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Research: A Novel for Performance

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TITLE: *Research (A Novel for Performance)*

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“A Note On The Text”

I should say something practical to start. Like that when I first turned in a draft of *Research (A Novel for Performance)* to Nick Leavens, the Artistic Director and Founder of |the claque| production company in New York, it was a play written in prose, and something entirely apart from the comedy I’d set out to write. I should tell you that, having had no experience writing plays, I’d been finding the mechanics of typing characters’ names again and again ridiculous and enraging. I should say that this was what was keeping me from working on the piece at all. I should say that, if Nick hadn’t encouraged me to abandon “script” format, I never would have written anything beyond a long repetitious list of character names. I should say, “Thanks, Nick.”

That is the simple explanation of why I first subtitled the piece “A Novel for Performance,” the explanation I use when I don’t have the time or inclination to fully explain. But to do that now:

Research debuted in its performed state in New York City, May 2011,¹ and I should say that from the start I was thrilled with the result—it was not so much a drama presented on stage but a text, or a series of them, palimpsestically, loud. “A Novel for Performance” is my solipsistic way of characterizing a novel

¹ *Research (A Novel by Performance)* was directed by Nick Leavens and produced by |the claque|. Cast

that must be presented on stage because of its simultaneous voices. Only in performance can the piece ever really be complete, because only in performance can dialogue be written on top of itself – “palimpsestically,” again, seems to be the right word for this. The performed “palimpsestic” speech in *Research* allows the separate stories/memories of the characters to braid, to get mixed up in erasing and recreating each other through contradiction and supposition (like actual memories) such that despite the reader/audience being bombarded with more and more information throughout the narrative, they still have to piece together “the whole story” individually. To accurately present simultaneous speech on the page would render the text illegible, you understand, with fonts printed one atop the other. An “h” and “o,” for example, would combine to form a “b.” An “a” and “l” to a “d.” You see what I mean; in the wrong form, a multivoiced narrative is more pile than pillar.

Whether all this “performance” came about because I first shared the idea of *Research* with a theater director or not, I don’t know. But because I hadn’t written “stage directions” in the first draft (or for that matter tagged dialogue with anything beyond commas or line breaks) I had no idea how it would actually come together on a stage. When Nick and I met to discuss the prose draft I’d delivered, I was full of questions regarding staging: In Part IV, how would the chair be lit? What about Part III—is it true you use food coloring for blood, because it shouldn’t be too bloody – maybe red wine vinegar is best? But then the smell. And in the first half, will there be an actual two-way mirror separating the

two rooms of the market research center? Because that's critical. Who is the set designer, for that matter? Can I talk to her? Him? They need to know how important the mirror is. Nick waved a hand as he would many times, whenever my questions piled. "You worry about the language and I'll worry about the mirror," he said. He gave a few notes, and we left drunk and excited. I went home to do another edit; he started casting for a table read.

At some point prior to that first table read,² however, I self-consciously decided the actors might like me more if I took the time to reformat the piece into a "script," or at least something they would recognize as not being written by a crazy person. What I didn't expect was for this to be much more an act of translation than anything else; it is, I've learned, far more difficult to recreate a text than it is to create one, for the simple act of typing character names can manipulate one form into another, which, if you'll permit the hyperbole, was as dramatic for me as if water lilies were to spill coldly from a museum painting, pond scum soaking my shoes, frogs scurry-hopping off to the gift shop. After the initial New York performances, I decided I wanted this experience again, and so translated the final script (on which many, many changes to language had been made during rehearsals) back into prose. Happily, the water lilies collected themselves and slid back across the floor and into the frame, but in a new composition.

² First table read was held in April 4, 2011 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Cast included Andrew Garman as Moderator, Michele Rafic as Lucy, Jacqueline Antaramian as Lucinda, and Mamoudou Athie as Jason (revised to Joseph).

Research is a story about memory and its unreliability, about a boy trying to create a new future for himself by remembering the past differently, by nudging those water lilies into new positions as they reframe. Consider this: memory is itself an act of creation, and to re-member an act of re-creation. Like writing a word, erasing the word, and rewriting the word, memory is palimpsest; the final form of any performance or remembered event exists only in the lost present tense of that event. That just-erased word, you understand. All subsequent memories or interpretations or recordings are acts of translation from the faded original.

Presented simultaneously in this book are the two latter versions of *Research (A Novel for Performance)*. On the left, the final prose form; on the right, the script of the May 11 and 12 performances. Although neither of these texts are complete within themselves, their side-by-side layout leaves a gap between, a gutter that, like a two-way mirror or water lily sliding across the floor, is in a state of constant contradiction and translation.

– Joseph Riippi, NYC, November 2011

Isn't that a contradiction?

Art is defined by its contradictions.

Art is defined by its contradictions?

No.

PART ONE

“Please Join Us For A Conversation

About The Meaning Of Your Life”

So no, then, she says.

She says it, doesn't ask.

No, he says.

She sits quiet, leans back in her wooden chair.

But why, she says.

The man is quiet.

Why would you think you could read in here? the man asks. He has an accent.

See a man and woman sitting in a room with a long mirror along one wall. They face each other across a wood table. Wooden chairs with red padding. Cups of coffee on the table. Styrofoam empties drip in the trashcan. The woman taps a painted index fingernail into the wood surface. The man looks from her face to her finger, then back to her face.

Because the last woman read, the woman says. Or she had a book at least.

The man says nothing.

The woman that was here before, I mean. Before me.

The woman *whom* was here before you, you mean, the man with the accent says.

They look at each other.

That's what I said, the woman continues. She had a book. I know she did.

They sit quiet.

Do you not understand what I'm asking?

What makes you think there was someone here before? the man asks. He opens a folder set before him on the table.

Because it smells like paper, the woman says. Like my mother was here. Sometimes the smell of books or libraries reminds me of my mother.

The woman holds her nose in the air, sniffs.

You let the last woman read, didn't you, she says.

The man is looking at the papers in his folder. He says nothing. He hums. The woman continues.

Smells like must, she says. You know, must? Like bookstore mold. Like that. You know. You understand. Like a used bookstore's moldy basement in rainy autumn. Like Southern Virginia, like leaves ground into the dirt, like crackly bookstore floorboards. Like yellow copies of *Walden*, with your nose pressed in the gutter all papercutty. And rain boots, Wellies--wellingtons, you follow? And beef Wellingtons. Cider apples, etcetera.

She takes a deep inhale through her nose.

Smell that? she asks. She smiles.

The man looks up from the papers in his hands. He stops humming. He sighs. He props his elbows on the table and opens his mouth to say something but

the woman cuts him off.

Plus someone is always “here” before we are “here,” you follow? What seems like first is never, really. To you at least. Not first, or even second, really. Not really. Columbus had to kill a lot of people to make believe—to make others and us, I mean—believe he was first.

The man puts his papers down. He raises his eyebrows and lifts his hands in a gesture of exasperated explanation. I was the only one here when you got here, he says.

Well, I won’t kill you for it, she answers. She smiles broadly down the length of the table.

* * *

Behind the glass, in a small and dark room, a boy sits in a row of chairs watching the woman and man at the table. The boy is collegiate, intent, writing very fast on a yellow legal pad. It is very dark. The boy is a younger man much smaller than the man at the table, and a different race. He is the only person in this room with many chairs.

The woman at the table is talking. If she were to look directly at the boy, she would see only her smiling self reflected back in the mirror. But behind, the boy is writing everything she says.

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The woman says, It smells like she was reading a really old book.

The man at the table brushes a hand across his mouth. The last woman *who* was here, was here yesterday, he says. And she left yesterday. They've cleaned since then.

He points to the trashcan.

Whatever you smell isn't her, he says. It wasn't her book.

He pauses.

I mean, that is to say, if she had a book. Meaning perhaps it was these papers.

The woman fingers her scarf fringe. I only read new books, she says. Fresh off the presses so to speak. So fresh there's no smell.

I'm sorry, Miss Pearle, the man says, But we really need to move on.

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Behind the glass, in the back of the dark room, a door opens and an older

woman appears. The boy turns from his work and nods as if expecting her, and then returns to his writing. The older woman takes a seat behind the boy in a second row of chairs facing the glass. She is wearing a sweater with a large brooch in the shape of a small fish glittering in the near dark. She whispers something to the boy. No, the boy answers. She hasn't said anything about you yet.

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Except warm, the woman at the table continues. I'd say new books have a warmer smell. You understand what I mean? Comprehend? Acknowledge? See? You see. You see, you do. Warm isn't a smell. Not really. Not in the way we use the word. Not even as much as cold can be a smell. But you get the idea. I have an idea of it so you must have an idea of it. Is it a stretch to think like that? That because I understand, it follows that you should, too? At least vaguely understand. Is there a word for that? There must be. In this language or in the next. Another. There are words for everything. And different languages.

With all due respect, Miss Pearle, we really must—

Oh, of course you know. You see what I mean. You get it. "A new book can smell warm." Just leave it at that. That's the strange thing about new books. They are warm, then cool off after printing, but still they get warmer with age,

with all the handling. Even in the musty basement, the yellow pages. Warmer, not colder, not like—

We really do need to move on, the moderator says, stronger now, louder.

Why? the woman asks. She points to acknowledge the mirror for the first time. Isn't this the point of all this?

The moderator points to the tabletop, then to the mirror, then to the woman herself. We do have specific topics to cover, Miss Pearle. This, them, you—all of it has certain objectives.

Such as?

Such as your father. The day he died.

The woman is quiet.

The moderator smiles. What he smelled like, if you prefer.

Warm, or cold, you understand.

Miss Pearle coughs, adjusts rigidly in her seat. Tightens the scarf. Okay, she says. My father. I see what you mean. Talk about my father.

Yes.

Yes, she repeats.

They sit quiet.

Are you going to talk? she asks.

The moderator looks to a scrap of paper. Your father was a veteran, wasn't he?

A veteran?

Of a war.

Oh. Yes. The woman nods, salutes.

He knew his way around a gun, is what I mean, Miss Pearle.

Oh yes. If a gun were on the floor, I've no doubt he could find his way around it, yes.

The moderator smiles very slightly. Funny, he says.

You think guns are funny?

No, I don't. I think you are being—

There is nothing funny about guns, my father would have said. There is nothing funny about guns excepting the cartoon guns which shoot out flags with messages instead of bullets, like with the coyote, the bird in the desert.

Okay, so let's talk about how guns aren't funny.

BLAMMO!

The woman makes a gun with her hand, points it at the moderator.

Now imagine an advertisement for a taxidermist hanging from the barrel, she explains.

Lucy.

BANG! KAPOW! BOOM-A-ZOOM!

The woman laughs, a gun of each hand, firing about the room.

As to your father, Lucy. I have his last words to you here.

The moderator shuffles through his papers.

What you reported as his last words, at least.

Lucy blows imagined smoke from her fingertips.

What I reported, she repeats.

Yes.

What I done said to the sheriff.

Sure.

Well, it was very cold that night. I remember that. They had me in the paddy wagon, the police car. The lights were on, but no sirens. They brought me an uncomfortable blanket. That blanket—you could put a fire out with that blanket it was so cold.

She points one of the guns at the mirror.

FIRE! FIRE!

The moderator raises a new piece of paper and holds it out to Lucy.

Do you know what it says here?

About the blanket?

No.

About the fire, then.

No, about what your father said to you when you found him—

Lucy places her handguns flat on the table.

Well, let me explain something first. When someone has died. For example. For example, my father in the cold, for instance. For this instance of cold example. To make a blanket statement about it all. A book gets colder at first, after printing, after it's born, you see, and with age it warms and yellows. But a body, when it dies, it dries. Goes papery. Goes wet first but dries like carpeting or blankets putting out fires instead of water putting out fires. But books, as I was saying. To use books as part of our blanketing. A body is like a book, you see. It has a smell when it is new. A warmth from printing. But as time passes and the book sits on its shelf or in a freezer or in a living room against a wall with a gun pointed at it--

She is quiet for a very brief moment, seemingly thinking.

Whatever the death case may be, she says.

She is quiet again, but briefer.

His body cools towards cold, you see. Yellows without warming. Not like books. Body becomes less warm, losing, you see, you understand. Death is loss, you see. You see? Just sits, like on a shelf but with no one ever touching.

Lucy sits quiet.

Touching, the moderator repeats.

And then it will take a while for the police to arrive. It's cold and the cars take time to warm up. You're cold, too. Sitting there. No police blanket. And then them coming in with belts and guns. You are too young to know 9-1-1, really, you understand. You know the number but have never dialed the phone before. It's not that you don't know how to dial a phone, not that you aren't tall enough to reach it on the kitchen wall by climbing a stool. You have seen it dialed a thousand times. By your mother, your father. By your father calling your mother and asking her to come home, "Please darling, come home, I can't do this, not alone, not just me and little Lucy..."

She pauses again. Stares into a cup of coffee.

Lucy—

But it's getting so cold. The warm, you see, the blanket's not there, and the old one your father was using is ruined now, everything just disappearing by the second, by all those police and ambulancers breathing in that warm smell, breathing out the cold nothing, the loss, the colding of it all.

She looks at the moderator directly.

Do you understand? You follow? It's okay if you don't. They said it was okay that I didn't follow, that I didn't understand, that I didn't get what he had asked me to do. "No child could comprehend," somebody said.

The moderator nods, waits for her to continue.

So you can't do it. Couldn't do it. The dialing. Can't turn his pages, still too wet. Can try, can run your hands all over the warm, colding stuff coming out of him. But not at first. Just sit there. Staring. And breathing. Breathing in, out. Smelling warm, less and less. The first of all the differences. The first of the musts.

They sit quiet, waiting.

The first of the musts? the moderator says.

You *must* get over. *Must* move on. *Must not* look back. *Must* look back. *Must* move on. Again. Etcetera. Repeat. And so on. The dealing with of things.

I see.

Do you? Do you understand? "Child couldn't comprehend." You see why the musts? You must do something. Now. Now him. My father. Him just dying. There. In the corner. You just a kid. You remember dialing 9-1-1 because it was the only number you knew. Besides your own but you can't call yourself. Call yourself and you're busy. Can't answer your own call for help. Don't want to look at it or hear it, not like that. Mustn't do that.

Lucy is breathing hard, clutching her scarf, tightening it around her neck. The moderator watches her breathe, heave.

Lucy, he says, being gentle.

