, for stories, or for a film -- not a documentary, but a Hollywood film. High concept. A plot premise, fragments of dialogue. No follow-through. I never complete them. Nora's the creative one around here. The one with stick-with-it-ness.

NORA

Plodding determination.

HARRY

Has she told you?

LUKE

She mentioned some stuff she writes.

HARRY

Have you read any of her unpublished novels? Hard to break in writing novels these days. I tell her to self-publish. She won't. She sees it like a vanity press in the old days.

(beat)

Of course, country music -- it's not really the world for me, even if I had the self-discipline to finish a song. Is it. As far as I know, the one Jew who made it in country was Shel Silverstein.

LUKE

Oh?

HARRY

The guy who wrote those children's books. *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. *The Giving Tree*. He was kind of a Renaissance man, with cartoons and columns in *Playboy*, plus children's books and children's songs and country songs ... He wrote "A Boy Named Sue" for Johnny Cash.

LUKE

Oh, right, of course.

HARRY

Kind of a campy song. I mean, it sends up a traditional country story song or revenge ballad, and traditional gender roles in a campy way. Nora has heard me talk at length --

NORA

I sure have.

HARRY

-- About camp in Broadway musicals. How there's gay campiness, but also Jewish campiness, a similar kind of irony and distance. The same sense of people on the fringes sending up the dominant culture. And some musicals have both. Nora told me you were interested in "Jewish" music. Beyond "Hava Nagila."

LUKE

Well, yeah. I asked about what she likes to listen to.

HARRY

In my home when I was growing up, I was offered modern European composers who happened to be Jewish. Schönberg and Mahler. Schönberg's a bit too atonal for me. But my father looked down on popular music from a very great height -- so of course, that's what I focused on. It gave me a wicked thrill. But country music -- that has felt a bit too toxic and charged for me in recent years. Since the election.

LUKE

Since Trump, you mean.

HARRY

Yes. I can no longer look on the country music audience as benign innocents. I see them more as malignant enablers of evil, posing as benign innocents.

NORA

Harry, you said we'd have a party and get drunk. To celebrate Luke doing a good job on the transfers. Let's not get into this.

LUKE

No, it's fine. We can talk politics. But if you're expecting me to be arguing in favor of Donald Trump just 'cause I'm from the South and I like country music -- I'm sorry, but that's not gonna happen.

HARRY

But you would agree that that *is* his demographic?

LUKE

Mostly. But it's a little more complicated than that. Nashville is a destination city, with people from all over. More people arriving every day. Lots of Belmont students don't agree with all the policies of Belmont. Nashville is a blue city in a red state -- all of Davidson County is blue.

HARRY

But when it comes to the music, how can you separate it? How can you listen to those saber-rattling, Bible-thumping songs, and not want to throw a rock at your radio?

LUKE

There aren't so many songs like that. There were some at the time of the Iraq War. Some Toby Keith songs -- they play them on Veterans Day or Memorial Day. It's not my favorite kind of song, just like I don't like Bro country and other things that have come along.

LUKE (CONT'D)

But I don't have a problem with good songs about the Bible. There are some songs of faith that I find really powerful.

HARRY

Do you go to concerts?

LUKE

Some. When I lived in Nashville I'd go out to hear friends play in writers rounds, or with their bands in clubs.

HARRY

And it doesn't bother you to be surrounded by Trump-voting yahoos?

LUKE

There's a real mix of people who live there. Like I said.

HARRY

But, in general --

NORA

Let me just jump right on in here. Luke, if you're feeling like I betrayed a confidence, like I told Harry a bunch of things you told me in private, then I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that. I told him you asked me about different kinds of music that Jews like -- and I was stumped by the question. I told him some people who were close to you voted for Trump, and it sounded like you were ambivalent about it. I wasn't trying to set you up. I wasn't expecting Harry to use all of that as a way to bait you and insult you and dissect you, but given that Harry is Harry, I guess I should have known --

HARRY

We're working on a project, Nora. And you said he's interested in city people, new kinds of people, and he wants to learn about our differences. Why shouldn't we get to know each other? Why shouldn't we have a conversation across the national divide?

NORA

That's not what you're doing right now. You're out for blood.

HARRY

Haven't you heard? I need the blood of angelic young gentiles in order to make my matzoh.

NORA

Go to Hell.

LUKE

I don't know what -- that's all about ...

NORA

He's invoking the Blood Libel. It's an old anti-Semitic legend. He likes to put words in everybody's mouth, including me. So watch yourself.

LUKE

Okay, I'll watch myself. But if you want to talk politics, Harry, I guess I'm up for it.

HARRY

What do you think of Donald Trump?

LUKE

I don't ... I have an aunt who just wrote him off because he made fun of that handicapped guy. That reporter, during the campaign. That was it for her. And she's a very loving Christian woman. She had friends on Facebook who argued that Trump always moves his hands that way, New Yorkers talk with their hands, he wasn't making fun of the guy ... and she defriended them. She said: "You can stay my friend if you acknowledge that he did that, he made fun of that reporter and you voted for him anyway. But if you're gonna pretend not to know he did that, I can't deal with you." I sort of admired that. Her stance. But she's the only one in my family who didn't vote for him. Except for me.

HARRY

And how do you deal with the ones who did vote for him?

LUKE

I try not to talk politics with them. Some of them are on Facebook -- my brother and sister -- and I see what they post to their pages. And what their friends write. But I try not to get sucked in.

HARRY

And do you see the racism that's at the heart of it?

LUKE

I don't ... know that it's racism ...

HARRY

Then what is it, exactly?

LUKE

For a lot of people of faith it's about being Pro-Life. It was all about that seat on the Supreme Court for them. And the next seat.

LUKE (CONT'D)

And once they voted for Trump -- they felt protective of him. They're good people, but they make excuses for him. They say: how can you know his heart? How can you know that he doesn't mean well?

HARRY

Mmm. The Birther Movement didn't give them a clue about his heart, or lack thereof? Or the way he doesn't deny that he has a book of Hitler's speeches that some people say is his only bedtime reading? I hadn't even heard about that book yet, but I knew what I was listening to when he rode the elevator down and launched his campaign calling Mexicans drug-dealers and rapists. I said: Crikey, it's Hitler! It's Hitler in Weimar Germany scapegoating the Jews, from the '20s into the '30s, saying: Why did we lose the War? Why are we poor during the Depression? It's the Jews! It's the Communists! It's the homosexuals! It's the cosmopolitan city people making decadent art in the Bauhaus movement! They're to blame! I thought: Does this fool really think he can get anywhere with that Hitler nonsense, here in the United States? And then he swept the Republican primaries. And I thought: Wow. Republicans are pretty scary. But, does he really think he can win a general election with that stuff ...? And then he did. But I'm wondering: what do the "good" people close to you make of a man cheating on every contract he's signed? What did they make of his Trump University scam, which was designed to steal the life savings of the elderly and the uneducated?

NORA

Or the pussy-grabbing tape? Or boasting on Howard Stern about having the right to "inspect" women and girls naked in his beauty contest changing rooms? With more women saying he's done the things he brags about then there are men who say Jerry Sandusky raped them when they were kids? With Trump's lawyers claiming for 25 years that it was okay when Trump violently raped Ivana just before their divorce, shouting at her and ripping bunches of hair out of her head, because "you can't rape your spouse"?

HARRY

Now, now, Nora. I thought you said we shouldn't bait Luke about politics, and pick on him.

NORA

We shouldn't. But maybe I'm baiting you. Maybe I'm wondering why Trump's misogyny is never an issue for you, and a sign that he doesn't have a good heart. You talk about everything but that.

HARRY

I'm looking at the bigger issues.

NORA

Oh, sure. Misogyny is small potatoes. I need to look at the underlying evils of capitalism, I need to see the big picture. Break it down for me, Harry. Mansplain it to me.

HARRY

Mansplaining. That's such a tired term.

NORA

It's a useful term and it's apt.

HARRY

Hillary Clinton was worthy but dull. She was a neo-liberal war-hawk and the best Republican who ran in 2016, and I'm sorry she didn't win.