Wouldn't have to smell it through the phone at least. The warm smell.

Her breathing calms. She unwraps a bit of scarf. Looks around the room.

They both breathe for awhile. Lucy removes the scarf from around her neck completely.

Sorry, she says. This chair was warm when I sat. That was why I asked about the woman that was here before. That was all. I'm a little nervous. All this, it's a lot. I have a little case of the butterflies, you could say. Not even quite butterflies. Case of the caterpillars. Little cocoons in my belly. Waiting to...I don't know.

She laughs.

The woman *whom* was here before, Lucy.

They smile at each other. First her, then him, left to right in the glass.

I thought you said it was the smell that made you think of your mother, the moderator asks. Was it a smell like your father's smell when he died? The warm "colding smell" you mentioned?

Lucy reaches for the cup of coffee the moderator had set before her when they began the session. She stares into the surface of it, sniffs at it.

Yes and absolutely, she says. Sight and sound. Sound and sight. That's all that's worth remembering. Smell remembers itself, my father used to say. If you remember what you just saw, heard, yes, absolutely.

She sips the coffee for the first time.

Ouch, burned myself.

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The older woman in the dark room behind the glass looks up from her cell phone.

She took her coffee black, she says.

The boy looks up from his writing.

She did?

I just said she did.

The boy returns to his writing.

The older woman rises in the dark, leans toward the boy in the front row, nearer to the glass.

What are you writing?

He writes.

That she took her coffee black is important, Joseph. You understand that, right? You can see what that means about this woman, can't you? It means she doesn't shop often, that she doesn't trust herself to keep milk from going bad—

Can I just do this?

—that she doesn't have time for milk anyway. Perhaps she likes the burnt feel on her lips. Or perhaps it is the burnt taste. Or the burnt smell, even. She doesn't even know what she wants. She needs guidance from a mother.

The older woman places a hand on Joseph's shoulder. He shrinks away, without stopping his scribbling, and the woman sits back into the seat directly behind Joseph's.

Despite what she says about smell. Disregard that. Look, you look like a smart guy. I can see you're a smart guy, Joseph, is what I mean. I mean, I understand that you are. And because you are in the position for observing this market research setting, *you* have to know what this young woman means. That's your specialty, Joe. Can I call you Joe? That *you* comprehend is the reason why *you* are here, why only *you* can do this.

Joseph stops writing for a moment.

Thanks, he says.

“Thanks,” the older woman mocks.

He continues writing.

She rises and walks back to her original seat, tapping her thumbs against the front of her phone.

See, I worry that you don't understand how burnt can have a smell. Like warm can have a smell. Like she is saying, like she was just saying. Listen to her.

Without milk, coffee is hotter. Smells warmer. So warm it's burnt. That's important. There's a logic there. And only a certain kind of person, logically, likes that.

The older woman pauses to read from her phone.

And maybe you are that type of person, she continues. But this is the sort of thing you need to be looking for, Joseph. I've been trying to teach you but you've been too caught up in yourself. This, the coffee, it's the sort of thing that tells you about an interviewee.

She pauses again. Continues again.

And by extension, you understand, this tells you about "the world" and "the human condition," if you want to be grand about it. But that is, at the heart of it all, the point of research, isn't it? See how she takes off her scarf and leaves it off? She'll put it back on, and that's important, Joe-boy. You understand? See?

Joseph stops writing for a moment and turns to look at her.

She didn't say she took her coffee black, he says.

What?

It was you who said it. That she took her coffee black.

The older woman stares at him in the dark. He goes back to his writing.

That it was important, too, he says, his head lowered to the legal pad. You said that too. Not her.

Is that what you're writing now? the woman asks.

Yes.

He writes.

What are you writing right now?

That she took her coffee black.

He pauses, crosses something out, continues.

And now?

That she took her coffee black, he repeats. But bigger. For emphasis.

That she took her coffee black is important, Joseph.

I know. It says that here.

* * *

Lucy retrieves a large hardbound book from her purse and drops it hard onto the table.

THUMPHT.

I think I am going to read, she says. I would like to, I mean.

The moderator watches her, doesn't respond. He lifts his own large box of folders and files onto the table from beside his chair.

Sometimes I think I want to kick back with a book and it doesn't work.
Too many thoughts going through my head and I can't get into the narrative.
Suture in, as they say. As my mother said. She was a filmee, not a surgeon. Suture
like a film suture, I mean. Not like a surgery suture.

Your mother didn't help sick people? the moderator asks from over his
papers.

Lucy laughs loudly.

No. Oh, no no no.

How do you know the must smell you smelled wasn't from that book?

I don't. I'm just assuming.

She holds the book up to show him the cover.

This is fiction, she says.

It's fiction?

Lucy nods.

Truly, she says.

You aren't going to read it?

I thought you said I couldn't.

You can't.

Oh no, I know how to read.

The moderator takes a paper from the box and pushes it halfway along the length of the table toward Lucy, but keeps his hand on it. Once she's seen its writing, he pulls it back to his side of the table.

So, Lucy, as you might suspect, based on what we have said already, based on what you have offered already, we've asked you here today to talk about what you remember of your father.

Lucy rises from her chair with her scarf in hand as the moderator continues to speak. She walks to the mirror running the length of the room. She approaches the image of herself, pulling at aspects of her clothing and hair, wrapping the long colorful scarf about her.

Please pay attention, Miss Pearle.

She continues at the mirror, letting down her hair, knotting the scarf, undoing it all and doing it back again as the moderator speaks to her from the table, his piece of paper held hard before him like a gavel.

Miss Pearle, Lucy, you understand that what a person remembers about his or her father is important, yes? It shapes them in a way memory of a mother doesn't, in that the father, you understand, can often be a much shakier connection for the child. Traditionally. Absolutely. No subconscious memory of a traumatic birth and all that. And that we have a mostly patriarchal society, you understand, contributes to this. And there was Oedipus, too, Lucy, you remember? He killed his father, you remember? Stories have been written and told for centuries about

Oedipus and his father, whose name I forget, but who was also Oedipus' wife's ex-husband. Complicated. Absolutely and complicated. Life and everything about it is, are, complicated. That hasn't changed. The relationship to the father is a rich mine of material about the human condition, Lucy, you understand. About *your* condition, in particular, you understand, that we want to explore in this hour. To quote the key objective for our time here today--

He holds the paper out in both hands before him like a proclamation.

“To address the meaning of life via the address of one specific life and its meaning. Subject: Lucinda Pearle. Relevance: Death of father by double-barreled shotgun gunshot.“

Lucy retrieves her coffee from the table without acknowledging the moderator. She never takes her eyes off the mirror and the reflection just beyond its surface.

So, Miss Pearle. Lucy, specifically. Today, the persons that I work for have asked you here in order for us to have a conversation about the conversation you had with your father in the minutes before he died. You understand that, yes? Absolutely? To learn from experience, as you would have learned to dial a phone, as you said, by dialing, observing your father's having dialed, having dialed your mother.

Lucy leans in toward her own face, raises a finger, taps.

Can you hear me behind there? she asks.

What was that? the moderator asks, looking up from the notes to which he's been referring.

The persons *whom* you work for, you mean, Lucy says, finger still tapping.

Yes, my apologies.

You are looking for words but not always using the correct ones, Monsieur.

At the mirror, Lucy turns her face in profile one way, and then the other, keeping locked eye contact on herself.

I know you're there, she whispers. I can't see you, but I know you're there.

They can hear you, yes.

I know.

She turns to look at him.

You know, I've done this before, she says.

Yes, I do, he responds. Many times, it says that here. Many times and no one has ever left happy. Now, would you like something else to drink? More coffee?

Yes.

What?

Yes.

No, what would you like more—

The moderator catches his foot on the leg of the table and falls hard against the floor, the box of files and his chair with him. Papers flutter in the air to the floor.

* * *

Joseph and the older woman are silent, unmoving. The papers flutter and then rest beyond the glass. Lucy is standing directly before Joseph with the glass between them, staring at the fallen man in his papers. Joseph bends his head back to his notebook, and Lucy turns back to her reflection, him.

* * *

Why did you do that?

The moderator is picking himself up, and his papers.

I didn't mean to, he says.

I don't believe in doing things just to do them, Lucy says.

Neither do I.

Lucy places her palm against the glass and pushes off, back to the table, sitting as the moderator does.

Be purposeful in all you do and you'll be happier in life, she pronounces. Dial phones with purpose. Sniff the air with purpose. Look at art with purpose. That's what my father used to say.

Did he?

Absolutely. Yes. Absolutely and yes. But no, not that exactly. Sometimes exactly, maybe. Sometimes he would say things that stuck in my head. Sometimes he would say something like that, too. But we change memories every time we remember them, you know. I read that somewhere. At least I remember reading it, which, you understand, casts doubt over the entire thesis of what I just said.

She laughs.

Oh life, she says. It's all so paradoxical. My father used to say that, too, I remember. "I read that somewhere," I mean. The words would be in different orders sometimes when he said it. Other times he would use the same words with other words in between and make whole new sentences. Depending on what he meant to say.

And what did he mean to say, you think?

Oh, that language is amazing, I suppose. "Isn't it?" "Is it not?" See, just like that. You understand? And my father could speak Finnish and French, too,

and when he spoke those words they were very different, but maybe meant the same thing.

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Joseph, do you think that woman looks like me?

Joseph shakes his head, keeps writing.

Maybe she does, though. A little bit, at least.

The older woman adjusts her sweater and broach, looking through the mirror to Lucy. Lucy brushes some hair behind her ear, the older woman does the same.

Are you sure? The older woman asks.

She takes her coffee the same as you, Joseph says.

In front of him, Lucy sips from her coffee. Joseph looks at her, returns to his work.

Let's start again, the moderator is saying.

What are you writing, Joseph? You've been writing this whole time.

Don't worry about it.

But what is it? You think this is important, don't you, this note-taking.

Some people, I know, believe you have to write a thing down to really understand it. But that's not true, you understand.

The woman bends to peer over Joseph's shoulder.

“She is looking at her reflection, maybe. She is wondering if she is beautiful maybe. Elle pense que si est belle, peut-etre.”

Joseph tries to hid the notebook, but the older woman reaches fast, her broach scratching against his face and making him bleed. She clambers away from him, fast over chairs, the notebook hers now, reading aloud, while Joseph climbs over his seatback and after.

“She is thinking, ‘I wonder if they can tell I am lying.’ She is thinking in French, like her father. She is thinking, Ecrire: to write. Lire: to read. She is thinking in Finnish like her grandfather. Lukea: to read. Kirjoittaa: to write. She is thinking, ‘I wish I didn't come here.’”

Joseph has her by the hair with his fist, and takes back the legal pad easily. His face is red even in the dark. The woman laughs and dabs at the blood on her broach with the sleeve of her sweater.

“I wish I didn't come here?” she repeats, laughingly. Joseph, you know she would never think that. You know she wants to talk to someone about it all.

Joseph goes back to his chair, wipes his face. In the glass before him, he can see that Lucy is laughing too. The moderator is searching his files. The older woman continues her talking.

You see how all of what you're writing is fiction, right, Joseph? Because you're not really *seeing*. You're making it up.

Pay attention. That's all you have to do. See the boy, see the girl. See what's important, the plot points, the narrative arc, or line, or circle. She wouldn't lie, you understand. It's impossible for her to lie.

Joseph scratches something out from his pad. He looks at Lucy in front of him.

She always lied, he says.

Lucy is still laughing, moderator still searching.

What are you talking about, "always"?

Des mensonge, Joseph says. Des recreations.

What?

Lucy has stopped laughing.

Virkistys, he says.

I don't understand, Joseph.

It means lie, he says. He writes.

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Lucy is laughing, wiping her eyes. She checks her reflection and brushes a lock of bangs from her face.

Let's start again, the moderator repeats.

Sure. Shoot.

Let's approach this a different way. Like your father might. Different words, you understand?

She nods. Absolutely.

Okay. So just two words you have to choose from for this part, okay? Yes or no. Yes or no questions, you understand?

Yes. Absolutely.

Exactly. No lies.

Yes. No. I won't. "I never lie," my father used to say. It was kind of a joke.

First question: Have you ever known anyone who died.

Lucy answers fast.

*

*

*

Why would she say that?

What?

Joseph was writing.

Why would she say she's never known anyone who has died? Everyone has known someone, at least a little, who has died.

I suppose.

Pay attention to what's happening, Joseph.

Joseph doesn't look up from the pad.

My father used to say that in French, he says. "Faites attention!" That was when he was teaching me French. You don't remember that, do you, Lucinda.

How would I remember that?

Exactly. If you said you did you would be lying.

This is no place for riddles, Joseph. Pay attention.

*

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The moderator is surprised. Why would you say you've never known anyone who has died, he asks.

Lucy shrugs.

I always lie, she says.

The moderator opens a new file, very carefully. It is old, leafy, autumnal.

Well, it says here that, not only have you known someone who died, but that you have seen someone die.

I don't know what that is.

This is your file.

I have a file?

Yes.

Lucy laughs, smiles.

No, no, no.

Yes, you do. This is it. It has your name on it.

Lucy counts on her hand.

Some things that are mine, okay? Personality, sense of humor, this scarf, incredible command of conversation, good looks, you by the balls by the time this thing is over, but not that file.

The moderator chuckles, lifts his hands, shrugs.

My name, okay? I suppose other people could be called Lucy. Could they not? Something close to it, at least? That doesn't mean they have the same name as me, but it means they could have a file and I could not.

Okay, I apologize. This is a file *about* you. By "yours" I meant to say that it was *about* you. These are the papers that say you were recruited for this

interview, specifically--

Papers *who* say.

Like all the other interviews you've given, Lucy. Because you have seen someone die. Because of your expertise. With that. With death.

Papers *whom* say.

No, Lucy. That doesn't make sense.

Okay, then papers *who*.

The moderator is growing agitated.

Lucy, listen to me. This is your file in the sense that—

In the sense that it is about me.

Yes!

Do you have a file? In a different sense, maybe? Maybe not in the touch sense, that you can hold and feel it like you do there, but maybe by smell? My the memory of smell? You could say that this is your file too, because you have it in your hand, you understand.

You could say that, but it doesn't make sense.

Yes it does.

No, it does not.

But which sense? *There's* the rub, as my father used to say. "Ay, there's

the rub.” My father played that role in a high school production. The mad masturbatorial prince role.

The moderator looks at the mirror as if for help.

* * *

Why is he looking at me?

What?

The moderator is looking at me, Joseph.

“She is thinking no one ever does their best at anything, not for her,”

Joseph says.

Who is thinking that? the woman asks. Me or her?

Joseph keeps writing, the moderator looking at the woman with the broach.

This research is being recorded, Joseph. You don't have to transcribe it word for word.

Lucinda turns her head away from the glass. He shouldn't be looking at me! she shouts.

Almost verbatim, Joseph says.

What?

“Lucinda asks Joseph, ‘Are you transcribing this word for word?’”

Lucinda is speechless.

“This research is being recorded, Joseph. You don’t need to transcribe it word for word.”

“Can I call you Joe?”

“Joseph responds with very meaningful silence.”

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I like you, Lucy says. You try harder than most. You care about doing a good job, I can see that. Sorry I’m difficult. Sorry I haven’t know anyone who has died.

Do you mean you have not known anyone who has died because once a person has died they can no longer be known? Is that something you believe?

Lucy nods.

Yes.

The moderator is surprised.

Yes?

The moderator waits for Lucy to say something more. He glances at the

mirror, then back to Lucy. Behind the mirror, Lucinda moves closer to the glass, next to Joseph. She slaps at him, pricks him with the broach, but it's as if he can't see her.

Yes, Lucy repeats. But I don't want to talk about that.

You have talked about it before, Lucy. It says so here, in your—in *this* file. It says you have known people who died.

No.

That doesn't make sense, Lucy.

It doesn't?

No!

The moderator looks to his notes for reference.

Listen, he continues. You said "I don't want to talk about that." By "that" you implied a knowledge that "that," whatever it is, exists. The antecedent of the word "that" is the knowledge you are now denying. That "that" was a contradiction and admission. Therefore, you must have that "that," that "that" which you don't want to talk about. That "that" which the people who have hired me and are interested in hearing about. So I will ask again, have you known someone who has died?

Lucy looks at the mirror and speaks to it directly.

Joseph looks up and meets her gaze.

That was good, she says.

Joseph smiles.

Sorry, Lucy says, turning back to the moderator. No, I have not.

You have not.

Lucy nods again: I have not known anyone who has died because once a person has died they can no longer be known. That—*that* is something I believe, as you suggested.

I don't believe you.

I know, right? It's too convenient. So convenient a solution it's inconvenient. So uncomplicated it becomes a complication.

The moderator holds up another leafy page from the file.

It says here that your father died when you were eight years old.

Lucy ignores him and drains her coffee in several gulps. The moderator waits.

Sorry, she coughs. I wanted to finish that coffee before I read my book.

She holds up the large book she had retrieved from her purse.

I would hate to spill black coffee on the pages, you understand, and ruin

the book before it can properly warm and must. This is my favorite book, you see. My father wrote it, you see. Let me ask: How do you take your coffee?

Is that true? the moderator asks. That your father wrote that?

I take my coffee black, you understand. I take it black because my father took his coffee black and his father took his black.

That's in your file, too, the moderator says, searching for the verification. And it says, as I said, that your father died when you were eight years old. Now. Is that latter statement true?

The moderator waits while Lucy begins to chew at the empty Styrofoam in her hand. She turns to the mirror and the moderator claps his hands SMACK! SMACK! Loud across the table.

Here! He yells. Right here! It says here your father died of a self-inflicted shotgun shot to the stomach. Now tell me, Lucy Pearle, is that true?

Lucy tugs on her scarf and shakes her head. Behind the mirror, Joseph writes faster and harder into his notebook, shaking his hand out occasionally for blood flow. Lucinda is next to him, still speechless, paying full attention.

Lucy is still chewing at the coffee cup.

I don't remember how my father's father's father took his coffee, she says. Maybe I never knew.

It says here that your father also died of a shotgun shot to the chest. Is that also true?

My great grandfather, you understand. He lived in Finland. The Russians killed him. I don't know if he even drank coffee.

It says here your father was shot with a shotgun gunshot once in the stomach and a second shot once in the chest and that they were both fatal wounds. Is that true, Lucy? Yes or no?

I know he ate sardines. My father used to tell me a story his father used to tell him. About *his* father's father.

Lucy, the moderator says.

He would eat sardines for breakfast. He would fold them into a piece of toast his wife had made by holding bread in a piece of iron over an open flame. The sardines would drip out the end of the toast like a bad taco.

Miss Pearle, the moderator says.

He would suck on the fish heads and flick at them when they were in his mouth with his tongue. This would make the tails wiggle and wriggle and writhe between his lips as if still alive.

Lucy, the moderator says, now more loudly.

I remember learning from my father that my grandfather had been a champion Finnish swimmer. I remember thinking that maybe he was a champion

because he ate so many sardines, or maybe it was because he was a champion swimmer that he was able to make them come to life in his mouth. He used to say that he would turn my father and his brothers into fish if they didn't eat their dinner.

Lucy Pearle! the moderator says, now very loud. He claps SMACK!
SMACK! Again.

He had the power to do it, too, you understand. To get them to eat their fish. "Carrots will help you see at night and fish will help you become a champion swimmer," he would say. He could have made a million dollars if it were true, if he could have figured a way to write the book that would make children eat their dinner. "How To Bring A Fish To Life" he could call it.

Who fired the second shot? the moderator shouts, with the leaves of paper in clumps in his hands. Who shot him the second time? Your father, Lucy. Who, Lucy? Can you tell me who shot him the second time?

"You are what you eat," I guess, is what my great grandfather would say. That could be a title for the book. Or more effectively, "You eat what you are," or "You eat what you will become." I like that better. But I don't know if he ever said that. I guess he may have.

The shotgun, the moderator says.

It makes sense with the story. It's the sort of story my father would tell me when I was a kid, which makes sense, because he did. He must have. It's

important that memories make sense, so you have a sense of where you come from. Don't you agree? If you're confused, you're left with nothing to stand on.

What did your father say when you came into the room, Lucy. Tell me what he said.

If I remember what his father told him about his father, and his father's father, if I can remember it, write it, then I have something to stand on. Something for others, too, a record, like this book.

We have records right here, Lucy. This file. *Your* file. Tell me what I'm going to find in this file, Lucy!

I would like to have asked him if he ate enough chicken or pheasant, if it would make him fly like the fish helped him swim. That would have made a nice memory. But he would have answered in Finnish. Which is a very strange language. And I wouldn't understand. You need to understand to remember, to remember to understand. You follow?

Where were you when you heard the first shot? Can you tell me that, Lucy?

Strange, isn't it? That a word can mean the same thing in a different language?

Lucy, it says here in this police report that *you* were the one who shot your father.

How many words do you think there are for the word "sardine"? For

“coffee”? Which one is right?

Is this true, Lucy? Is what this file says truth or fiction?

Well, even then, still, one word must be most right, mustn't it? Or at least right-er than all the rest? Like, we make English words out of older words, so those older words are more right, must be more right-er words, mustn't they? And before that there must have been others.

Lucy, you were just eight years old. It wasn't your fault. You know this, right?

Like how there was always someone here before, and so you have to kill them to pretend you matter. Like Columbus killed the people who took the “new” away from his “new world.” Just like that. New words kill old words. Nothing can be new or really matter anymore. People die, people are born. Oedipus kills his father, like you said, the princesses kill King Lear, and then MacDuff and his forest come kill them with Romeo and Juliet.

Who killed him, Lucy. Just admit who killed him.

AntiLear, AntiBeth, Anti-ett, Anti-meo. There's no top, just a circle that's all bottom, all base. Like Columbus said, quote: “The New World turned out to still be the regular world, so I killed a bunch of people to make it new.” End quote. That last part he stole from Ezra Pound.

You shot your father, Lucy! That's what it says in the file. Why would it be written down if it weren't at least part of the truth? Why would they keep a file

that was wrong? What use would it serve?

It's the same for names, too, you understand. There are no new names. My full name is Lucinda. My father called me Lucy because I was named after my grandmother and his father called his wife Lucy. And those are the same person, my grandmother and my father's father's wife. Even if I can use different words to tell you what I mean, you see? It's still the same. So strange. You must understand. You're an understanding person. I'm sure you do. Sure you are. Everything's the same and different and all happening at the same time. You talk for a living. You know. You understand. You say things you believe are true and you mean them because you believe in that truth. You comprehend. You must.

The moderator rises from the table and reads from the papers in his hand: "The daughter entered the house from the backyard to find the deceased on the floor, shot once through the stomach."

Yes, yes, yes. Probably all three. If my grandmother or my father's father's mother's wife had been French, maybe then she would have been named Lucille instead of Lucinda. And then I could still be Lucy, but it would be a different name still, wouldn't it? Would it? Because it came from a different place. It would have been different, but the same, you see? You understand what I mean?

"Upon questioning the deceased's daughter reported she picked up the weapon on the deceased's request and forensics validate it was she, Lucinda aka Lucy Pearle, that fired the second shot. The daughter, aged eight, was taken into

custody and did not speak--”

“Did not speak.”

“The daughter, aged eight, was found with evidence beneath her fingernails, pinning her to.”

“She did not speak.”

“She did—“

The moderator stops and looks to the mirror.

What’s wrong? Lucy asks.

PART TWO

“Joseph’s Monologue”

Watch me rise from my seat and understand it's as if something has occurred to me. See me sit again, my pen poised above the legal pad. Lucinda is here, watching me, hands folded in her lap, waiting.

She was always so very polite.

Now I go to the door of the room where the light switch is. I press, and the glass is the mirror side now. See me reflecting in its lit center.

I look at myself.

I have things to say, you understand. I need to say them.

"She did not speak." I didn't know what to do after that, I can't remember.

When I was six years old I killed a man. I should tell you that first. I would remember better if I had been a little older. If I'd been allowed to develop a little further.

I'm assured I didn't mean to. I should also say that.

My father's father used to say you are what you eat, and that was why he was a champion swimmer. He was fast as a sardine and strong as the strongest coffee. He used to say too that if you already have everything written down there's no point in asking someone to verify it again. "Writing helps you understand," he would say. "You understand?" he would say. He used to say that

but you understand I am not just re-saying it by saying it now. I am saying it in my own words because I don't know the Finnish words.

I should say it feels like cheating to use someone else's words to tell, to try and explain my life. That police report the moderator was reading was a real police report, you understand. That's what they asked me, you understand, like my father's father. "You understand?" Over and over. "You understand what you did? Did you understand what he was asking? Did you see that he had tried to kill himself? Did you comprehend that? Do you understand what a gun is meant to do, Joseph? Do you understand? You're only six years old how could you understand. But did you? Did you comprehend? Acknowledge. No! Absolutely! Absolutely no! What did he ask? What did he say? Are you absolutely sure he asked you to? Absolutely? Yes or no!"

"And where was your mother in all of this?"

She's right here, you understand. Lucinda. Watch me walk around her. "Do you know where she is?" they asked me. "Do you know her phone number so we can call her for you?" "Where is she?" "Where is she?" "Your mother, Joey. Where is she?"

She's sitting very still and very polite and has absolutely nothing to say. See how very close I am to her? See my lips just an inch from an ear? How even this close she can't hear me begging her?

“WHERE THE FUCK WAS YOUR FUCKING MOTHER!”

I have a deadline, you understand. I need to finish this as soon as possible. I promised. And what I need to do now is just keep pushing it, you see. I press this switch and the lights reverse: Watch. See me there in the mirror, and PRESS, see it change. Now we're in the dark, and there's Lucy and the moderator again, in the light through the glass.

We just need to keep pressing, you understand. Pressing her, Lucy, you understand, because she understands it *all*. She's clever enough to see what is happening.

So: we turn the screws, and apply torque. Heart. Torque and heart, absolutely. Memory is all little pieces, you understand. Research, you understand? See the books, see the words. See the colors and shapes and smells you put together and shake and hope for something clear. Watch them compile. Composition, by piling. That's what these are: pillar words to hold weight, you understand. Thick, pile-driven paragraphs that would be boring and weak if they were easy to understand.

Consider this: Lucy walks into the room and says to the moderator: “*I remember once upon a time my father tried to kill himself but failed, and so when I found him he asked me to finish him off, and so I did, and I lived moderately happily, a totally average amount, ever after. The end. Fin. Heuva*”

It wouldn't be real, you see. To tell a story like that.

But the goal of this, you're probably wondering. It's to figure it out, you see. Selfishness on my part to discover the, the *whatever* that created Lucy. The breath of her. The aliveness of her. Why is she alive and not asking me to shoot her, you understand. I don't understand, you see. I don't understand, which is what *you* have to understand to understand why I am doing this. There's not really a one word 'thing' I'm searching for. I need many, many more words than that. And you've seen how many words I've written trying to keep up. The piles of them. See my hand? See how it is turning to claw?

Enough words for now. Enough words for a while.

Except to defend what I've done: What happens is you see, you search, and then you RE-search. You RE-member. RE-think. It's a lot of work, you understand. Trying to decide between Finnish and French, understand and comprehend, all that. But *you* reader, *you* understand. *You're* savvy.

Savvy.

“Savvy.”

Kind of a stupid word isn't it?”

I'm just rambling now. I need a drink. It makes me nervous sometimes, drinking, but sometimes it helps, too. My father never said that, but you understand that I could say right now, “My father used to say that” and you would believe me?

That's important.

Sometimes, you see, I just fall asleep and forget my good ideas. I bet I've had a lot of brilliant ideas I've forgotten. Magical seeds, brilliance scattered in no soil. But, you know what? Get yourself a beer. Read the rest of this with a beer in hand. Very important, beer. Helps you get over things. Helps you forget, so you can build up a better memory. Take a beer. Share it amongst yourselves and your loved ones. There's a special vintage from Queens I prefer. They make it in the back room of a laundromat. Sunnyside Suds, if I remember correctly. Super sanitary, no blood ever spilt in its making.

"Heuva beer, my father would say." Good beer.

The police, when they came, they commented on our last name. Said it sounded Italian, made fun of it. I was just sitting there but I remember saying, "No, it's Finnish." And them realizing I was there under the heavy blanket. They couldn't see me. But then they were nervous around me. I was a killer, you see. They started their questions. "Did you understand, did you understand, did you."

We've been over all that, though.

Anyway. Enjoy your drink. Have another, maybe you'll forget we even had this conversation.

But on with it, I suppose.