NORA

But you didn't vote for her. After Bernie lost the primaries --

HARRY

Got cheated out of the nomination --

NORA

Horse-shit, he lost the nomination by four million votes, and you couldn't bring yourself to vote for the woman who beat him.

HARRY

I didn't vote for anyone. I didn't like being forced to choose between two unappealing options.

NORA

Then you don't get to say you're sorry she didn't win, and you don't get to lambast Luke because people's he's close to voted for Trump. Your righteous rage is worthless. You and the Johnson voters and the Stein voters, and the Nader voters in 2000 -- you were one of those also, weren't you?

HARRY

Yes. But this time I didn't vote at all.

NORA

Well, some people never learn, I guess. They just keep on shooting their country in the foot.

HARRY

I live in New York. It never matters, in terms of the electoral college, if I vote or not.

NORA

It matters to me. And it matters to this argument. Shame on you for supporting self-righteous spoilers who help put dim, bigoted men in office. And shame on you as the child of a Holocaust survivor for doing nothing, for standing by as fascists who oppose our Constitution and believe in white supremacy take power. And shame on you as a man who has women friends, or putative friends, plus a woman who's your mother, for not giving a damn about misogyny and violence toward women, and saying you're focused on "bigger issues." There's no separation of the issues. Dehumanizing women and treating them as *things* is the same as calling immigrants an infestation, and letting 4,600 Americans in Puerto Rico die after a hurricane and lying about it, and saying the Nazis and KKK are good people. And trying to take health insurance away from twenty million. It's all the same fight, it's all about whether we act like people and treat others as people or whether we're sociopaths enabling the sociopaths in power. If you think your vote didn't count, you should have looked for other ways to prevent this from happening.

HARRY

You're a New Yorker -- your vote is equally worthless. What did you do to help Hillary win?

NORA

Everything I could. I wrote to her campaign regularly, and gave advice nobody listened to. I railed at her to put out campaign ads with her sitting at a kitchen table holding a coffee cup and saying: "Here's my plan for universal pre-K for four-year-olds, and here's why I want to get rid of Citizens United, and raise the minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour and end the college debt crisis and invest in green energy, and here's how I'm going to pay for everything by making the rich pay their fair share." I wrote to them, every week: stop telling people to go to the website! That's not inspiring! Talk about the issues if the media won't!

HARRY

And what did that get you?

NORA

Nothing, but I kept doing it. I went on Quora, I tried to parse and defuse the lies and disinformation of Trump and Assange and Putin and all the Russian cyber-trolls. I became a top writer on Quora. I got a nifty jacket.

HARRY

You can't lump Julian Assange with --

NORA

I sure can. Don't tell me what I can't do.

HARRY

Nora, I don't think I've ever seen you this riled up.

NORA

Well, stop picking on Luke, you Trump-enabling coward.

LUKE

I didn't vote, either.

NORA

What?

LUKE

I didn't. I was conflicted, and -- I wound up not voting for anyone.

HARRY

It wouldn't have made a difference for you, either. In Tennessee. Or Alabama.

NORA

Why didn't you vote for Hillary?

LUKE

I heard a lot of people say bad things about her. I should have voted. But the things I heard -- that's why I cut the Trump supporters some slack. A lot of people from my university and my hometown get a distorted view of things, from watching FOX News and from radio shows and what they read online. They wish Trump wouldn't tweet so much. They've learned to look away from the bad things he's done, sleeping with a porn star, the kinds of things Bill Clinton did also ...

NORA

Bill Clinton had a consensual affair with Monica Lewinsky, she was a college graduate who made passes at him, and all through the 2016 campaign, Republicans lied and said she was underage, they conflated consensual sex with assault, they'd say she was the "victim" of the Clintons, but if you watch her TED talk, she compares herself to that gay student at Rutgers who found out his roommate taped his first sexual encounter and made it public, and the kid jumped off the George Washington Bridge. The Clintons didn't publicly humiliate her --

HARRY

Oh, Nora, now you are definitely attacking sweet little Luke, as well as me --

NORA

He grew up in the Bible Belt where sin is sin, and they maybe don't distinguish between sins that hurt women and sins that don't, but what's your excuse, Harry? I think I'm still going after you more than him.

HARRY

I take an entirely benign view of sin.

NORA

It was Linda Tripp and Ken Starr and the media who publicly humiliated Monica Lewinsky like that Rutgers student. She said in her TED talk that it's wrong to publicly slut-shame someone, and she's right. It was wrong to slut-shame her and wrong to slut-shame Bill Clinton at the same time when they both wanted to keep the relationship they'd had years earlier private. Who cares that Trump cheats on all of his wives, and has prostitutes pee on a bed, that's not what makes him a sexual predator.

LUKE

Well, I don't know about all that, I'm just saying ... People I know didn't like Hillary so much, they didn't trust her, and maybe some of them worry too much about the border, and about people breaking the laws without any penalty -- and they thought Trump was speaking straight to them. And they see him -- almost as a holy fool, or a man who doesn't understand the role he's been asked to play, the role God has chosen him to play ... but they do feel God has done that.

HARRY

Holy Fool? Is that another way to say "useful idiot"? Like the way the evangelicals see Jews and the Holy Land. They're pro-Israel because they're looking forward to Armageddon, and they think it will happen when the Jews and the Muslims do battle in the Holy Land, and all the evangelicals will be Raptured up, while the rest of us are left behind to destroy each other ... and of course, the hard-line right-wing leaders of Israel see the evangelicals the same way. As useful idiots who support the Jewish State.

LUKE

Well ... again. I don't know about all that. But I think I know what goes on in the minds of a lot of people who voted for Trump. They mean well. They would never talk to anyone or treat anyone the way he does. They say: he's a New Yorker. He's a businessman. He's a leader. He has to be more ruthless in the worlds that he lives in. Some people like my aunt can't get past the bad things about Trump. I can't either. But -- a lot of Christians believe in forgiveness and redemption. They think he's being judged too harshly.

HARRY

Well, listen, I didn't know Charles Manson's heart either, but I could take a guess about what was going on inside it.

LUKE

People -- good, kind people -- are forgetting what it says in the Book of Matthew. They forget what Jesus really cares about. "I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." You know?

NORA

Well, sort of. We know what you mean.

LUKE

I just think this is a very sad time. And it's actually turning some people ugly and mean -- not in my family, but in my community. Those friends of my brother and sister talking trash on Facebook, like I said. Talking racist, even. Pretending lies are truth and they can't tell the difference. And that was part of what made me want to get away. Get out of my comfort zone and see someplace else.

NORA

Well, good for you, Luke. You've done something brave, that most people wouldn't do. And don't listen to me and Harry when we lecture you and yell at you. We're just East Coast elitists.

LUKE

Oh, I don't think that.

NORA

Well, we are and we aren't. But we're also appalled and terrified -- we're two scared Jews in a time when, as Harry says, not only are the Nazis on the rise, but Nazi-style rhetoric is being aimed at other vulnerable minorities, and it's ugly to listen to.

LUKE

But you know -- I mean, there are Jews in the administration. Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump. Stephen Miller.

HARRY

Yes, the delightful Stephen Miller. One of the proudest specimens of American Jewry since Bernie Madoff, Joel Rifkin and Leopold and Loeb. But of course, there were also Jews who worked with the Nazis in the ghettos and in the camps. In the camps there were kapos. Sometimes beautiful gay young men who were inmates would get abused less, and would be allowed to survive, if they gave sexual favors to the Jewish kapos. Who might, at any time, throw them over and let them be killed, and pick another favorite from the batch on the next train. When you watch our movie with subtitles -- you'll get to hear a little about some of them. I'm thinking Stephen Miller and Jared would make superb kapos.

NORA

I just want to say -- I've known Harry a long time, and he used to believe in Godwin's Law. He didn't like to make comparisons of anyone to the Nazis. Even people he hated. Before Trump.

HARRY

Well, you know, even Godwin has given smart, thoughtful people a pass now if they talk about Hitler in relation to Trump.

NORA

Has he?

HARRY

Yes. He says it's all right.

NORA

That's funny.

HARRY

We live in strange times.