Salut. Cheers.

PART THREE

“Correct!”

See the man and older woman sitting in a room with a long mirror along one wall. They face each other across a metal table. Hard metal chairs with no padding. A bright lamp on the table. Handcuffs. The man taps his thick index finger against his dark sunglasses. The woman looks from the man's glassed face to picture of the boy on the table in front of her. She cannot move her arms for the bruises and cold. Her sweater, ripped where her brooch used to be, hangs about her like a thin, wet scarf. She sniffs, pneumatic, crying.

The man across the table has a checklist and a stubbed red pencil. His voice is hoarse and large, accented.

Name?

The woman does not respond.

I said name.

The woman sniffs. Lucinda, she says softly.

Last name?

Lucinda Pearle.

The man scratches red into his form.

Occupation?

Advertising.

Another scratch on the form.

Favorite book?

I—I don't really read much. I don't know.

Doesn't matter. Just need it for the file. First book you think of.

The Bible?

Good choice! Age?

What?

I need to verify the age you say versus the age we have for you on file.

Lucinda shrugs as much as she can for her bruises and a tear or drop of sweat drips into her lap. She is wet and cold all over.

I'm sure it's right, she says.

The investigator's glasses stare black at her.

You're sure it's right, he says.

She shrugs and drips again.

Buy how can you be sure?

I can't, she says. Does it matter?

He looks back to the checklist. I suppose not. Favorite food?

What?

Come on, that's easy. Your favorite food!

The investigator is smiling now below his glasses.

I really don't know.

You don't know your favorite food?

The investigator scratches the back of his neck.

Okay, consider this, he says. Say tonight was gonna be your last meal. The gallows await at daybreak and the death row chef is looking to you for a culinary challenge. What d'you have?

My last meal?

Sure. Say it's your last meal. I tell you what I'd have. Beef. Any kind. Any cut. I would kill for a good steak right now, you understand. Missed lunch. Maybe a nice cut of fish, or crab, lobster, too. Surf and turf, you know? Go out on a high note.

Lucinda is crying.

Okay, how about this, the investigator suggests. He writes with his pencil as he speaks. Let's do lobster, ice cream, pizza. A course of each. A nice three-course au revoir of American favorites.

I don't have much of an appetite.

Good then! We'll be sure to order plenty of lobster so there's leftovers. Anyway. Moving on. Children?

Yes.

One? Three?

One.

One son? Daughter?

Yes. One. A son.

Correct! So, tell me, Lucinda Pearle, advertising exec, non-reading lobster eater, what was your son's favorite food?

Sir, I hate to question your authority, but I really don't see what this has to do with—

Listen, Pearle. You're making me tired. If you don't know your own son's favorite food, then how about the first solid food you fed him, eh? You must remember the first time you spooned a rubber-covered spoon into your little boy's mouth. "Here comes the airplane" and all that, right? Are you really telling me you don't remember?

The investigator taps his thick fingers against the picture of the boy on the table. She looks at it and tears fall.

She wraps what's left of her sweater tight around her. Mashed carrots, she says.

Excellent, Lucinda! Very correct! And a good choice, carrots. Help his eyesight. Help him see what there is to be seen, you got me? Start out with strong vision for his future. Did you tell him, when he was older, that those carrots he ate as a kiddie would be good for his eyes?

Lucinda is shaking. His, his father told him, she says.

The investigator nods, turns to a new page in his checklist. Yes, yes he

did. Very correct, Mrs. Pearle, very correct. And what did his father say?

I—I don't remember exactly. That they would help him see in the dark, I think.

The investigator smiles. Correct! He makes another slash.

Now the investigator sighs, puts the red pencil behind his ear and rubs his eyes with two fingers beneath his glasses without taking them off. Lucinda watches him, sniffingly, as he takes the photo of the boy away from her side of the table and closes it within one of his many files. He leans forward on the metal table, putting his hands together on the reflective surface and gesturing with his neck to first a camera and then a microphone on either side of his enormous face.

So obviously we are recording all this, Lucinda. That's why I need you to speak up when you answer. It's for our safety, not yours, this recording. We are not concerned with your safety. I need you to understand that, Lucinda. None of us, not one of us listening or watching right now, are concerned. You can call for help, but we are not concerned.

Lucinda nods slowly.

SPEAK THE FUCK UP WHEN YOU ANSWER!

Yes, I understand! You all hate me! I understand!

You understand why you are here today?

I have an idea.

And what is that idea?

You want to ask me about my husband.

Specifically?

You want to ask me why I wasn't there.

Why you weren't where, Lucinda.

With him. At the house.

What house?

The—what had been our house.

Correct. That's right, Lucinda. You weren't there. So what do you know so far about our situation today?

I—I had to leave. I didn't—I didn't mean to leave him there all alone.

Lucinda weeps into her lap, drops of tears and snot dripping, dripping coldly out of her.

By him you mean your husband, the investigator says.

Lucinda shakes her head. More tears land on the floor.

By him you mean your son, don't you!

I meant to come back for him, Lucinda cries. I didn't know he was going to do that.

Your husband, you mean now. When you say you didn't know he was

going to do that.

Yes. I didn't know.

Didn't know he was going to do what?

That he would—

He phoned you, did he not, Lucinda? We have the records here. This paper in my hand is the official police report we have on file. He phoned you. You cannot deny this! Would you like me to read you the transcript of exactly how that conversation went?

No, no, no! Please don't. I don't want to know. Just please, tell me, is my son in trouble?

The investigator laughs. Are you fucking kidding me? Of course he is.

But he's—

He was in trouble way before today, too, I can tell you that for a fact. It's very well documented.

But he's just a boy!

It was your son who pulled the trigger, Lucinda. You think he could somehow *not* be in trouble?

He's only eight years old, please.

The investigator shakes his head. He is six years old, madam.

What?

This is how it works, maam. A man died today. Your husband died. Your son killed him. You understand that, don't you?

Lucinda is shaking her head violently.

Joey would never. Would never, ever, ever mean to—

Mean to?

He would never—

You think he didn't mean to?

No! There's no way—

The investigator stands up from his chair with a loud shriek of metal against concrete.

HOW WOULD YOU FUCKING KNOW WHAT HE DID OR DIDN'T
MEAN TO DO? YOU WEREN'T THERE! YOU LEFT! YOU KILLED HIM!
YOU UNDERSTAND? DO YOU SEE? DO YOU? DO YOU? DO YOU!

This is more or less how I remember it.

Book IV

“Lucy’s Monologue”

Watch Lucy enter the living room. Acknowledge she is carrying a book. It is a very thick book, like a text book. See how she holds it under one arm in the very plain room. This room is dimly lit by a small lamp that burns like sepia in a rear corner. This is a room she has been in before, many times, maybe lived in.

When Lucy starts speaking, it is as if to tell a story. She paces about the room, which is carpeted by many cloths, sweaters and scarfs, whatever could be found. See how she seems to have something to say, but is unsure of how to start? She does not like being alone. She can't see me, you understand, but I am here, too, in the back behind the lamp, where you can see me but she cannot.

Pay attention.

“When your father. When that happened—where was your mother?”

“The file doesn't say, you see, so you have to ask.”

“The file being, of course, memory.”

See Lucy take her book from under her arm and flip through its pages. See her show them to you.

“This is blank, naturally.”

See the blank pages flutter out the binding and onto the floor.

“Perhaps you assume I am just making everything up as I go along.”

“Which I am, of course. Absolutely.”

“But I don’t know. Files are complicated, I suppose. Not usually, but perhaps”

Watch Lucy stop pacing and stand very nearly still near a wall. Listen.

“My father called me Lucy. ‘Lucy, I need you to shoot me, please,’ he said. Saying ‘please’ even though his stomach and guts were poured out like lapfish. Fish guts, you understand. In his lap. Like a spilled stew, you understand. Felt warm, I imagine. Like pissing yourself, perhaps, which it was, too, absolutely. Just through a new hole.”

See Lucy sitting cross-legged on a piece of floor carpet and leaning against the wall.

“Even though if ever you didn’t have to say please *that* was the time, still he said please. Even if ever you shouldn’t waste words it is when you only have moments to live, he still said please. ‘Live each day as if it’s your last,’ some might say, he might have said. Carpe dee capital=M. *Especiallly* when you know it’s your last. *Especiallly* when it’s your last by especial choice. ‘Waste not want not,’ he might have said over breakfast. Eat the whole sardine.”

“Politeness is not wasted, was his point.”

“Maybe he said it, ‘Lucy, I need you to shoot me. *Please.*’ Maybe he started a new sentence so as to add stress. Italicized it. To be certain I knew what it was he meant for me to do.”

Focus on how Lucy removes her scarf and twirls it about between her butterflyed legs, dragging fringe along the carpet, tracing the pattern. There's something there on the floor she is tracing.

“Oh, that's another example of a warm smell, I should say. The shot to the gut smell. The waste spilling out all warm. I didn't mention that before. Maybe it was obvious. But that should go in any police report ever read back.”

See Lucy rising, pacing across the carpet past me sitting silent in my chair behind the lamp. Perhaps you think she looks at me for a moment as she passes by but doesn't say so. Perhaps she does. But now she turns away from me and toward you. She leans along the arm of a different chair.

“Please join us for a conversation about the meaning of your life,’ the notice said. I remember it. ‘The meaning of your life,’ it said. The ‘your’ was not in italics but it might as well have been given the way I interpreted the notice's meaning. ‘Your’ in italics like a proper title.”

“And the smell. Remembering the warm smell when I read it.”

“My father used to say there was no excuse for being impolite, not ever. Not even during an interrogation. Not even if the opposite party is rude. “Two rude do not make a polite,” he used to say. It was kind of a joke. But everyone always admired how polite my father was. I told the police that, when they came. I said, ‘Please, *please*.’ Over and over again. ‘S’il vous plait, s’il vous plait,’ as he

might have said, in his way. He said it all the time, you understand. I didn't understand why they were mad at me for being a good girl."

"Whereas my mother, my namesake, well."

"She left without permission, you see. Without the consideration of notice to my father. 'Not very polite,' he should have said, and left it at that. But he never did, you understand."

Watch Lucy sigh a very deep sigh and rub her neck. Watch her scratch at the jeans she is wearing, her right thigh. She sniffs, but is not crying. She will never cry again.

"Something about politeness, okay? Consider this: My father as a man with an axe in his head and me as a pink fairy."

"Halloween, you see."

"I remember he used an entire tube of blood makeup on his face, and old lipstick of my mother's on his shirt collar. We walked the neighborhood streets when it was still light out. Twilight, dusk, sunset, whichever word you prefer. His favorite Halloween candy was my least favorite Halloween candy, which is a great thing between two people, you understand. Some married couples have something like that, you know. A husband hates tomatoes and a wife enjoys them, and you get married with this the only small difference between you, and then someone never has to eat tomatoes again and someone else gets twice as many

tomatoes. What was an argument becomes just one of the many reasons that make you perfect for each other, and that you try to remember whenever you think that maybe your love is dripping out of you, fluttering away. But you hold onto the memory, remember it so much that tomatoes become more important than ever, so that someday they become the ripe heart of a loving story your grandchildren tell.”

“At least that’s the idea.”

“The truth, if you’re interested, is that the tomato effect is only good in restaurants and situation comedies on television. In real life, a tomato disagreement is complicated; it means that in supermarkets you are constantly at odds. One person feels guilty about wanting tomatoes and another feels annoyed about having to spend three ninety-five on fucking marinara. But hey, you’re married, deal with it. Taste is just one sense. You have others. For many people, this is not true love, but it is the truth about their love.”

“My mother was at home with a bowl of red candies for the other fathers and daughters. I didn’t doubt the truth of it. I didn’t need verification by sight or writing to know she loved me. I could count on it. I could anticipate her face then, rather than have to remember it from a photograph. Could anticipate the warm the smell of her hugs rather than pretend with a scarf or cardigan. I could look forward, you understand, not back. It wasn’t a must.”

See Lucy sighing. See her lie on the floor and stare at into a dark ceiling.

“I remember a green cardigan with the broach her mother gave her. I had to turn my head when she hugged me or the broach might blind me in the eye. I remember this very well, but I know from pictures that the cardigan she wore most often was blue.”

“I don’t remember a blue cardigan.”

See Lucy turn her head on the floor and look at you.

“So Halloween. My father walks and holds my hand. I have to hold my hand up, you understand, near my ear, because he is so much taller than me.”

See Lucy extend her hand straight up.

“I can’t adjust my sparkly princess tiara without letting go of his hand, so it keeps falling against my nose like a pair of too-big eyeglasses.”

“It’s funny the things you can remember.”

“Especially things like this, that don’t seem all that special. But are, you understand. It’s too much, sometimes, when they come flooding in.”

Watch Lucy rise and walk to a small refrigerator next to me. I open the door and the light pours out. She reaches in, retrieves a bottle of beer.

“This was my father’s favorite beer, you understand. Sunnyside Suds. He kept it here, in our living room.”

Hear the SNAP as Lucy uncaps the bottle. Smell what she smells when she sniffs at the bottle.

“I once read somewhere that smell is the sense most closely related to memory.”

Watch Lucy take a long drink and swirl it about her mouth like wine. Taste the bubbles, the hoppiness, the alcohol.

“It was a scientist who wrote that about smell, you understand. And I believe it. Sometimes I will pass someone in an elevator or department store and they will be wearing a perfume or cologne and it’s like WHOOSH, off I go into memory. All of a sudden, just like that. Lucy’s lucidity.”

See her drink again. Feel the glass on your mouth, the alcohol fluttering into your head. Remember your own father’s favorite beer.

Are you sure?

“Consider this: I go to the mall with my mother to buy her mother a present. I am six years old. Her mother, who gave her the broach that could blind me, is having an important birthday. I don’t remember which. The present is a bottle of perfume, the same perfume maybe that your grandmother wore, you remember? My mother sprays a spritz onto one of those sampler cards they have in department stores for this very purpose. And it’s horrifying, you understand. My grandmother in a mottle, my grandmother on a business card. You can

imagine this? You remember the smell of your grandmother, of her house? Maybe this has happened to you.”

“My grandmother died eventually. There was a funeral where people spoke of her love for jewelry and perfume. She left me a broach of my own, but no perfume. A few months later I was in a department store and I went to the perfume counter just to smell her. I missed her, you understand. I couldn’t remember what she smelled like. But then I did.”