(beat -- HARRY becomes a little friendlier
toward LUKE)

So, where are you staying, Luke? Housing in the city can be hard to come by.

LUKE

I'm sharing an apartment with three people in Brooklyn. In Red Hook. My granddaddy left me some money when he passed away.

HARRY

A bunch of roommates in Red Hook? That doesn't sound like fun. Stay here, save money on rent.

NORA

Have you been living here, Harry?

HARRY

For the past few weeks, yes. I sleep on a futon in the room where I work. You hadn't noticed?

NORA

No. But there's no shower. How come you don't smell?

HARRY

I take sponge baths. And sometimes I go to a friend's place -- he lets me use his shower.

NORA

What do you eat?

HARRY

I live on ginger-nut cakes. Like Bartleby the Scrivener.

NORA

Good luck with that.

LUKE

How did you all get this suite of rooms?

HARRY

Another friend. He had a business he ran out of this suite. Hand-made greeting cards, mixed media, fabrics, paints, line drawings, collage. He had two people working for him. Then he found out he had pancreatic cancer. He's traveling now, and he doesn't want some people close to him to know he's dying yet, so he rented me these rooms for next to nothing. So, you see, I'm just a lucky ambulance chaser.

NORA

Wow. You *are* Bartleby the Scrivener. Cooped up in these rooms by yourself at night. Working on this morbid film, listening to those horrible interviews. Have you given any thought to whether you're cracking up?

HARRY

(in Bartleby mode)

I would prefer not to.

NORA

Yeah, that's cute.

HARRY

But if Luke would like to save his inheritance by getting out of Brooklyn and living here in Manhattan in the room where he works, I'm sure my friend would allow him to make use of the shower also -- and that apartment is only four blocks away.

NORA

Gee. What a generous offer for you to make.

HARRY

I'm a generous guy.

LUKE

Where do you live, Nora?

NORA

I've been staying with a woman I knew at Oberlin. For almost a year. Living in her living room. Paying a little rent.

HARRY

After another nasty break-up.

NORA

That's the kind I specialize in.

LUKE

Thanks for your offer, Harry, but I actually find the people in my apartment -- interesting. And I kind of like taking the subway.

HARRY

Oh, you should have seen it back when it worked most of the time.

NORA

You're making the right choice, Luke. If you move in, he'll just lecture you about Donald Trump. And make you pay for the sins of Real America. And you'll have no place to escape to at night, except the mean streets of the city.

LUKE

With Trump ... I'd say he's really just like a lot of older men where I'm from. Watching FOX all day, shouting about silly things they haven't thought through ... He's just everyone's dad or grandpa.

NORA

See, that's all Bernie Sanders was around here. Everyone's shouty old Communist grandfather.

LUKE

New Yorkers?

NORA

Jews. Jews all have old Commie grandfathers or great-grandfathers.

HARRY

Eastern European Jews, perhaps.

NORA

Oh, right. Not German Jews.

HARRY

Would either of you care for more Jack?

LUKE

I'm good.

NORA

You go ahead and kill the bottle, Harry.

HARRY

Well, I don't know about that ...

NORA

How did your country song go?

HARRY

Oh. Something like ...

(half-sings)

And right now, it don't really matter/If I never get you back/Some people tell me, whiskey's not the answer/They don't know Jack/ They don't know Jack.

NORA

That's pretty good. I might write that with you.

HARRY

How about you, Luke? Do you ever co-write country songs?

LUKE

Oh, I've tried it. Wasn't very good at it. In Nashville -- there are people who are good songwriters, and people who aren't, and you figure out fast which kind you are. I mean, it's Music City. There's a lot of talent running around.

HARRY

Music City. Why don't we live in a place like that, Nora?

NORA

We live in Pain and Despair City. That's just as good.

HARRY

Yes, and even when we leave it -- that's still where we are.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF SCENE FIVE

SCENE SIX

LIGHTS UP on LUKE, alone on stage. HE addresses the audience directly.

LUKE

I first met Krista at Bible camp when we were seven years old. Both of our daddies were pastors -- we had that in common. What I liked right away about her was she seemed fearless, and she did things boys usually do. It was more than her being a "Tomboy" -- you almost couldn't place her as a girl or a boy. She poured everything into sports. She led the other girls in her bunk, and came up with things for them to do in the talent show. She had a beautiful, low singing voice -- boys and girls had singing activity together, and I loved to hear her sing. I don't know if I had a crush on Krista or just wanted to be friends with her -- I guess it was a crush. But by the end of camp, the second summer we spent together, I got her to exchange numbers. I'd call her and we'd talk. And we even had play dates -- and we'd have light saber battles, and play X-box, and play basketball ... Our parents thought it was strange. They didn't think we were fooling around, at eight, nine or ten, but they thought girls should play with girls and boys should play with boys. So, we wound up mostly having a telephone friendship, outside of Bible camp. Once I got my own phone, I'd call her late at night, and just talk for hours at a time. Soft, so my parents wouldn't know, with the lights out in my room. I could tell she didn't like me that way -- but she was funny. She was my friend. I loved to hear her low, soothing voice. It calmed me down, and helped me go to sleep at night. She'd tell me about what she was going to do. Hitch-hike to New Orleans. Start a band. Join a motorcycle gang. I just let her talk.

(beat)

When we were thirteen, she started acting strange. She was fighting with her parents 'cause they wouldn't let her keep her hair short and wear jeans, they wanted her to start acting more like a girl, in skirts and dresses. They wanted her to get past the Tomboy phase, and they wound up grounding her when she cut off all her hair. She got to keep her phone, and she'd give me updates on what was going on. Angry, she was really angry. And then, all at once -- she didn't want to talk to me. She'd put me off. It was like she shut down emotionally, and she told me she wasn't interested in having any friends. I saw her that summer at camp -- and she still didn't want to talk, and when I tried to ask what's wrong, please, tell me, she snarled at me, and physically attacked me. I mean, we were off together in the woods, and she was punching me hard, she made my nose bleed, and I just said: tell me what's going on, what is happening to you. She started crying. I'd never heard her cry, or seen her do anything that seemed weak or vulnerable. She said her daddy was messing with her. She didn't want to go home from camp. Ever. She asked me to run away with her. I told her I couldn't do that. We were thirteen. We'd get caught. I told her to tell someone. A grown-up. She said nobody would believe her. I offered to pray with her about what she should do. She told me God could go to Hell, and I could go to Hell. The next week she ran away from camp.

LUKE (CONT'D)

They picked her up the next day. Either her family got rid of her phone or she did -- I couldn't reach her anymore. When I was fifteen -- when both of us were fifteen -- I heard she killed herself. Hanged herself in her room. I told my daddy what she had told me. About her daddy, my daddy's colleague, the respected preacher. I should have told him right away, maybe, two years earlier, but it didn't make any difference. Daddy said Krista was a troubled soul. She was confused about sexuality, confused about what it meant to be a woman, and her parents had tried to help her as best they could, and she resented it. She must have been telling me lies, he said. Well, I respected my daddy, and I tried to respect and trust what he was saying. But I couldn't. He offered to pray with me. I wanted to tell him to go to Hell, and for God to go to Hell, but I didn't say it out loud. I just stopped -- believing. I'd go to church and while Daddy was giving his sermon, I'd let my mind wander. To profane thoughts. Or I'd imagine flesh-eating zombies coming into the church and tearing up everybody in there. I'd imagine joining a motorcycle gang. Getting the hell away from this phony, sanctified place I was tired of. I ran away myself for a week, when I was sixteen. It hurt my folks so much. They were just bewildered -- they didn't understand why I did that. And why I found myself screaming at them sometimes, so choked up with hate ... I loved my parents and I didn't want to hurt them. I repented. I told my dad I was the Prodigal Son, and I was returning to the love of my family. I thought I'd had some kind of break-through. Be patient, I thought. Do your time, and get out. I thought that going to college would be enough of a change, I'd be independent, in a new city, I'd make my way. But I was still trying to be a good boy, and still wanting to say Fuck You to all of them, for Krista. I kept it up until I graduated. And then I left.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOSCENE ONE

LIGHTS UP on HARRY sprawled across a chair, and NORA working on her computer.

HARRY

What did he say? What's wrong with him?

NORA

He said he's coming down with something, maybe a cold. I think he's hung over. From the Jack Daniels. I think he really doesn't drink much, and he didn't want to admit it.

HARRY

How about you? You hung over?

NORA

No.

HARRY

But you're a notoriously cheap date.

NORA

But I went home and drank three tall glasses of water before I went to bed.

HARRY

Do I know this woman you're living with, from Oberlin?

NORA

No. How could you? When did you ever take an interest in my women friends?

HARRY

Well, but so many of them are worthy but dull.

NORA

Like Hillary.

HARRY

Exactly.

NORA

Go fuck yourself.

HARRY

I hope Luke is sick or hung over, like you say.

NORA

That's a nice thought.

HARRY

I mean, I hope he's not staying away because we put him off with all of our political yelling.

NORA

We may have scared him or made him angry. It will serve you right if we did.

HARRY

Why will it serve me right?

NORA

This is your idea of how to hit on someone. You bully him, you make fun of him, you ask him a barrage of Socratic questions ...

HARRY

What makes you think I'm hitting on him?

NORA

It's like a first-grader. A little boy who sees a little girl he likes, so he throws a rock at her to get her attention.

HARRY

Nora. What makes you think I'm hitting on Luke?

NORA

Harry, c'mon. I know your MO. It was the same thing with Patrick. As soon as you started baiting him, and telling him he wasn't good enough for me, and making fun of his interpretations of literature and philosophy -- I kind of knew you were hot for him. I didn't think you'd get very far ...

HARRY

Luke is nothing like Patrick.

NORA

That's true, he's not. He's nicer, actually. So lay off.

HARRY

Ooh. Getting territorial, are we?

NORA

I'm not after Luke. I'm not a cradle robber like you.

HARRY

I like beautiful boys ...

NORA

The way a camp kapo does?

HARRY

Fuck you. As I was saying, I like beautiful boys, but I make sure they're legal before I pursue them. Luke is legal. It's more than my corrupters did in my case -- for which, of course, I am very grateful.

NORA

Yeah, I don't need to hear your Jersey public bathroom stories. It's good you're finally admitting that you're after Luke. To me, to yourself. It's tiresome when you prevaricate.

HARRY

I find him distasteful in an interesting way. Fascinatingly noisome. The whole syrupy corn pone persona. The accent, the good manners. Something disgusting and horrible is happening to our country, and he embodies it, and I think it might be interesting to fuck something so very monstrous in such a beautiful form.

NORA

Yeah, stop focusing on what you think he symbolizes, and try to see the very young person who might get hurt if you fuck him over.

HARRY

Mmmm. So, are you sure you're not after him for yourself?

NORA

No. Why would I be after him?

HARRY

Well, you've just been through another rotten relationship. Or several. You could use some harmless fun. And you're always complaining about New York men. We're jaded, we only want sex, we're emotionally brutal ...

NORA

And self-absorbed, and you treat women as if they're disposable.

HARRY

Right. And here, all of a sudden, is a sweet Southern gentleman. Who has a Jew fetish, and finds you exotic, and wants to hear all about your writing. I've even seen him try to protect you from me.

NORA

He is sweet. He hasn't heard of half the things I reference, and it makes me feel like Grandma Moses. That doesn't turn me on. It would be like I was a molester. He may be legal but he's a baby, and I don't seduce babies.

HARRY

Why not let him seduce you?

NORA

I don't know that he's out to seduce me. I don't see why every work place situation has to turn into harassment and crossing the line --

HARRY

Yawn.

NORA

But even if he *is* interested in me -- not just as an interesting anthropological specimen, but sexually -- I'm just not feeling it. You know? The religious upbringing ... I don't find it monstrous but sexy, or whatever you said. It just bores me. He quotes scripture at me, and he says he sees things through a glass darkly, or how in Romans, or First Corinthians, or "in the book of Luke, the book I'm named after, the Apostle Paul says this, that, and the other ..." And he seems to think I know what he means, or I'll have to agree. And I'm repelled. I try not to hold it against him, but it's completely alienating.

HARRY

Are you sure?

NORA

I'm sure. So, you don't have to fight me for him. The field is wide open for you. I hope he continues to resist your efforts, but I'm staying out of it.

HARRY

Why do you hope that? If you don't want him?

NORA

You're a force of darkness. He's a force of light. It's a kind of light that bores me, but it still qualifies as light. And I don't want your darkness to consume it.

HARRY

You project too much onto me. Stemming from your own life's disappointments. I have not been around you for years, and I am not responsible for everything that has ever gone wrong.

NORA

You're probably right.

HARRY

He's a young man who has come to a different place to learn about alien beings. It occurs to me that I have a good mind, and I have many things that might be worth learning.

NORA

As you poison him and make him hate his family and hate himself.

HARRY

I thought you said I was baiting him just to get his attention.

NORA

If you really fall for him and if you get him into bed you'll do it all the more.

HARRY

So, you don't just see me as hating women. You see me as hating all of mankind.

NORA

Sure. It's part of being self-destructive. You want everything you do to be a disaster. That's why you pursue projects like this miserable documentary. It's kind of a reverse Kobiyashi Maru.

HARRY

I'm re-programming the computer to make sure that I fail?

NORA

Exactly. And so, hurting somebody close to you, and making sure the relationship ends in pain and bitterness all around, is part of how you do that. I'd rather not see you spread your toxic need for things to disintegrate all over Luke.

HARRY

Mmm. It's hard to know whether you're jealous of me or jealous of Luke.

NORA

I'm not looking to go to bed with you at this point in my life, Harry.

HARRY

What *are* you looking for, Nora?

NORA

Who knows. As usual, you looked me up when I was lonely and I was bored. I believe in this miserable, sour, iconoclastic film of yours. I'll finish this project -- and then I think I'll leave New York.

HARRY

And move to Nashville?

NORA

Sure. Or Austin. Or some interesting city where people are gentler to each other and the man shortage is not as acute. And I like the idea of a blue city in a red state. Maybe the sane people there feel weirded out by the regular Americans all the time, the way I've felt since the election.

HARRY

Which you blame me for.

NORA

Right. All of you Bernie Bros.

HARRY

It wasn't only guys who supported Bernie.

NORA

It was an awful lot of comfortable white guys, though, wasn't it? An awful lot of armchair socialists. Who, like Bernie, didn't really care about women's issues, and saw everything in economic terms, and thought Planned Parenthood was too bourgeois and "Establishment." But I don't just blame you people. I also blame Comey and Putin and Assange and every other sexist asshole male who diddled with the election. Bernie and Comey are actually highest on my list, I think.

HARRY

Oh, so tell me. Tell me how Bernie "diddled" the election. He cast a spell on Hillary Rodham Clinton and made her the most boring woman alive?

NORA

Hillary won the primaries in 2016 --

HARRY

You've said that already --

NORA

But she also won them in 2008. By less than one percentage point, but she still got more votes in the primaries than Barack Obama. She just didn't have as many delegates or super-delegates. And that must have been pretty frustrating and painful for her.

HARRY

Awww.

NORA

But she conceded. Well before the Democratic Convention. Because she saw the big picture, she looked beyond herself and she didn't want the Republicans to win. Let's contrast that to your pure-hearted Bernie. When he finally, grudgingly conceded, he said: "She's got more delegates than me, and more super-delegates." He forgot to mention that she also got four million more votes. He deliberately misled his foolish followers into thinking he had more votes. Like Donald Trump making up three million illegal voters to claim he won the popular vote.

HARRY

Bernie is not Donald Trump.

NORA

No, but he's almost as bad. Quick, easy, solutions. Vote for me, America, I promise you free money and sex toys growing on the trees! Just like Trump, he thought it was all about him -- I alone can fix it. And he couldn't stand losing to a girl, in exactly the same way. He couldn't acknowledge it had happened. He had to yell: Waaah, no fair, she cheated!

HARRY

Hillary acted like the uncrowned queen and the inevitable candidate from the beginning, she didn't want to debate Bernie, or debate him at an hour anyone would watch --

NORA

In the end, there were nine debates and three town halls, on at reasonable times, and I watched all of them. And I thought she beat him every time, just like she beat Trump.