“It’s possible I picked the wrong perfume, you understand. It’s possible I am remembering it all wrong.”

Watch Lucy finish her beer.

“I haven’t been back to a perfume counter since that one time. I want to preserve the memory, you see.”

Hear Lucy’s bottle break against the floor. Watch her walk very fast in your direction.

“Do you want to know what he smelled like? My father? Before or after the shotgun shot to the gut?”

“Coconuts, of course. His favorite Halloween candy.”

See Lucy’s face just inches from your face.

“Do you believe me?”

Watch her laugh, feel her breath on your face. Smell the alcohol on her breath, a whiff of your grandmother's perfume. Watch her back away, her eyes on yours.

“Not really, coconuts, but, sure, you could say that. Why not? It's something a young girl of six or eight would believe and remember.”

“Something I do remember. My mother and father used to whisper to each other after sex. I heard them once. I crawled into their room and was hiding under the bed. I wanted to hear if they talked about me. I remember my father whispered that if my mother ever left he would kill himself. He thought it was romantic, maybe. Maybe she thought it was romantic too, I don't know. I don't think a person would marry someone they didn't find romantic. Even if by romance you mean unromance.”

“Now there's something my father would say. *Unromance*. Re-romance. Re-romantify.”

“So yes, you absolutely understand. It was absolutely unromantic that she left. My father, maybe he thought it was *proromance* to hold up his end of the bargain. Like a Juliet or a Romeo. *ProRomeo*, he was. Promeo. If he hadn't gone ahead and done it he would have had to remember lying to her, you see. He would have had to come up with a new way of remembering—to avoid remembering not having been a Promeo.”

“So what was there left to do?”

See Lucy sitting quietly in a chair much too big for her. See her small, like a child in her father's chair.

“That's something that's not complicated, you understand. What he did. Funny how it's the things we do that aren't hard, that are uncomplicated, that combine to complicate everything.”

“Sorry, my words are piling up.”

See Lucy sit quietly for awhile. Understand how difficult it is for her, to have to remember all of this, to have to go through life knowing she killed her father, and that it was because he asked her to. See her looking into your eyes. She is so lovely. Listen to her.

“You understand what I mean by re-remember? To re-remember and re-tell and re-search and search and search until you find something that resembles a kind of truth? That's what we do, you understand, all of us. We try to un-complicate things by researching and looking for the narrative thread holding our worlds together, the rationality behind the emotions, our lives, why we are where we are.”

“The heart of it all.”

“I loved my father, you see. I loved him. I haven't said that yet. I haven't used that word. Check the transcript if you don't believe me. It would have been

too easy, you see, to have just said ‘I loved my father.’ Because that sums up everything that I am, that I’ve done up until this point.”

See Lucy walk across the room to the spot against the wall where she’d sat earlier, tracing on the floor. See there, faintly, the shadow of a large man, thin smoke rising upwards.

“I was his seven-year-old princess and I did love him and that’s why I did what he asked me to do. He was polite. He said, ‘Lucy I need you to shoot me. Please.’”

See Lucy stand there looking, remembering.

Now you are outside the house you grew up in. Maybe you are in a backyard, or out on the street. You are playing. You are daydreaming. Your childhood best friend is smiling at you. And then you hear something. You tell your friend you heard something. You think something fell in your living room. Your father was hanging picture earlier. One of the pictures is of you and him at Halloween. You go inside, you smell something like fireworks, like the Fourth of July. There’s smoke, something burning. You hear your father crying. You’ve heard him cry before, on the phone with your mother. You see him against the wall with a hole in his stomach, and things you’ve never seen before pouring out of him. It is nothing like a movie. So much smell. You cover your mouth. You want to run. You want to go and get your daddy to help you, but this is him, this is

your father, and he is pointing to the gun with a red hand like a claw. Please, he says. But you don't understand. Please, he says again.

What do you do?

And after, how do you go on?

Now Lucy is standing at the door at the light switch, and the room is very, very cold.

“The planet is spiraling toward the sun, you understand. You understand what those words mean?”

You don't say anything.

“So no, then.”

END

RESEARCH

A Novel For Performance

by Joseph Riippi

Directed by Nick Leavens

Produced by |the claque|

As performed at The Tank Theater, New York City, May 2011.

“Isn’t this a contradiction?”

“Art is defined by its contradictions.”

“Art is defined by its contradictions?”

“No.”

NAMES

LUCY: *a young woman with scarf, 25-35.*

LUCINDA: *another woman with green cardigan and broach, 30-40's.*

JOSEPH: *a college student, 18-22.*

MODERATOR/INVESTIGATOR: *a man. Perhaps he has an accent.*

AUDIENCE: *people (exactly) like you.*

PROJECTION: *live action image of LUCY as projected by JOSEPH in the epilogue.*

PART ONE

Chapter I

Lights on when AUDIENCE sits.

Enter LUCY and MODERATOR.

LUCY and MODERATOR sitting in a room with a long mirror along one wall. They face each other from ends of a wooden table. The MODERATOR's back is to AUDIENCE, such that they occupy something of his perspective. There are cups of coffee on the table. Styrofoam empties drip in a bin, indicating someone having been here previously. A video camera is on a tripod next to the MODERATOR and aimed at LUCY. There is a viewfinder trained on LUCY's face. She is not necessarily attractive but she is interesting to look at. Perhaps she has very large glasses. If the AUDIENCE were given binoculars one could view this viewfinder from his or her seat and view LUCY's face up close. This is important. There is also a microphone on the table. A few manila envelopes with papers rest neatly in the corner next to the MODERATOR. A notebook. LUCY has a purse with a blank book in it. It is a hardcover and has no discernable title or goldleaf but a bookmark would be interesting. She wears a scarf, gloves. A long pause before LUCY speaks to indicate that they have been sitting there for a time.

LUCY: So no, then.

MODERATOR: No.

Brief pause.

LUCY: But why.

Same brief pause.

MODERATOR: Why would you think you could read in here?

LUCY: The last woman read. Or she had a book at least.

Brief pause.

The woman that was here before, I mean. Before me.

MODERATOR: The woman *who* was here before you, you mean.

LUCY: That's what I said.

Briefer pause.

She had a book, didn't she?

MODERATOR: *Shuffling papers.* What makes you think there was someone here
before you?

LUCY: It smells like paper. Like my mother was here. Sometimes the smell of
books or libraries reminds me of my mother.

Brief pause.

Like, must, you know? Like bookstore mold. You know, you understand. Like a used bookstore's moldy basement in rainy autumn. Southern Virginia, leaves ground into crackly floorboards, old copies of *Walden*, boots, Wellies--wellingtons, you follow? And beef Wellingtons. Cider apples, etc.

She holds her nose in the air for a long pause, cutting the MODERATOR off as he is about to deliver his next line. She is not instructive so much as sharing thoughts as they occur.

Plus someone is always "here" before we are "here," you know? What seems like first is never, really. To you at least. Not really. Columbus had to kill a lot of people to make believe—to make others and us, I mean—believe he was first.

MODERATOR: I was the only one here when you got here.

LUCY: Well, I won't kill you for it.

MODERATOR: I appreciate that.

LUCY: It smells like she was reading a really old book.

Pause. LUCINDA enters stage right where JOSEPH is already seated in dark. She is late, removes a coat, drops a purse, etc. She whispers something to JOSEPH, probably "Sorry, I couldn't find a cab." He nods, whispers back something like, "No worries, we

just started.” The lights remain dim on their side of the mirror.

MODERATOR: The last woman *who* was here, was here yesterday. And she left yesterday. They’ve cleaned since then. *He indicates trash bin.* Whatever you smell isn’t her. It wasn’t her book.

Brief pause

I mean, that is, if there were, or if she had a book. Perhaps it is these papers.

During the next lines LUCY unwinds her scarf from around her neck as she begins to feel more comfortable and in control. She uses the scarf and other accessories throughout the action as a way of indicating levels of stress or thought or intensity-of-memory. Tightening the scarf around her neck might be similar to the way a nervous smoker would light a cigarette in a police interrogation.

LUCY: What was she reading? I only read new books. Fresh off the presses. So fresh there’s no smell.

MODERATOR: I’m sorry, Miss Pearle, but we really need to move on.

LUCY: Except warm. I’d say new books have a warmer smell. You know? You understand what I mean? Comprehend? Acknowledge? See? You see. You see, you do. Warm isn’t a smell. Not really. Not in the way we use the word. Not even as much as “cold” can be a smell. But you get the idea. I

have an idea of it so you must have an idea of it. Is it a stretch to think like that? That because I understand, it follows that you should, too? At least vaguely understand. Is there a word for that? There must be. In this language or in another. There are words for everything. And different languages.

MODERATOR: With all due respect, Miss Pearle, we must—

LUCY: Oh, of course you know. You see what I mean. You get it. “A new book can smell warm.” Just leave it at that. That’s the strange thing about new books. They are warm, then cool off after printing, but get warmer as they age, with all the handling. Even in the musty basement, the yellow pages. Warmer, not colder, not like—

MODERATOR: *Interrupting.* We really do need to move on.

LUCY: Why? Isn’t this (*indicating the space between herself and the moderator*) the point of all *this*? (*indicating the mirror, JOSEPH and LUCINDA on dark portion of the stage*).

MODERATOR: We do have specific topics to cover. This, them, you (*indicating the same*) all of it has certain objectives.

LUCY: Such as?

MODERATOR: Such as your father. The day he died.

Brief pause.

What he smelled like, if you prefer.

Briefer pause.

Warm. Or cold, you understand.

LUCY: *Putting her scarf back on.* Okay, so, my father. I see what you mean. Talk about my father.

MODERATOR: Yes.

LUCY: Yes.

Pause.

LUCY: Are you going to talk?

MODERATOR: Your father was a veteran, wasn't he?

LUCY: A veteran?

MODERATOR: Of a war.

LUCY: Oh. Yes.

MODERATOR: He knew his way around a gun, I mean.

LUCY: If one were on the floor, I've no doubt he could find his way around it,

yes.

MODERATOR: *Chuckles.* Funny.

LUCY: You think guns are funny?

MODERATOR: No, I—

LUCY: There is nothing funny about guns, my father would have said. There is nothing funny about guns excepting cartoon guns which shoot out flags with messages instead of bullets, like the coyote and the bird.

MODERATOR: Okay, so let's talk about how guns aren't funny.

LUCY: *Making gun with her finger.* BLAMMO! Now imagine an ad for a taxidermist hanging here.

MODERATOR: Lucy.

LUCY: *Making gun with each hand now, like pistols.* KAPOW! ZIP-BANG!
BOOM-A-ZOOM! *She laughs.*

MODERATOR: As to your father, Lucy. I have his last words to you here. Or what you reported were his last words.

LUCY: *Blowing smoke off imaginary guns.* What I reported.

MODERATOR: Yes.

LUCY: *In cowboy voice, holstering the guns.* What I done said to the sheriff.

MODERATOR: Yes.

LUCY: *Regular voice.* It was very cold that night. I remember that. They had me in the paddy wagon, the police car. The lights were on, but no sirens. They brought me an uncomfortable blanket. You could put a fire out with that blanket it was so cold. *Pointing imaginary gun.* FIRE! FIRE!

MODERATOR: Do you know what it says here?

LUCY: About the blanket?

MODERATOR: No—

LUCY: About the fire, then.

MODERATOR: No about what you said your father said.

LUCY: Well, let me explain something first. When someone has died. For example. For example, my father in the cold, for instance. For this instance of cold example. To make a blanket statement about it all. A book gets colder at first, after printing, after it's born, you see, and with age it warms and yellows. But a body, when it dies, it dries. Goes papery. Goes wet first but dries like carpeting or blankets putting out fires instead of water putting out fires. But books, as I was saying. To use books as part of our blanketing. A body is like a book, you see. It has a smell when it is

new. A warmth from printing. But as time passes and the book sits on its shelf or in a freezer or in a living room against a wall with a gun pointed at it—*briefest pause*—whatever the death case may be—*same briefest pause*—his body cools towards cold, you see. Yellows without warming. Not like books. Body becomes less warm, losing, you see, you understand. Death is loss, you see. You see? Just sits, like on a shelf but with no one ever touching...

Briefest pause, considering, somewhere else. MODERATOR

MODERATOR: *Prodding.* Ever touching?

LUCY: *Ignoring MODERATOR, remembering, fingering scarf.* And then it will take a while for the police to arrive. It's cold and the cars take time to warm up. You're cold, too. Sitting there. No police blanket. And then them coming in with belts and guns. You are too young to know 9-1-1, really, you understand. You know the number but have never dialed the phone before. It's not that you don't know how to dial a phone, not that you aren't tall enough to reach it on the kitchen wall by climbing a stool. And you have seen it dialed a thousand times. By your mother, your father. By your father calling your mother and asking her to come home, *(making voice)* "Please darling, come home, I can't do this, not alone, not just me and little Lucy..."

Briefest pause again.

MODERATOR: Lucy.

LUCY: But you have no experience of dialing the phone yourself. And it's getting so cold. The warm, you see, the blanket's not there, and the old one your father was using is ruined now, everything just disappearing by the second, breathing in that warm smell, breathing out the cold nothing, the loss, the colding of it all.

To MODERATOR again.

You understand? You follow? It's okay if you don't. They said it was okay that I didn't follow, that I didn't understand, that I didn't get what he had asked me to do. "No child could comprehend" somebody said.

Brief pause.

So you can't do it. Couldn't do it. The dialing. Can't turn his pages, still too wet. Can try, can run your hands all over the warm, colding stuff coming out of him. But not at first. Just sit there. Staring. And breathing. Breathing in, out. Smelling warm, less and less. The first of all the differences. The first of the musts.

Pause.

MODERATOR: "The first of the musts"?

LUCY: *Insistent, to self.* You *must* get over. *Must* move on. *Must not* look back.

Must look back. *Must* move on. Again. Etcetera. Repeat. And so on. The dealing with of things.

MODERATOR: I see.

LUCY: Do you? Do you understand? “Child couldn’t comprehend.” You see why the musts? You must do something. Now. Him just dying. There. In the corner. You just a kid. You remember dialing 9-1-1 because it was the only number you knew. Besides your own but you can’t yourself. Call yourself and you’re busy. Can’t answer your own call for help. Don’t want to look at it or hear it, not like that. Mustn’t do that.