HARRY

Hillary funded the DNC like it was hers, she was always the favorite of the DNC --

NORA

Sure, and what did that add up to? He lost the fucking primaries. Maybe because he was a Jewish communist atheist and a lot of people down South didn't want to vote for that. But guess what? A lot of other people were scared to vote for a woman, we all have problems.

HARRY

And then Bernie hit the trail and campaigned for Hillary.

NORA

Sure, after demanding to read her speeches like her dad checking up on her, and after setting up Trump's whole "Crooked Hillary" line, and inciting his followers to throw a big tantrum all over the Democratic Convention, after setting things up perfectly for Assange and Putin and their nothing-burger of an email drop that sounded like something ... Bernie hit the trail.

NORA (CONT'D)

After she re-worked her policies to include his ideas, and let him co-write the platform. And her ideas were a lot like his anyhow, they just had more depth of field. He hit the trail and told his supporters: we'll rule from below! We'll keep them honest! We'll hold their feet to the fire! It was a sure-fire way to make you people vote for Stein or Johnson, or not at all.

HARRY

And where was she? If her plans were so inspiring and wonderful, why wasn't she out there talking about them?

NORA

Why wouldn't the media cover her when --

HARRY

Why did she disappear from the campaign trail for weeks at a time? Why was it up to Bernie and Beyonce and Elizabeth Warren and whoever else to make the case for her? Even when she was on-stage, why did others have to do the heavy lifting?

NORA

Fine, I wish she didn't get pneumonia, I wish she campaigned more, I wish she was a better speaker. But Bernie did Trump and Putin's job, all during 2016, framing her as so corrupt --

HARRY

He said he didn't give a damn about her emails --

NORA

That's when he thought he could win. When he started losing he got pouty, he'd frame her as a corporate stooge, he wouldn't concede after he lost, and reporters kept asking him: Aren't you afraid what you're doing might get Donald Trump elected? And Bernie would say: No, Donald Trump can't be elected because he's a bigot, and America would never elect a bigot. Well, there's a funny punch-line to that story, I don't know if you've heard --

HARRY

All right, Nora --

NORA

And if they ask him about it now, Bernie says: "I'm focused on the future, I don't want to live in the past." No introspection, no holding himself accountable. What a statesman!

HARRY

All right, Nora.

NORA

All right. I'm done.

HARRY

Again. It's a curious thing. I've never known you to flash with this kind of anger.

NORA

I'm furious. I get up every day furious at what's happened, and I go to bed the same way. Furious and heartbroken.

HARRY

Well, obviously, so do I, so does every thoughtful person --

NORA

But as a woman -- I feel it on a visceral level. I've absorbed casual sexism and misogyny and patronizing remarks from you and my father and crappy boyfriends and everyone else my whole life -- I can't do it anymore. I don't think I used to be a humorless, angry feminist. I am now. I wear it with pride.

HARRY

Just remember that 54% of you white women voted for Trump.

NORA

I'm not white, Goddammit, I'm a Jew, over 70% of us voted for Hillary! You're one of the freaks who couldn't be bothered -- or you just hate women so much --

HARRY

Do you really, seriously think that? Or are you just striking a pose?

NORA

I don't know what I think anymore.

(beat)

I think you should stay away from the kid.

HARRY

So that my darkness does not consume him? So that I don't fill him with my Bartleby despair, here in these shabby, empty rooms?

NORA

So that you don't take out your rage at Trump and Real America on him. Or start a loving relationship and make it turn ugly, in order to hurt yourself, and hurt him in the process.

HARRY

Why do you think he's here? Why New York?

NORA

He's more broad-minded than we are. He wanted to see a new world.

HARRY

Do you think he's expiating guilt in some way? Like, he knows his part of the country did something disgusting and unforgiveable, and he's here among us doing penance? Or, do you think he hates his preacher daddy and his whole smarmy, heart-warming family, and he's come here to say fuck you to them?

NORA

Sure, it's possible.

HARRY

Or -- he's bi-curious. He's come a long way to finally be who he can't be at home.

NORA

I think he's definitely looking for something that he can't find at home. Not men, necessarily. But some kind of forbidden love. It makes me weary to see somebody that young. It makes me remember when I was so young and stupid, I thought I could actually find love.

HARRY

Love. You're better off without it, and I'm better off without mine.

NORA

Don't quote Star Trek at me, Harry.

HARRY

Why did you agree to work with me on this movie?

NORA

I told you. I believe in it. The world's going down the toilet -- in my personal life and in the life of this country -- so, why not. I got some money in the divorce to live on. I can barely put one foot in front of the other. This keeps me busy.

HARRY

Am I taking advantage of you? Am I using you?

NORA

I don't think so. Maybe I'm using you.

HARRY

How would that be possible?

NORA

Maybe I'm writing something, and observing you up close is helping me to write it. You know how you're always saying a good writer is a voyeur. A mad scientist. Maybe I'm watching you scurry around like a laboratory rat, and I'm taking notes on you. Or -- maybe you just stir up annoying old memories that I'd like to access.

HARRY

Really? Well, good. It's nice to hear that you're writing. And it's nice to know that I can be of use to an old friend. I'm still your toxic muse.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

LIGHTS UP on HARRY, LUKE and NORA, each alone on a different part of the stage, facing the audience. When one character is speaking, the other two are still.

HARRY

The songwriter Lorenz Hart -- everybody called him Larry. He was ebullient, always bouncing around a room, laughing loudly and rubbing his hands together, chomping on his black cigars. He was tragically short, with a large head, like a gnome, and he loved to throw big parties and pick up the check for a huge group of people. He was the great-grand-nephew of Heinrich Heine. I see them as quite similar. Speaking different languages, sparkling with wit, mixing genre with genre, metaphor with metaphor and mood with mood, destroying themselves, dazzling those around them with what Richard Rodgers called a "pinwheel brilliance." And alone, a lot of the time. Writing miserable lyrics about rejected love and heartache ... With Hart it had to be more coded, of course, because he was gay. He'd often write his songs in the voice of a woman. Lots of good torch songs -- you oughta hear Ella Fitzgerald tear one up. "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered." "Falling in Love With Love." "A Ship Without a Sail." "Spring is here -- I hear."

NORA

I didn't see Harry for a few years after we graduated high school. And then he showed up in Oberlin, after he dropped out of Sarah Lawrence. I thought I'd gotten past any damage we had done each other. I was living off campus, among townies, in an apartment with a guy named Patrick. Shacked up. Obies marry other Obies, that's what they say, and that's where we thought things were headed. Patrick was a bit passive, a bit self-absorbed. He let me do most of the housework, and kind of let me do a lot of his academic work. I'd "proofread" his papers and somehow wind up fleshing them out and finishing them for him ... But that was fine. I'd been saved from the entropy of my dead-end friendship with Harry. I'd put the moves on Patrick, and he'd respond, and I thought I had lowered my expectations just the right amount and found my niche. And then Harry turned up. Knocked around campus until he met someone who knew me, got my contact information, and knocked on my door. And I let him stay with us -- his sleeping bag on our living room couch. Patrick was passive about him staying with us, but willing, as usual. And I thought, what the hell. Help out an old friend whose life has crashed and burned. He can't hurt me now.

LUKE

When I first arrived in NYC by Greyhound bus -- it did feel scary. I wasn't used to all those different kinds of people. They all seemed a little harsh, a little rude to me. They could just tell I was from the sticks. Just from body language, maybe. People would yell stuff at me. Look me up and down, like they were mocking me.

LUKE (CONT'D)

My first few days, I stayed in an Air B n B, and I was so surprised to see roaches in the kitchen! Even just little ones! It got better. But even after I had my apartment in Brooklyn and I was starting to learn my neighborhood, I was learning the subway system -- I'd be daydreaming, on the street or in a store, and sometimes I'd hear a thick New York accent and I'd just think: where am I? What am I doing here? Am I stuck in some movie? Is this an episode of Law & Order?

HARRY

Larry Hart loved to rhyme. He was a fool for an internal rhyme or a daring rhyme. If you write "You sew your trousseau and Robinson Crusoe/Is not so far from worldly cares/As our blue room, far away upstairs" you are wild about your own powers, and mad with your own perfume. Hart was seven years older than Richard Rodgers. He held forth to him, when they first met, about how childish and lazy American songs and musicals were, their plots and their rhymes, and how much better they could be. And Hart knew he had found a musical genius. He was never in love with Rodgers, but there was a real love between them. He drove Rodgers crazy. Hart had no discipline. Even though Rodgers was younger, Hart started calling him the "principal." Later in life, Rodgers would sometimes talk about Hart in scathing, homophobic ways, as in "it's good to write a score and not have to search all over the globe for that little fag," but I think it actually came out of a place of love. Like a white person in love with a black person who thinks that gives him the right to use the N word. For decades, Hart would sneak off and get drunk, he'd go on a bender and get lost for days with his low-life friends, and Rodgers would be frantic, looking for him, and sometimes if they were doing a show that needed changes, Rodgers would have to write a lyric himself. Rodgers was funny about pretending not to know Larry was gay. And of course, in the '20s and '30s, coming out was out of the question for Larry. Most of their shows are brittle and brilliant and forgettable. It's only the dazzling songs that survive. You can lift them right out of the script and sing them in a piano bar, and the power doesn't fade. "My Heart Stood Still." "Ten Cents a Dance." "Where or When." "Isn't It Romantic." "The Lady Is a Tramp." "Blue Moon." "We'll have Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island, too."

NORA

Harry was suddenly my old supportive friend again, making in-jokes as if nothing had happened -- and for the first time taking an interest in my work. He read my first two proto novels, and offered excellent criticism. Oberlin is famous for its creative writing program. No teacher there gave me advice half as good. He would sit up with us, late into the night, drinking red wine and probing the cracks in our relationship. How had we met? What did we share? I could sense him gauging Patrick, weighing his intelligence. He was competitive, trying to see if I had replaced him in my life with someone worthy ... and then he was competitive, playing his role of my evil twin, seeing if he could win Patrick for himself. It took a while. Like I said, Patrick was passive. If someone was willing to fuss over him, and treat him as something special -- he took it as his due.

NORA (CONT'D)

I think there were several weeks that went by when Patrick was sleeping with both me and Harry -- which also feels incestuous, when I look back on it. When I found out -- when Harry arranged for me to discover them in flagrante delicto and naked as two jay birds ... I went to stay with the woman who's putting me up now. She had a tiny little cubicle of a dorm room, but she gave me space on her floor. I don't know that Harry had use for Patrick much longer, after I gave up on both of them. I don't know that anyone paid rent on the apartment for that last month ...

LUKE

One of my roommates, or apartment mates, is a woman named Josefina. She calls me *hijo*, or *m'ijo*. She's 46. Her father was from Puerto Rico, and her mother was from Cuba. Her parents only spoke Spanish at home. She didn't learn any English until she started school. Her mother taught her all about this religion called Santería -- it sounds like voodoo, almost. She's a Santera, some kind of priestess. She shops in this "Botanica" down the street from where we live. She burns these candles in her room -- all different colors. The other roommates wish she wouldn't -- they think she's gonna burn the house down. But Josefina is careful, and I think it's cool. And she's got these amazing statues in her room -- these African figurines. I ask her what they represent. And I let her do her ritual stuff over me, though I know how much my family would hate it, like it's witchcraft and of the Devil. One night, Josefina used these shells to try to tell me more about my future and my past. They're round and smooth and fold in on themselves. They look like little mouths full of teeth to me. I asked her -- would I ever find love? And she -- I don't think it's just the Santería stuff, she says she's also a psychic. She said I was looking for this lost love, I look for it everywhere, I'm never gonna find it, it's the wound that will not heal ... and I knew she was talking about Krista. That was what she was picking up on. And I just started crying and crying and crying. She was hugging me, and rocking me ... I like being Josefina's *hijo*. I'm far from home, and her kids are grown and far away, and it's like she's this big, comfortable mom for me. And we both really need that.

HARRY

It's the opposite with Rodgers and Hammerstein, of course. You wouldn't want to try singing "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" in a cabaret. But their shows have held up far better over the years than the shows by Rodgers and Hart. Every now and then, you get a revival of *A Connecticut Yankee* or *The Boys From Syracuse* -- and Larry Hart thought to turn Shakespeare into a musical long before Cole Porter, and before Bernstein and Sondheim and Robbins and Laurents. But the Rodgers and Hart shows do creak ... The original version of *Babes in Arms* must have been wonderful, with kids rebelling against the Depression, and parents who couldn't help them, and standing up to racism and putting on a show. But the guts of it have been emptied out. *Pal Joey* survives. Larry put down the bottle and worked hard, and got serious, when they were writing it. He knew it was his masterpiece. It's about a heel, a weak, amoral man, in and out of relationships. It was in some ways the first grown-up musical, and no one knew how to take it in the 1940s.

HARRY (CONT'D)

The reviewer for the *Times*, whom Hart respected, asked: "Can you draw sweet water from a foul well?" And when Hart heard that review on opening night, he left the party guests with the whitefish and the lox, and locked himself in his room, sobbing. Heinrich Heine managed to stay alive until he was 58 years old, gasping to a nurse with his final breath that he wanted a paper and pencil to write something down. Larry Hart only made it to 48. Rodgers had already gone off and written *Oklahoma!* with Hammerstein, since Hart wouldn't write it with him, and wouldn't stop self-destructing. Hart blessed the new partnership and said: I don't know why you put up with me all this time. Rodgers arranged a revival of *Connecticut Yankee* to cheer him up. But Larry got noisy and drunk opening night, he went on a bender, out in the rain, got sick as a dog, got found on the curb by Loewe of Lerner and Loewe ... and in an oxygen tent in the hospital, a nurse heard Larry Hart gasp out: What have I lived for? And he died.

NORA

I got my degree from Oberlin. I didn't marry another Obie. I did help out in the office of several Obies who were running a web series in New York. I was script editor, and I wrote some scripts, and learned about production, and got paid a decent amount. A cousin set me up with a guy named Seth. Seth was the first nice Jewish boy I'd dated -- Harry does not count. Seth's family had a business. They made handbags. They were millionaires. Seth wasn't an intellectual -- but no guy I've ever met had been as smart as Harry anyhow. Seth had a nice sense of humor, and he wasn't passive, like Patrick. Seth loved sex, and he seemed to love my body, and that was a revelation. We got married, and I switched to working on the show part-time only. I had more time for my own writing: for novels no one wanted to publish. It's nice to be rich. We had a beautiful TriBeCa apartment. We were planning a family. Seth's older brother, who was running the business for their father, had a knocked-up wife, a trophy wife who didn't say much. Seth did everything his brother did, and so he wanted me to be knocked up, too. That was okay by me. I was ready for kids. My body wasn't. We tried for a while, and got some tests done ... and it seems like I may never be able to carry a baby to term. Well, Seth tried not to take it personally. But he resented me for it. Meanwhile, his wonderful, amazing older brother Mark was finding his pregnant and then lactating wife unappealing, so he started screwing around, Donald Trump style. I mean -- not assaulting women, just cheating on his wife who was nursing a baby. And Seth, of course, had to do everything his brother did, and he was not good at hiding his affair ... I got a nice hunk of cash in the divorce settlement. I'm living cheap, though, now. I'm trying to make the cash last a long time. And so I just coast. It looks like I can't have kids, I have no faith in relationships, American democracy has fallen into a black hole ... So, why make an effort to achieve anything? I don't have to, for a long while. I'm not up for Tinder, and swiping left or right. I tried one relationship after the divorce. I found I was back to jerks who just want a one night stand, or a one-week-stand, and I'm not wired that way. After marriage I can't be bothered to navigate the meat market. Harry got in touch with me through a high school friend.

NORA (CONT'D)

Once again, chatty, friendly, acting like nothing had happened. He told me about this documentary of his. Triangle. He needed someone to help him hunt down images to use with the audio interviews. I said sure.