Brief pause. LUCY breathing hard, clutching scarf, tightening.

MODERATOR: Lucy.

LUCY: Wouldn’t have to smell it through a phone at least. The warm smell.

Pause.

MODERATOR: Lucy.

Brief pause. LUCY playing with scarf, twirling hair, waiting.

MODERATOR takes a manila envelope from the stack and opens it, begins to read, looking for something. Pause as he does.

LUCY: Sorry. This chair was warm when I sat. That was why I asked about the

woman that was here before. That was all. I'm a little nervous. All this, it's a lot. *Indicating the camera, the mirror.* I have a little case of the butterflies, you could say. Not even quite butterflies. Case of the caterpillars. Little cocoons in my belly. Waiting to...I don't know. *Nervous laugh.*

MODERATOR: *Looking through the papers.* The woman *whom* was here before, Lucy. Not *that* was here before.

Brief pause. They smile at each other.

I thought you said it was the smell that made you think of the woman. Was it a smell like your father's smell when he died? The warm (*checking notes*) "colding smell" you mentioned?

LUCY: *Reaching for her coffee for the first time.* Yes and absolutely. Sight and sound. Sound and sight.. That's all that's worth remembering. Smell remembers itself. If you remember what you just saw, heard, yes, absolutely.

Sips coffee. Smells coffee.

Ouch. Burned myself.

Chapter II

Stage right, the other side of the glass. JOSEPH and LUCINDA having observed previous chapter. JOSEPH sitting upstage in the first row, LUCINDA downstage and behind JOSEPH, less engaged in the action. JOSEPH has a yellow legal pad and pen, on which he takes copious notes. LUCINDA has a phone with which she is considerably occupied, reading and responding to emails.

LUCINDA: *Looks up.* She took her coffee black.

Brief pause.

JOSEPH: *Looking up from his notes.* She did?

LUCINDA: I just said she did.

JOSEPH writes this down, and then continues to write.

LUCINDA: What are you writing? *She rises.* That she took her coffee black is important, Joseph. You understand that, right? *To AUDIENCE.* You can see what that means about this woman, can't you? *Back to JOSEPH.* You understand that it means she doesn't shop often, that she doesn't trust herself to keep milk from going bad...

JOSEPH: *Interrupting.* Can I just do this...

LUCINDA: *Ignoring...* that she doesn't have time for milk anyway. *To*

AUDIENCE. Perhaps she likes the burnt feel on her lips. Or perhaps it is

the burnt taste. Or the burnt smell, even. She doesn't even know what she wants. *Hand to chest.* She needs guidance from a mother. Despite what she says about smell. Disregard that. Look, you look like smart people. *To JOSEPH.* And I can see you're a smart guy, Joseph. I mean, I understand that you are, and because you are in the position for observing this market research setting, *you* have to know what this young woman means. That's your specialty, Joseph. That *you* comprehend is the reason why *you* are here.

JOSEPH: Thanks.

LUCINDA: *Mockingly.* "Thanks."

Brief pause. LUCINDA turns away.

LUCINDA: *To AUDIENCE.* See, you understand how burnt can have a smell.

Like warm can have a smell. Like she is saying, was just saying. Listen to her. Without milk, coffee is hotter. Smells warmer. So warm it's burnt. That's important. Only a certain kind of person likes that. *She moves to sit down, points to a woman in the front row.* Maybe you are that type of person. *Sitting, back to JOSEPH.* This is the sort of thing you need to be looking for. *She resumes with her phone.* I've been trying to teach you but you've been too caught up in yourself. This, the coffee, it's the sort of thing that tells you about an interviewee.

Brief pause. Typing on phone.

And by extension, you understand, tells you about “the world” and “the human condition.” If you want to be grand about it. See how she takes off her scarf and put it back on? That’s important. You understand? See?

Pause. She types. He writes.

JOSEPH: *Still writing.* She didn’t say that she took her coffee black.

LUCINDA: What?

JOSEPH: It was you who said it. That she took her coffee black.

Brief pause.

That it was important: you said that too. Not her.

LUCINDA: Is that what you are writing?

JOSEPH: Yes.

He keeps writing. She watches him.

LUCINDA: What are you writing now?

JOSEPH: That she took her coffee black. *Pause. He erases something, writes some more.*

LUCINDA: And now?

JOSEPH: That she took her coffee black. But bigger. For emphasis.

LUCINDA: That she took it black is important, Joseph.

JOSEPH: *In same mocking voice LUCINDA used previously.* “Thanks.”

Indicating notebook. It says that here.

Chapter III

Stage Left. The MODERATOR shuffling papers. LUCY watches him for a moment, begins to fiddle with her scarf, but retrieves an old hardcover book from her purse instead.

There is no dust jacket, no title the AUDIENCE will be able to see. She places the book in front of her but does not open it.

LUCY: I think I am going to read. I would like to, I mean.

Brief pause, waiting for response from MODERATOR.

Sometimes I think I want to kick back with a book and it doesn't work.

Too many thoughts going through my head and I can't get into the narrative. Suture in, as they say. As my mother said. She was a filmee, not a surgeon. Suture like a film suture. Not like a surgery suture.

MODERATOR: Your mother didn't help sick people?

LUCY: No. *Laughs heartily.*

MODERATOR: How do you know the must smell you smelled wasn't from that book?

LUCY: I don't. I'm just assuming. *Briefest pause, then as if explanation.* This is fiction.

MODERATOR: It's fiction.

LUCY: *Nods, smiles.* Truly.

MODERATOR continues looking through papers. Pause. LUCY doesn't open the book.

MODERATOR: You aren't going to read it?

LUCY: I thought you said I couldn't.

MODERATOR: You can't.

LUCY: Oh, I know how to read.

MODERATOR finds the paper he was looking for, pushes it across the table to LUCY, but does not let go. Pulls it back to his side of the table.

MODERATOR: As you might suspect, based on what we have said already, based on what you have offered already, we've asked you here today to talk about what you remember of your father.

LUCY rises from her chair as the MODERATOR continues to speak, looks at herself in the mirror that is the wall. She adjusts her clothes, pulls at them slightly, exposing shoulder. She smiles

MODERATOR: Please pay attention, Miss Pearle. You understand that what a person remembers about his or her father is important. It shapes them in a way memory of a mother doesn't, in that the father, you understand, can often be a much shakier connection for the child. Traditionally.

Absolutely. No subconscious memory of a traumatic birth and all that. And that we have a mostly patriarchal society. And then there was an Oedipus, who killed his father, you remember. And that the father of Oedipus--his name I forget—he was also Oedipus’ wife’s ex-husband. Complicated. Absolutely and complicated. Life and everything about it is, *are*, complicated. That hasn’t changed. The relationship to the father is a rich mine of material about the human condition, you understand. About *your* condition, in particular, you understand, that we want to explore in this hour. To quote the key objective for our time here today (*reading from a piece of paper from the file*): “To address the meaning of life via the address of one specific life and its meaning. Subject: Lucinda Pearle. Relevance: Death of father by double-barreled shotgun gunshot.” *LUCY continues pacing about, looking at herself in mirror, sipping coffee that may or may not actually be black.* So, Miss Pearle, Lucy, specifically, today, the persons that I work for have asked you here in order to have us have a conversation about the conversation you had with your father in the minutes before he died. You understand that, yes? Absolutely? To learn from experience, as you would have learned to dial a phone, as you said, by dialing, observing your father’s having dialed, having dialed your mother.

LUCY: *Quietly To mirror.* Can you hear me behind there?

MODERATOR: What was that?

LUCY: The persons *whom* you work for, you mean.

MODERATOR: Yes. *Smiling*. My apologies.

LUCY: *Playfully*. You are looking for words but not always using the correct ones, Monsieur...

LUCY taps her finger against the glass, directly in front of JOSEPH. He looks up. They make eye contact through the wall for a Brief pause, before he turns back to his notes.

LUCY: *Still playfully*. I know you're there...I can't see you but I know you're there...

MODERATOR: They can hear you, yes.

LUCY: I know. *She continues looking at herself*. You know, I've done this before.

MODERATOR: I know. Many times, it says here. Many times and no one has ever left happy. Now, would you like something else to drink? More coffee?

LUCY: Yes.

MODERATOR: What?

LUCY: Yes.

MODERATOR: No, what would you like more...

MODERATOR begins to rise but in doing so catches the leg of his chair and falls in a crash. Everyone looks up and at him for a brief pause. The boy behind the mirror stops writing. For a brief moment it seems as if this was not a part of the play, as if all the actor's are attempting to figure out what to do in the emergency.

JOSEPH is the first to move. He looks back to his notebook and writes, MODERATOR picks himself up. LUCY looks back at herself in the mirror, adjusting clothing. LUCINDA occupies herself with a cell phone, texting or emailing.

LUCY: *Not looking at him.* Why did you do that?

MODERATOR: *Reorganizing himself at the table.* I lost my balance. I didn't mean to.

LUCY: I don't believe in just doing things to do them.

MODERATOR: Neither do I.

LUCY: *Sitting back down at the table.* Be purposeful in all you do and you'll be happier in life. Dial phones with purpose. Sniff the air with purpose. Look at art with purpose. That's what my father used to say.

MODERATOR: Did he?

LUCY: Absolutely. Yes. Absolutely and yes. But no, not that exactly. Sometimes exactly, maybe. Sometimes he would say things that stuck in my head. Sometimes he would say something like that, too. But we change

memories every time we remember them, you know. I read that somewhere. At least I remember reading it, which, you understand, casts doubt over the entire thesis of what I just said. Paradoxical. My father used to say that, too, I remember. "I read that somewhere," I mean. The words would be in different orders sometimes when he said it. Other times he would use the same words with other words in between and make whole new sentences. Depending on what he meant to say.

MODERATOR: And what would he mean to say?

LUCY: Oh, that language is amazing, I suppose. "Isn't it?" "Is it not?" See, just like that. You understand? And my father could speak Finnish and French, too, and when he spoke those words they were very different, but maybe meant the same thing.

On stage right, JOSEPH is still writing. LUCINDA looks up from her phone or computer, on which she has been texting or writing emails. Lights remain dim on their side.

LUCINDA: Do you think that woman look like me?

JOSEPH stops writing and looks up. LUCY is standing directly in front of him, separated by glass. When he looks up she looks back and they almost make eye contact.

LUCINDA: She does look like me, doesn't she.

JOSEPH shakes his head, goes back to his writing.

LUCINDA: Maybe she does a little.

LUCINDA moves toward LUCY at the glass, plays with her hair, adjusts her collar, whatever one might do to make herself more like LUCY.

JOSEPH: She takes her coffee the same way as you.

LUCINDA stops looking at LUCY. Moves to JOSEPH, tries to look over his shoulder at what he is writing.

LUCINDA: What are you writing? You've been writing this whole time.

JOSEPH: Don't worry about it.

LUCINDA: But what is it? You think this is important, don't you, this note-taking. Some people, not me, but some people, believe you have to write a thing down to really understand it.

JOSEPH: Stop!

LUCINDA: *Reading over JOSEPH's shoulder.* "She is looking at her reflection, maybe. She is wondering if she is beautiful maybe." *In poor, phonetic French.*

"Elle pense que si est belle, peut-etre."

JOSEPH tries to hide the notebook but LUCINDA wrestles it away, pries at it, reads aloud to AUDIENCE.

LUCINDA: *Reading as JOSEPH struggles to regain the notebook. They struggle hard. Him almost climbing over her back.* “She is thinking, ‘I wonder if they can tell I am lying.’ She is thinking in French, like her father. *In the poor phonetics again.* She is thinking, Ecrire: to write. Lire: to read. She is thinking in Finnish like her grandfather. Lukea: to read. Kirjoittaa: to write. She is thinking, ‘I wish I didn’t come here.’

JOSEPH regains the notebook. Both out of breath. LUCINDA laughs and walks back to her seat. JOSEPH goes back to writing. LUCINDA sits. To JOSEPH:

“I wish I didn’t come here.” No, she wouldn’t think that. She wants to talk to someone about it all.

JOSEPH watches LUCY almost as if a statue he is sketching.

LUCINDA: You see how all of what you’re writing is fiction, right? Because you’re not really *seeing*. You’re making it up. Pay attention. That’s all you have to do. See the boy, see the girl. See what’s important, the plot points, the narrative arc, or line, or circle.

Brief pause.

She wouldn’t lie, you understand. It’s impossible for her to lie.

Briefest pause.

You understand that they never lie, right?

JOSEPH: She always lied. Des mensonge. Des recreations. Virkistys. Whatever
you want to call it.

Lights down Stage Right.

Chapter IV

LUCY and MODERATOR seated at the table, sipping coffee.

MODERATOR: Let's start again.

LUCY: Shoot.

MODERATOR: Let's approach this a different way. Like your father might.

Different words, you understand?

LUCY: *Nodding.* Absolutely.

MODERATOR: Okay. So just two words you have to choose from for this part, okay? Yes or no. Yes or no questions, you understand?

LUCY: Yes. Absolutely.

MODERATOR: Exactly. No lies.

LUCY: Yes. No. I won't. "I never lie," my father used to say. It was a kind of joke.

MODERATOR: First question: Have you ever known anyone who died?

LUCY: *Immediately, with confidence.* No.

LUCINDA: *In darkness, to JOSEPH:* Why would she say that?

JOSEPH: What?

LUCINDA: That she has never known anyone who died? Everyone has known someone, at least a little, who has died.

JOSEPH: I suppose.

LUCINDA: Pay attention, Joseph.

JOSEPH: *Not looking up.* My father used to say that in French. “Faites attention!” When he was teaching me French. You don’t remember that, do you.

LUCINDA: How—why would I remember that?

JOSEPH: Exactly. If you said you did you’d be lying.

LUCINDA: Pay attention!

MODERATOR: *Looking at the files spread before him.* Well, it says here that, not only have you known someone who died, but you have seen someone die.

LUCY: I don’t know what that is.

MODERATOR: This is your file.

LUCY: I have a file?

MODERATOR: Yes.

LUCY: *Laughs.* No.

MODERATOR: Yes, you do. This is it. It has your name on it.

LUCY: *Counting on her hand.* Some things that are mine: personality, sense of humor, this scarf, incredible command of conversation, good looks, you by the balls by the time this thing is over.

MODERATOR laughs.

LUCY: Not that file. My name. I suppose other people could be called Lucy, couldn't they? That doesn't mean they have the same name as me, but it means they could have a file and I could not.