LUKE

I don't feel like I'm living in a cop show anymore. I know my way around the streets and the subway. I guess I can pass for a real New Yorker, until I open my mouth and they hear the way I talk. I've tried food that burns my mouth, and stuff I never thought I'd eat, and some of it's just good, neighborhood food to me now. I tune out things are especially hard to hear and see, like everybody else. Angry mentally ill people yelling stuff. Endless poor people begging, when I just can't give them money. I've grown a tough old rhinoceros hide. I hear someone say something in a very New York way -- and it doesn't jolt me. I'm home. Or, I'm not home ... but I'm an immigrant, I'm comfortable living in exile here. Like a whole lot of people in New York.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

LIGHTS UP on NORA pacing with her cell phone. SHE is on hold. SHE drifts across the stage, and stares off.

NORA

Hello? Yes, I'm still here. Thanks for getting back to me. Yes, it's early morning, here in New York ... I'm asking that you scan the images and let us see them. We're not going to steal them, but we need to see what you have before we can talk about paying for any of it.

(listens)

I don't know. I guess you should trust us because this is an incredibly un-commercial project. A labor of love. And because Harry has directed good documentaries before, I sent the links ... Okay, so you know.

(listens)

I can't send you a script. It's a documentary. We haven't translated all the interviews yet, we haven't made a final determination about what we're using ...

(listens)

Yes. I know that what you have is rare, that's what I've heard. Look, so many photographs were lost. The Institute for Sexual Sciences in Berlin had something like 35,000 pictures and a bunch of students and Storm Troopers came crashing in and burned them all. Not recently, I mean in 1933. Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute. The pictures and all the books were publicly burned. But that's what makes the pictures in your album all the more precious. They deserve to be seen. But understand, this film is a labor of love, none of us working on it are getting paid ...

LUKE ENTERS through the front door -- through the wings on the other side of the stage. SHE doesn't notice him, as HE listens to her talk.

NORA

No, I don't think it would cheapen the value of your pictures. On the contrary, it would make the world aware of them, and we'd have no further claim on them, the copyright is yours, you could sell the use of them to someone else ...

(listens)

Sure. Sure, take all the time you need. You've got my number. We're five hours behind you.

SHE gets off the phone.

LUKE

Hey.

NORA
(scared)

Oh!

LUKE
Hey, sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. I wasn't creeping up on you or nothing.

NORA
No, it's fine, it's just ... lousy connection to Europe. I was straining to hear.

LUKE
You think you've sealed the deal?

NORA
I have no idea. I'm not known for my salesmanship.

LUKE
Is Harry up?

NORA
Yeah, Harry was apparently up at the crack of dawn. He greeted me and then he headed out for breakfast. There's a diner that he likes down the street. That was about an hour ago.

LUKE
Did he say when he'd be back?

NORA
Why? You want to party for as long as the boss is away?

LUKE
No. I -- I think I'd like to talk, though.

NORA
I'm not holding forth about Existentialism. It's too early in the day.

LUKE
No, I ... I wasn't after a big intellectual discussion.

NORA
Well, then, you may have come to the wrong place. That's how I'm programmed.

LUKE
Listen, Nora ... I'm worried about you. I asked a friend about you.

NORA

Do we have friends in common?

LUKE

No, but. I've got a friend ... Someone who lives in my apartment. She's a seer. She knows a lot of things.

NORA

Oh, Luke. Don't tell me you believe in psychics.

LUKE

But -- it's not like that. This person has a gift, she sees things.

NORA

I thought you came to New York to get away from all that. The religious stuff.

LUKE

Oh, this is *not* my daddy's religion. This is stuff he'd say is gonna send me straight to Hell.

NORA

Okay, and I totally get how that's part of why it appeals to you. But to me, it's just more of the same. It's -- I'm sorry, I know you came here to tell me something, and you're being kind, you're concerned about me, but ...

LUKE

Say it. Say what you mean.

NORA

To me, it's the kind of thing that put Trump in the White House.

LUKE

(hurt, keyed up for a number of reasons)

How? If I have a wise friend who has visions, who knows things she can't possibly know, 'cause I never told her, and helps people get in touch with those they've lost, and say goodbye to them, and warns people about bad things that are gonna happen ... How did her gift put Donald Trump in the White House? She hates Donald Trump. She hates what he did to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria! Going there, and lobbing rolls of paper towels at people, and meanwhile the power stays down, and thousands of people die --

NORA

Sssshhh. We all hate Trump. It's okay.

LUKE

So, how is her gift like Trump, then?

NORA

It's not part of ... the fact-based universe. That's what I really value now. I think Trump voters like your family ... turned their backs on facts long ago. If they were ever interested in them. I mean. People who don't want to let science teachers teach Darwin in high school? They want to teach kids in public schools about Adam and Eve? They want abstinence only sex ed, they don't believe the studies that show it leads to more teen pregnancy and STDs? That kind of mindset takes people naturally toward believing politicians who say Climate Change isn't real, don't trust the scientists, coal is the future. It leads naturally to destroying the EPA and NASA and saying that career public servants from both parties who have spent their lives carefully gathering facts are just the Deep State, they're partisan hacks, don't trust their data, don't trust anything they say. Scrub the real science off of the .gov sites. Ban the CDC from using terms like "evidence-based," and "science-based," along with "fetus" and "transgender." Science is real only when it's convenient, when you need brain surgery -- then, suddenly, you want someone who actually knows stuff.

LUKE

But why do you think my friend would support any of that?

NORA

It doesn't matter if she supports Trump's whole ... Look. Luke. The Muslim world and the Asia were way ahead of the Europeans during the Middle Ages. Okay? The Chinese and Japanese were writing novels five hundred years, a thousand years before us. And printing them on paper. And we got gun powder from the Chinese. And they were exploring the world in ships. The Muslims were doing eye surgery. They preserved Aristotle -- they preserved ancient Greek texts that set Europe on fire once they got them back. And until the last seventy years, the Muslim world was a much safer place for Jews to live than Christian Europe. So, what happened? Why did the West pull ahead? Why did the Renaissance happen in Europe, and the Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution? The Muslims got a leader who said people shouldn't read any book but the Holy Koran. The Europeans developed the scientific method. Yeah, some of their great scientists were still wrapped up in religion and alchemy, mixed in with math and science. But Europe was able to invent the modern era because they learned to separate science from religion and magic, and nobody else had done that. That may sound like nothing, but that's really important to me. And as England developed Parliament, and brought back self-government, which had been lost since ancient Greece and Rome, and as America developed our own system -- we developed a free press, and newspapers that have fact-checkers, that separate the opinion page from news, that issue a retraction when they get something wrong ... That's pretty important also. For an advanced society. For a free society. So.

NORA (CONT'D)

To me, Donald Trump is at war with reality, he's at war with the press, he says all he knows is what he reads online, he lies every day, he tells people not to believe 98% of scientists, and that's part of how he destroys democracy and reason and thought, and objective truth, and turns us into a dictatorship. And anybody else who wants us to leave the fact-based, science-based universe -- the kindest witch or magician, or miracle-working rabbi, or whatever it is ... I'm going to identify that person with Donald Trump.

LUKE

So, you don't think there's anything in the world that's a mystery? That you just can't understand?

NORA

Lots of things are mysteries. Donald Trump is in the White House. The universe is absurd, and I don't understand anything that's going on.

LUKE

But I'm saying -- you don't think there are some things ... some people ... I tell you, Nora, I've had a pain I've carried on my heart. For a long time. And my friend knew about it. Without my telling her. Talking to her about it, sharing my guilt and grief -- healed me.

NORA

That's wonderful. We all need a good shrink. I don't mean to be glib and flip about it, that's really wonderful.

LUKE

She helped me say goodbye to someone I've needed to talk to, for a long time. She helped me talk to her. I finally got closure. And then, last night -- my friend told me about you. I asked her about this film project. And those things Harry says, about how some people might think we're bashing the victims of the Holocaust, if we've got these interviews about how some of them didn't like gays ... That's why I asked my friend about my job. But she didn't talk about that. She saw *more* than that. She said there was someone in the place where I work who's in trouble, who's feeling great pain and distress, and I had to help that person. And as soon as she said it, I knew she was talking about you. You said you've known Harry a long time?

NORA

Since third grade.

LUKE

Listen, Nora, I had a friendship like that, going way back, but the way it went down for me was different. But Josefina is right, you've got to get out of this place.

NORA

Luke, it's really lovely what you're trying to do. But you can't rescue me. Mostly, people can't rescue each other. I mean, a good relationship cheers people up, they rescue each other that way. But both people need to want -- to be rescued. In the same sense.

LUKE

Just hear me out. We finish this project. I'm ready to work around the clock. I might start sleeping here, like Harry offered, just to cut out my commuting time. And then, once we're done, we've done all we need to do here -- a room in my apartment has opened up --

NORA

I've already got a place to live.

LUKE

But I'd like to spend time with you. Hear what you've got to say on a million topics. And maybe, who knows, I've got some wisdom -- not about philosophers, those things you've talked about. But maybe I've gotten some life wisdom, even though I'm younger. And we help heal each other.

NORA

It's a beautiful fantasy, but it's not reality-based.

LUKE

And we keep you away from Harry. 'Cause I agree, he's brilliant. But he's toxic. Toxic for you. He's doing something terrible to you. Josefina could feel it ...

NORA

Your friend is intuitive, and she could sense what you wanted to hear, and that's what she told you.

LUKE

It's not healthy. It's not right. It's not good for you. Being around him. He's -- Josefina said. When I interpret what she said. He's damaged you.

NORA

Sure. Harry has damaged my life. But he's damaged it in an interesting way. It makes me an interesting person, and it makes me a lot smarter. I wouldn't swap with anyone.

LUKE

But if you stay here --

NORA

I've stopped talking to Harry for years at a time. I probably will again. It doesn't seem to make any difference.

LUKE

But if you found something healthy, and loving --

NORA

I am what I am, Leila. And if there are self-made purgatories, we all have to live in them. Mine can be no worse than someone else's.

LUKE

Huh?

NORA

It's Star Trek. I'm quoting Star Trek at you.

HARRY

(emerging from the room HE works in)

She's quoting Spock.

LUKE

Oh!

NORA

Harry. You've been eavesdropping this whole time?

HARRY

Yes. It was gripping.

NORA

When did you get back?

HARRY

Half an hour after I left. You were caught up in some transatlantic phone call. You didn't notice me come in. I didn't feel like interrupting you.

NORA

So, you've just been lurking in your room. Why can't you say something, in a situation like this, instead of acting creepy?

HARRY

I would prefer not.

NORA

Fuck you.

LUKE

Harry, I'm sorry. I just. I said what I think is right --

HARRY

Skip it. It's very noble, though, you trying to rescue Nora, like she's a damsel in distress.

LUKE

That's kind of what I think she is.

NORA

Naah. I'm a cynical, burned-out old damsel, long past rescuing.

LUKE

No, you're not, Nora. That's just how he makes you feel.

NORA

Well, possibly.

HARRY

Possibly, but what you don't understand, Luke, is that you've got as much of a chance with her as I've got with you.

LUKE

Harry, I -- I think you're smart. I respect you. But I just don't --

HARRY

Exactly, you don't. And neither does Nora, in relation to you. You meet someone who represents the Other. And sometimes you *don't* want to kill that person. You're fascinated. You project all your fantasies onto that person. You want to fuck the Other more than you want to kill and consume and change the Other to be like you. Or, sometimes, it's a combination of both.

LUKE

I -- don't want to change Nora --

NORA

Sure you do, Luke. You tell me you were always so impressed in school to hear about all the commandments Jews have to follow, hundreds of them, and Christians have got it down to ten. I try to tell you: we're secular Jews. And even religious Jews, they've got the Talmud, it's one long argument, Jews argue with each other, they argue with God, they put God on trial when they think he's broken the Covenant, some Jews did that during the Holocaust. You don't hear that. You see me as some pious, primitive person who's almost reached the grace you've achieved, with your kinder, gentler version of religion, and you're gonna take me the rest of the way.

LUKE

I want to learn from you --

NORA

Yeah, about books and politics. Maybe. But when it comes to being a “good person” -- you see me as this noble savage heathen you want to civilize. I get a little whiff of missionary from you, I have to say.

LUKE

A missionary? I’m not a missionary. I’m trying to throw you a life line!

HARRY

You’re Lorenzo, and you want to rescue Jessica from the house of the harsh, bitter Jew.

LUKE

What?

NORA

Cut it out, Harry, he doesn’t get the reference.

(to Luke)

It’s a Shakespeare play, he’s riffing on *The Merchant of Venice*. Jessica is the daughter of Shylock.

LUKE

Shylock?

NORA

A stingy old Jew.

HARRY

Who wants his pound of flesh from a Christian. It always gets back to the Blood Libel.

NORA

Nothing here is getting back to the Blood Libel. You’re just insane, and you’re cranky because Luke doesn’t want to fuck you.

HARRY

For Lorenzo, Jewishness itself is the darkness he wants to save her from.

LUKE

Look, I don’t even see that you’re Jewish -- Harry. I mean, either of you -- how are you Jewish? You tell me you don’t believe in the Bible, you eat pork fried rice, you don’t go to synagogue, but you’re making this film, you’re saying all these -- sweeping things about Jews ... Maybe I don’t even know what a Jew is, at this point.

HARRY

No one does. But, you know what Sartre says in his essay “Antisemite and Jew.”

NORA

Ah ah, Harry. Didn’t you just hear me promising him no Existentialism this early in the a.m.?

HARRY

He asked a question, I’d like to answer it. Has he heard of Sartre, do you think?

LUKE

Yes, I’ve heard of him. He was the boyfriend of Madame Bovary.

HARRY

(delighted, incredulous)

He was *what?*

NORA

Stop it, Harry, he’s heard of him, he meant Simone de Beauvoir, go ahead.

HARRY

Oh, but that’s precious!

NORA

I said stop. Tell us what Sartre says a Jew is.

HARRY

Sartre says a Jew is, in effect, anyone that the people around him or her perceive as a Jew. So, if you stay in this benighted city long enough, Luke, and you become strange enough, and cynical enough, and enough of the Other, when you go home, you might be a bit of a Jew yourself. It’s a shame you won’t give me the time of day. I might have speeded up the alienation process.

NORA

You’ve had a lucky escape, Luke. From both of us.

LUKE

I don’t think so. Nora --

NORA

Let it go. Give up. Everybody loves the wrong person, everybody’s self-destructive, life sucks and we all need to live with it.

HARRY

Listen to her, Luke. She's very wise. Now, if it makes you uncomfortable to be here, after you've shot me down in flames and she's done the same to you ... you know how I told you never to take the equipment and the film out of this suite? Well, I've changed my mind. I'm willing to splurge on an Uber. You can take it all back to Brooklyn, and finish the project there. We'll help you move it.

LUKE

No. I'll finish here. I'll do the job I agreed to do.

HARRY

Well, that's very sporting of you.

NORA

And then, Harry will draw on his film world connections --

HARRY

Of which I have oh, so many --

NORA

-- And help you find work on a less thankless, less unpleasant project. One where they'll actually pay you money. He'll write you a glowing letter of recommendation. Won't you, Harry.

HARRY

He does good work. Why shouldn't I write him a glowing letter?

NORA

Then it's settled.

HARRY

I guess so. Luke -- you and I should retreat back into our lairs, and get to work, and let her get on with begging people for old photographs. Let's go.

(HARRY goes back into his room and closes the door. LUKE gives NORA one more yearning glance. SHE gives him an apologetic smile and a shrug. SHE starts dialing, and as HE goes into the room HE works in and closes the door behind him, someone picks up.)

NORA

Bonjour. Monsieur Rosenthal? C'est -- moi, Nora, de ... oui. English is better for me, thank you. I sent you a note about those five black and white photographs you have, of men dancing in the Eldorado in Berlin?

NORA (CONT'D)

(listens)

Yes. Yes, I know there were several cabarets with that name ...

(listens)

So, your pictures come from which one?

(listens)

Yes ...

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF PLAY