MODERATOR: Okay, I apologize. This is a file *about* you. By "yours" I meant it was *about* you. This is the file of papers that say you were recruited for this interview specifically because you have known someone who died...

LUCY: *Interrupting.* Papers *who* say.

MODERATOR: ...like all the other interviews you've given. Because you have seen someone die. Because of your expertise. With that. With death.

LUCY: Papers "*whom*" say.

MODERATOR: No. That doesn't make sense.

LUCY: Okay, then papers "who."

MODERATOR: This is your file in the sense that--

LUCY: *Interrupting.* In the sense that it is about me.

MODERATOR: Yes.

LUCY: Do you have a file? In a different sense, maybe? You could say that that is your file too, because you have it in your hand, you understand.

MODERATOR: You could say that. But it doesn't make sense.

LUCY: But which sense? *There's* the rub, as my father used to say. "Ay, there's the rub." My father played that role in a high school production. The mad masturbatorial prince role. (*MODERATOR looks at the mirror as if for help.*)

LUCINDA: Why is he looking at me?

JOSEPH: *Writing, reading as he does.* "She is thinking no one ever does their best at anything, not for her."

LUCINDA: Who is thinking? Me? Her?

JOSEPH keeps writing. LUCINDA watches him.

LUCINDA: This research is being recorded, Joseph. You don't have to transcribe it word for word.

Brief pause.

JOSEPH: "Lucinda asks Joseph, 'Are you transcribing this word for word?'".

Brief pause.

JOSEPH: “Joseph responds with very meaningful silence.”

Chapter V.

LUCY and MODERATOR at table. JOSEPH and LUCINDA in darkness behind mirror.

LUCY: I like you. You try harder than most. You care about doing a good job, I can see that. Sorry I'm difficult. Sorry I haven't know anyone who has died.

MODERATOR: *Growing agitated.* Do you mean you have not known anyone who has died because once a person has died they can no longer be known? Is that something you believe?

LUCY: *Nodding, deciding to become agreeable.* Yes.

MODERATOR: *Surprised.* Yes.

MODERATOR waits. LUCY drinks her coffee. LUCINDA starts to pay closer attention, moving to the front row of seats, putting her phone away. She gestures to the audience to pay attention. Mouths the words "See? Watch this." or "Pay attention" without saying anything.

LUCY: Yes. But I don't want to talk about that.

Brief pause.

MODERATOR: You have talked about it before, Lucy. It says so, here, in your-- in *this* file. It says you have known people who died.

LUCY: No.

MODERATOR: That doesn't make sense Lucy.

LUCY: It doesn't?

MODERATOR: No. *He looks to his notes for reference.* You said "I don't want to talk about that." By "that" you implied a knowledge that "that," whatever it is, exists. The antecedent of the word "that" is the knowledge you are now denying. That "that" was a contradiction and admission. You must have that "that." That "That" which you don't want to talk about. That "that" which the people who have hired and are interested in hearing about. So I will ask again, have you known someone who has died?

LUCY: *To mirror.* That was good. *To MODERATOR.* Sorry. No. I have not.

MODERATOR: You have not?

LUCY: I have not known anyone who has died because once a person has died they can no longer be known. That is something I believe, as you suggested.

MODERATOR: I don't believe you.

LUCY: It's too convenient, isn't it? So convenient a solution it's inconvenient. So uncomplicated it becomes a complication, right?

MODERATOR: *Holding up a file.* It says here, it says here that your father died

when you were eight years old.

LUCY drains her coffee.

LUCY: I wanted to finish that coffee before I read my book. I would hate to spill black coffee on the pages, ruin the book before it can properly warm and must. This is my favorite book. My father wrote it, you see. How do you take your coffee?

MODERATOR: Is that true? That your father wrote that?

LUCY: *Trying to ignore.* I take my coffee black. I take it black because my father took his coffee black and his father took it black.

MODERATOR: *Making notes.* That's in the file, too. And it says your father died when you were eight years old. Is the latter statement true?

MODERATOR waits while LUCY looks around for something else to talk about. She sniffs the air. She sniffs again, as if smelling something someone stepped in.

MODERATOR: It says here that your father died of a self-inflicted shotgun shot to the stomach. Is that true?

Over the next exchange LUCY and MODERATOR crescendo in volume and speed of voice, competing for control of the conversation. LUCINDA, in turn, becomes more excited and interested, and stands. JOSEPH stays seated, but writes faster and faster

too, shaking his hand occasionally from the pain.

LUCY: I don't remember how my father's father's father took his coffee. Maybe I never knew.

MODERATOR: It says here that your father also died of a shotgun shot to the chest. Is that also true?

LUCY: My great grandfather, I mean. He lived in Finland. The Russians killed him. I don't know if he even drank coffee.

MODERATOR: It says here your father was shot with a shotgun gunshot once in the stomach and a second shot once in the chest and that they were both fatal wounds. Is that true? Yes or no?

LUCY: *With MODERATOR interrupting by saying "Lucy" and "Miss Pearle" as appropriate to crescendoing dialogue.* I know he ate sardines. My father used to tell me a story his father used to tell him. About *his* father's father. He would eat sardines for breakfast. He would fold them into a piece of toast his wife had made by holding bread in a piece of iron over an open flame. The sardines would drip out the end of the toast like a bad taco. He would suck on the fish heads and flick at them when they were in his mouth with his tongue. This would make the tails wiggle and wriggle and writhe between his lips as if still alive. I remember learning from my father that he was a champion Finnish swimmer. I remember thinking that

maybe he was a champion because he ate so many sardines, or maybe it was because he was a champion swimmer that he was able to make them come to life in his mouth. He used to say that he would turn my father and his brothers into fish if they didn't eat their dinner. He had the power to do it. To get them to eat their fish. Carrots will help you see at night and fish will help you become a champion swimmer. He could have made a million dollars if it were true, if he could figure out a way to write the book that would make children eat their dinner. "How To Bring A Fish To Life" he could call it.

MODERATOR: *Going through papers as she talks.* Who fired the second shot?

Who shot him the second time? Your father. Who? Can you tell me that?

LUCY: "You are what you eat," I guess, is what my great grandfather would say.

That could be a title for the book. Or more effectively, "You eat what you are," or "You eat what you will become." I like that better. But I don't know if he ever said that. I guess he may have. It makes sense with the story. It's the sort of story my father would tell me when I was a kid, which makes sense, because he did. He must have. It's important that memories make sense, so you have a sense of where you come from.

Don't you agree? If you're confused, you're left with nothing to stand on.

If I remember his father told him about his father, and his father's father, if I can remember it, write it, then I have something to stand on. Something for others, too, a record. *She holds up the book.* I would like to have asked

him if ate enough chicken or pheasant, if it would make him fly like the fish helped him swim. That would have made a nice memory. But he would have answered in Finnish. Which is a very strange language. And I wouldn't understand. You need to understand to remember, to remember to understand.

MODERATOR: Lucy, it says here in this police report that *you* were the one who shot your father.

LUCY: Strange, isn't it? That a word can mean the same thing in a different language?

MODERATOR: Is this true?

LUCY: How many words do you think there are for the word "sardine"? For "coffee"? Which one is right?

MODERATOR: I don't know, how many for gun, Lucy? For loss? For father?

LUCY: *With MODERATOR still interrupting with "Lucy" or "Miss Pearle" as appropriate.* Well, even then, still, one word must be most right, mustn't it? Or at least right-er than all the rest? Like, we make English words out of older words, so those older words are more right, must be more right-er words, mustn't they? And before that there must have been others. Like how there was always someone here before, and so you have to kill them to pretend you matter. Like Columbus killed the people who took the

“new” away from his “new world.” Just like that. New words kill old words. Nothing can be new or really matter anymore. People die, people are born. Oedipus kills his father, like you said, the princesses kill King Lear, and then MacDuff and his forest come kill them with Romeo and Juliet. AntiLear, AntiBeth, Anti-ett, Anti-meo. There’s no top, just a circle that’s all bottom, all base. Like Columbus said, quote: “The New World turned out to still be the regular world, so I killed a bunch of people to make it new.” End quote. That last part he stole from Ezra Pound....

MODERATOR: *Interrupting angrily as LUCY talks over him.* You shot your father, Lucy. That’s what it says in the file. Why would it be written down if it weren’t the truth? Why would they keep a file that was wrong? What use would it serve....

LUCY: *Continuing.* It’s the same for names, too, you understand. There are no new names. My full name is Lucinda. My father called me Lucy because I was named after my grandmother and his father called his wife Lucy. And those are the same person, my grandmother and my father’s father’s wife. Even if I can use different words to tell you what I mean, you see? It’s still the same. So strange. You must understand. You’re an understanding person. I’m sure you do. Sure you are. Everything’s the same and different and all happening at the same time. You talk for a living. You know. You understand. You comprehend. You must.

MODERATOR: *Interrupting, reading, very loud, rising to read down to her.*

“The daughter entered the house from the backyard to find the deceased on the floor, shot once through the stomach.”

LUCY: *Interrupting, tightening scarf around own neck.* Yes, yes, yes...Probably all three. If my grandmother or my father’s father’s mother’s wife had been French, maybe then she would have been named Lucille instead of Lucinda. And then I could still be Lucy, but it would be a different name still, wouldn’t it? Would it? Because it came from a different place. It would have been different, but the same, you see? You understand what I mean?

MODERATOR: “Upon questioning the deceased’s daughter reported she picked up the weapon on the deceased’s request and forensics validate it was she, Lucinda aka Lucy Pearle, that fired the second shot. The daughter, aged eight, was taken into custody and did not speak--”

AN ENORMOUS BOOM as LUCY slams her hand down on the upturned coffee cup as hard as she can. All pauses for a moment as in the instance of the MODERATOR falling from his chair. JOSEPH looks at his pencil to find it broken. Holds it up, inspects it. Finds another.

Chapter VI

JOSEPH stands as if something has occurred to him. Sits back down. Then stands again, walks out of the area of the main action of the play thus far. Addresses audience.

JOSEPH: Sorry. I had to, to do that. I had to stop that. I couldn't understand that anymore. I just—

Brief pause.

When I was six years old I killed a man. I should tell you that. That I'm assured I didn't mean to I should also say. That he had been my father—that's important too. I remember he had been my father. But what I remember is. What I remember is—this, I suppose...*indicating the playing space*. But I need you to listen to me. Thank you for being here. I should say that. I do appreciate it. My father's father used to say you are what you eat, and that was why he was a champion swimmer. He was fast as a sardine and strong as the strongest coffee. He used to say too that if you already have everything written down there's no point in asking someone to verify it again. "Writing helps you understand," he would say. "You understand?" he would say. He used to say that but you understand I am not just re-saying it by saying it now. I am saying it in my own words because I don't know the Finnish words. It feels like cheating to use someone else's words to tell, to try and explain my life. That police report the moderator here was reading was a real police report, you understand.

That's what they asked me, you understand. "You understand." Over and over. (*Speeding up*) You understand what you did? Did you understand what he was asking? Did you see that he had tried to kill himself? Did you comprehend that? Do you understand what a gun is meant to do, JOSEPH? Do you understand? You're only six years old how could you understand. But did you? Did you comprehend? Acknowledge. No! Absolutely! Absolutely no! What did he ask? What did he say? Are you absolutely sure he asked you to? Absolutely? Yes or no! And where was your mother during all this. *Approaches LUCINDA, looking at her, circling.* Do you know where she is? Where's your mother. Where's your mother. Your mother. Your mother. Where is she. Where is she. *To LUCINDA directly, who watches him but without reaction.* Where the fuck is your fucking bitch of a motherfucking mother!

Looks at LUCINDA. Breathing heavy. She resumes typing on her phone. He is outside the action.

JOSEPH: *To AUDIENCE:* I have a deadline, you understand. I need to finish this as soon as possible. I promised. But now, now we just need to keep pushing it, pushing her, you understand (*indicating LUCY*) because she understands it *all*. Lucy, I mean, she knows what is happening. So—we just keep turning to screws, applying torque, heart, torque and heart, absolutely. See what happens, you understand. Memory is all little pieces, you understand. Colors and shapes and smells you put together and shake

and hope for something clear. It would be boring if it was easy to understand:

LUCY: (*behind JOSEPH*). “I remember once upon a time my father tried to kill himself but failed, and so when I found him he asked me to finish him off, and so I did, and I lived moderately happily, a totally average amount, ever after. The end. Fin. Heuva”

As JOSEPH delivers the following lines, the other actors rearrange the set behind him in order to completely reverse it. Stage right is now the interview table, stage left the rows of chairs for LUCINDA/JOSEPH. This switch can be made during a break/intermission following JOSEPH’s speech if necessary. It is, however, critical that the change is made by the actors, and that the audience sees them do it.

JOSEPH: It wouldn’t be real, you see. But the goal of this, you’re probably wondering. Why, all of this, you’re wondering, wanting to understand. It’s just to express, you see, it’s selfishness on my part to discover the emotional...no, the linguistically...tonal...well, the *whatever*, that brings this person out of bed each morning. The way of thinking that brings her from sleep to life. The breath of her. The aliveness of her. The reason she’s alive and not asking me to shoot her, you understand. I don’t understand, you see. I don’t understand, you understand. There’s not really a one word “thing“ we’re searching for. We need many, many more words than that. And you’ve seen how many words I’ve written trying to keep

up. My hand is turning to a claw. Enough words for now, I think. But still need to keep going. You see, you search, and then you RE-search. You RE-member. RE-think. It's a lot of work. Trying to decide between Finnish and French, understand and comprehend, all that. Well, *you* understand. *You're* savvy.

Brief pause to watch the rest of them rearranging the stage.

Savvy. Savvy. Kind of a stupid word isn't it?

Briefest pause as if for a response.

Exactly. You all need a drink. Me too. But it makes me nervous sometimes. But sometimes it helps, too, drinking. My father never said that, but you understand that I could say right now, "My father used to say that" and you would believe it? Sometimes, you see, I just fall asleep and forget my good ideas. I bet I've had a lot of brilliant ideas I've forgotten. Magical seeds, brilliance scattered in no soil. But, you know what?

Retrieves a bottle of beer/something from his bag, perhaps while it's being carried to its new location by one of the other actors. He brings it to an audience member in front row. Here. Beer, in a bottle. Very important, beer. Helps you get over things. Get over the shock of that. Share it amongst yourselves. It's a special vintage from Queens. They make it in the back room of a Laundromat. Sunnyside Suds, they call it. Super sanitary. No blood was spilt in its making. Heuva beer, my father would

say.

Returns to his seat, now on opposite side of stage.

Brief pause.

The police, when they came, they commented on our last name. Said it sounded Italian, made fun of it. I was just sitting there but I remember saying, “No, it’s Finnish.” And them realizing I was there under the heavy blanket. They couldn’t see me. But then they were nervous around me. I was a killer, you see. They started their questions. “Did you understand, did you understand, did you.”

Brief pause.

Anyway. Enjoy. Indicating the beer.

Part Two

Chapter VII

Lights up. The stage is reversed. MODERATOR is now DETECTIVE and sits facing audience. He wears aviator sunglasses and speaks in a different accent, one more appropriate to the new role of DETECTIVE. Camera and microphone are reversed to now point at LUCINDA, the subject of the interview.

JOSEPH watches from other side of the glass. He is writing, but not frantically. He stands to watch.

DETECTIVE: *Looking only at files and crossing items off a list.* Name?

LUCINDA: Lucinda Pearle.

DETECTIVE: *Making a check mark.* Occupation?

LUCINDA: Advertising.

DETECTIVE: *Check.* Favorite book?

LUCINDA: I don't—I don't really read much. I don't know.

DETECTIVE: Doesn't matter. Just need it for the file. First book you think of .

LUCINDA: The Bible?

DETECTIVE: Good choice. Age?

LUCINDA: What?

DETECTIVE: I need to verify your age versus the file we have on you.

LUCINDA: I'm sure it's right.

DETECTIVE: You're sure it's right?

LUCINDA: Sure.

DETECTIVE: How can you be sure?

LUCINDA: I can't. Does it matter?

DETECTIVE: I suppose not. Favorite food?

LUCINDA: What?

DETECTIVE: Come on, that's easy. Your favorite food!

LUCINDA: I don't know.

DETECTIVE: You don't know your favorite food? Say it's your last meal. The gallows await and the death row chef is looking for a challenge. What d'you have?

LUCINDA: My last meal?

DETECTIVE: Yeah, last meal! I tell you what I'd have. Beef. Any kind, any cut. I could kill for a good steak. Maybe a nice cut of fish, too. Surf and turf, you know? Go out on a high note.

LUCINDA: I—I—*She cries.*

DETECTIVE: Lobster? Ice cream? Pizza? How about a course of each. A nice three-course au revoir.

LUCINDA: Sure.

DETECTIVE: Good then! Lobster and pizza and ice cream. Gotta finish the ice cream, right? Nevermind the flavors, you seem bothered. So. Moving on. Children?

LUCINDA nods.

DETECTIVE: Need to hear you say it, madam.

LUCINDA: Yes.

DETECTIVE: One? Three?

LUCINDA: One.

DETECTIVE: One son? Daughter?

LUCINDA: Yes. One. A son.

DETECTIVE: Correct! So, tell me. What was your son's favorite food?

LUCINDA: I really don't see what this has to do—

DETECTIVE: *Interrupting.* Okay, if you don't know his favorite food, then how about the first solid food you fed him, eh? You must remember the first time you spooned a rubber-covered spoon into his mouth. "Here comes the airplane" and all that, right?

LUCINDA: Mashed carrots.

DETECTIVE: Nice! That's good. That's a good choice. Help his eyesight. Start out with strong vision for his future. Did you tell him, when he was older, that carrots are good for his eyes?

LUCINDA: His father did.

DETECTIVE: *Making a check on his files.* He did! And what did his father say?

LUCINDA: I—I don't remember exactly. That they would help him see in the dark, I suppose.

DETECTIVE: *Looking up, smiling.* Correct.

LUCINDA: Okay.

DETECTIVE sighs. Closes file. Retrieves blank notebook and clasps hands over the top of it. He gestures to the camera and microphone.

DETECTIVE: So obviously we are recording all this. That's why I need you to speak up when you answer. It's for our safety, not yours, this recording. We are not concerned with your safety. I need you to understand that. Not concerned.

LUCINDA: Okay.

DETECTIVE: You understand why you are here today?

LUCINDA: I have an idea.

DETECTIVE: And what is that idea?

LUCINDA: You want to ask me about my husband.

DETECTIVE: Specifically?

LUCINDA: You want to ask me why I wasn't there.

DETECTIVE: Where.

LUCINDA: With him. At the house.

DETECTIVE: What house?

LUCINDA: The—what had been our house.

DETECTIVE: Correct. Yes indeed. Very correct. What do you know so far.

LUCINDA: I—I had to leave. *She begins to cry. DETECTIVE watches, still. After a pause, he hands her a tissue.* I didn't mean to leave him there all alone.

DETECTIVE: By him you mean your husband.

LUCINDA: *Shaking head.* No.

DETECTIVE: By him you mean your son.

LUCINDA: I meant to come back for him. I didn't know he was going to do that.

DETECTIVE: Your husband, you mean now. When you say you didn't know he
was going to do that.

LUCINDA: Yes. I didn't know.

DETECTIVE: Didn't know he was going to do what?

LUCINDA: That he would—

DETECTIVE: He phoned you, didn't he? Phoned you to let you know? *Gathering a paper.* We have the records here. This is the official police report we have on file. He phoned you. He did. Would you like me to read you the transcript of exactly how that conversation went?

LUCINDA: No, no, no. Please don't. I don't want to know. Is my son in trouble?

DETECTIVE: *Laughing.* Of course he is.

LUCINDA: But he's...

DETECTIVE: He was in trouble before any of this.

LUCINDA: ...just a boy.

DETECTIVE: The dark kind of trouble mashed carrots aren't going to help him find his way out of.

LUCINDA: But can't you—

DETECTIVE: It was your son who pulled the trigger. You think he could *not* be in trouble?

LUCINDA: He's only seven years old, please.

DETECTIVE: This is how it works, maam. A man died today. Your husband died. Your son killed him. You understand that, don't you?

LUCINDA: He didn't mean to...Joey would never...never...

DETECTIVE: He didn't mean to?

LUCINDA: There's no way...

DETECTIVE: *Standing, leaning on table.* You think he didn't mean to?

LUCINDA: *Sobbing.* No! There's no way

DETECTIVE: *Standing and screaming.* HOW WOULD YOU FUCKING KNOW WHAT HE DID OR DIDN'T MEAN TO DO? YOU WEREN'T THERE! YOU LEFT! YOU KILLED HIM! YOU UNDERSTAND? DO YOU SEE? DO YOU? DO YOU? DO YOU!

Blackout.

Part III

Epilogue

From blackout.

LUCY's following monologue should be delivered in a language much slower and insistent than her language in part One. Whereas at the table she let language loose without consideration, here she is thoughtful, intent. She is storytelling. Her pauses are deliberate. Her words are deliberate. Her language is deliberate.

Enter LUCY to center stage. She carries same book from Part One, wears scarf loosely.

JOSEPH is on stage, behind LUCY, shadowly lit.

LUCY begins.

LUCY: "When your father. When that happened. Where was your mother."

Brief pause.

The file doesn't say, you see, so you have to ask.

Briefer pause.

The file being, of course, memory.

Briefest pause.

Holding out the book, flipping through its blank pages.

This is blank, naturally.

Briefer pause.

Perhaps you assumed I was just making everything up as I went along.

Which I was, yes, absolutely. But making a thing *up* still means there's a *down* place from which it came.

Brief pause.

But I don't know. Files are complicated. Not usually, but.

Briefer pause.

My father called me Lucy. "Lucy, I need you to shoot me, please," he said. Saying "please" even though his stomach and guts were poured out like lap fish. Fish guts, you understand. In his lap. Like a spilled stew. Felt warm, like pissing yourself, which it was, you understand. Just through a new hole.

Same pause, then rhythmically, as if scanning the meter of the words.

Even though if ever you didn't have to say please *that* was the time, he said please. Even if ever you shouldn't waste words it is when you only have moments to live. "Live each day as it's your last," they say. Carpe dee capital-M. Especially when you know it's your last. Waste not want not. Eat the whole sardine.

Same pause.

But politeness is not wasted, was his point.

Same pause.

Maybe he said it, “Lucy, I need you to shoot me. *Please.*” Maybe he stressed it. Italicized it. To stress the point.

She takes off her scarf, twirls it about.

Oh, that’s another example of a warm smell. The shot to the gut smell. The waste spilling out all warm. I didn’t mention that before. Maybe it was obvious. But that should go in any police report read back.

Briefest pause. She walks to the other side of the stage, addresses other side of the AUDIENCE.

“Please join us for an interview about the meaning of life.” The notice said, I remember. “The meaning of *your* life.” The “your” in italics like a title. And the smell. The warm smell. The warm shit smell.

Brief pause.

My father used to say there was no excuse for being impolite, not ever. Not even during an interrogation. Everyone always admired how polite he was. I told the police that. I said, Please. Please. S’il vous plait, s’il vous plait, he would have said. He said it all the time.

Brief pause.

My mother, my namesake. She left without permission. Not very polite.

Briefer pause.

Something about Politeness, okay? Consider: my father as a man with an axe in his head and me as a pink fairy. Halloween. I remember he used an entire tube of blood makeup on his face, and old lipstick of my mother's on his shirt collar. We walked the neighborhood streets when it was still light out. Twilight, dusk, sunset, whichever you prefer. His favorite Halloween candy was my least favorite Halloween candy, which is a great thing. You know? You have that, you married couples? You understand. Someone hates tomatoes and someone enjoys them and you get married and then someone never has to eat tomatoes again and someone else gets twice as many tomatoes.

Briefest pause.

At least that's the idea. The truth behind that story is that it's only good in restaurants and sitcoms. In real life it just means that in supermarkets you are constantly at odds. Just a married couple in a market, trying to decide if you should buy tomatoes. So now one's feeling guilty, the other feeling like they don't want to spend three ninety nine on fucking marinara, but hey, they married you, deal with it. A real life romantic comedy story,

right there. Commit it to memory.

Briefest pause.

My father was crazy for coconut candy bars and I hated coconut-coconut. Different than tomatoes, of course. No one's buying coconuts at the supermarket. It was better for us. As a child you're still not in real life yet. Wonderful. Magical. Surreal. Short for a super kind of real.

Briefest pause.

My mother was at home with a bowl of candy for the other fathers and daughters, you understand. She was there, then, waiting. Could count on it. Could anticipate her face rather than remember it. Anticipate the warm, the smell of her hugs. Look forward to, not back. No must.

Brief pause.

I remember that green cardigan with the broach. I had to turn my head when she hugged me or I'd end up getting blinded in the eye.

Brief pause.

Halloween. My father walks and holds my hand. I have to hold my hand up, near my ear, you understand, because he is so much taller than me. I can adjust my princess fairy sparkly tiara without letting go of his hand. It's funny how you can remember things like this. Oh. *Retrieving a beer*

from member of the audience. May I? Oh, Sunnyside Suds. Delicious.
Sniffs, drinks deep. I once read somewhere that smell is the sense most closely related to memory. *Sniffs beer again, drinks again.* You scientists know that. Sometimes I will pass someone in an elevator or a store and they will be wearing a perfume or cologne and it's like WHOOSH, off I go into a memory. All of a sudden. Lucy's Lucidity.

Drinks again.

So here's one. I go to the mall with my mother to get her mother a present. The present is a bottle of Chanel No 5 perfume. My mother sprays a spritz onto one of those sampler cards. And it's horrifying. My grandmother in a bottle, my grandmother on a business card. You understand? You can imagine this? Maybe it's happened to you.

Brief pause.

Eventually my grandmother died and there was a funeral and we cleaned out her house and a few months later I was in a store and I went up to the perfume counter just to smell what I knew she smelled like.

She drinks.

It was a little different than I remembered.

Finishes the beer.

I haven't been back since that one time.

Brief pause.

You probably wonder what he smelled like, my father. Before the shotgun gut shot, I mean. Coconuts, of course. *She laughs.* Not really, but—sure. Somebody should ask. The truth is I try not to remember. See above for my reasoning and rationale and you will understand.

Pause.

My mother, though. Maybe I've remembered that one too much already. I do remember my father used to whisper to my mother after sex. I heard them once. I crawled in and I was hiding under the bed. I wanted to hear if they talked about me. I remember my father whispered that if she ever left he would kill himself. He thought it was romantic, maybe. Maybe she thought it was romantic, too, I don't know. I don't think a person would marry someone they didn't find romantic. Even if by romance you mean unromance.

Brief pause. To self.

Now there's something my father would say. *Unromance.* Re-romance. Re-romantify.

Pause.

So, yes, exactly. It was certainly unromantic that she left. My father, maybe he thought it was *proromance* to hold up his end of the bargain. Like a Juliet or a Romeo. *Proromeo*, he was. Promeo. If he hadn't done it he would have had to remember lying to her. He would have had to come up with a new way of remembering—to avoid re-remembering not having been a Promeo.

Briefest pause.

So what was there left to do?

Same briefest pause.

Well, that's something that's not complicated. Funny how it's the things we do that aren't hard, that are uncomplicated, that combine to complicate everything. You know. You understand.

Brief pause.

Sorry, my words are piling up.

Same pause

You understand what I mean by re-remember? To re-remember and re-tell and re-search and search and search until you find something that resembles a kind of truth. Why? Because that's what we do. Try to un-complicate things by re-searching and looking for the narrative thread

holding it all together, the rationality behind this, our lives, why we are where we are.

Brief pause.

The heart of it all.

Brief pause.

Consider: I've been doing this for a long time. *Searching* for that heart of it all. Trying to find *the* point. Living life backwards as a way of running from death.

Brief pause. Pacing, gathering book and scarf.

Run, run, run. You understand? It's the only way to keep getting past.

Tightening the scarf, walking as if to leave stage. Then, returns to center stage as if something occurs to her.

I loved my father, you see. I loved him. I haven't said that yet. I haven't used that word. It would have been too easy. It would have been boring to have summed up this whole thing by saying, "I loved my father." But I loved him and that's why I did what he asked me to do.

Leaving, said over her shoulder. The planet is spiraling towards the sun, you understand. You understand what these words mean?

Brief pause.

So no, then.

Exit LUCY.

JOSEPH remains. He stands and begins the applause.

End play.

END.