JACKANAPE AND THE FINGERMEN

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d. harlan wilson

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"What'll he dress himself in! Gentleman Jack an' his frieze coat."

—Joxer, Seán O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*

"I can't remember ever remembering anything. Did I ever remember anything? Or, did we arrive here like epileptics, traveling thorugh the midnight of some unconscious joy?"

—Father, Russell Edson's *The Falling Sickness*

For Njål.

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JACKANAPE

AN OFF-COLOR DISTRACTION

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Irk
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Mise

Vacant interior. Cobalt light.

Each corner of the room converges into a different angle. There is a low-level ceiling with a jagged hole in it, stage left, towards the rear.

Center stage is a freestanding coatrack on which hangs a fedora and a dinner jacket. Clean white rectangles mark the dusty walls where pictures used to be. No windows.

The skin and clothing of the actors are colored in matte shades of gray, as if their bodies have been clipped from an old film noir. The hat and jacket are an irradiated maroon color.

Lights dim on at the beginning and dim out at the end of each scene.

With a few exceptions, all action takes place in this room, in this light.

Scene 1

Long tableaux of the room.

Scene 2

Young Man

A young man in jeans and a collared shirt ambles onstage, pauses, turns and stares blankly at the audience, turns and

ambles to the coatrack, turns and stares at the audience again, turns and stares at the coatrack, removes the dinner jacket, puts his arms in the sleeves, smooths out the lapels, buttons the jacket, turns to the audience, glances down at the jacket, glances at the audience, and grins a plastic grin.

The coat begins to strangle the man, tightening on his midriff and closing around his throat, forcing his arms behind his back in an awkward, anguished pose as he struggles for his life. He falls down. We hear the sound of bones breaking as the man's head and limbs pound the floor and he squawks, croaks, and gurgles in pain. Then he lies still.

As the lights dim out, the jacket goes limp, like a boa constrictor releasing its grip on prey.

Scene 3

Dagny, Brenda

Holding hands, a young couple enters stage right. They walk across the room as if strolling leisurely through a park.

BRENDA Isn't Dagny a girl's name? I never heard of a boy called Dagny. You sort of look like a girl, I guess. And a boy. What's that called?

DAGNY Androgynous. I take after the son of Hermes and Aphrodite.

BRENDA Who? That doesn't make any sense. My point is, in certain lights you look like you could wear a dress. I don't think Dagny is even a name.

DAGNY [*unhanding her*] What's it to you, Brenda? I'm a man and that's my name. [*Notices the coatrack*.] What's this?

BRENDA I don't know. It doesn't belong to you, though, so don't touch it. You're always touching things that don't belong to you. [*Hits him playfully.*]

DAGNY That's not fair. You haven't known me long enough to know what I touch and what I don't touch. [*Touches the jacket*.] What a handsome number. I think I'll try it on for size.

BRENDA Dagny! You can't do that!

DAGNY Who's going to stop me, Brenda? You? I'm a man, remember. I was kidding about the gods.

BRENDA [*restrained*] Just put the hat on, okay?

DAGNY I intend to put on the hat. A man puts on a jacket first. First the jacket, then the hat. That's the way men work.

BRENDA [*hysterical*] This is crazy! [*Screams*.]

DAGNY [*takes* BRENDA *by the shoulders and shakes her*] Calm down! Calm down! Calm down! [*Screams*.]

Tossing BRENDA *aside,* DAGNY *removes the jacket from the coatrack and yanks it on. He makes a satisfied frog-face and is about to speak when the jacket breaks his arms, then forces him to his knees and completely engulfs him, squeezing him to death in one great contraction.* BRENDA *stands there in a daze, knees buckling, head and lips twitching ... She screams again as the lights dim off.*

Scene 4
Victim, Bystanders

Tableaux of a man being strangled by the jacket as a group of bystanders dressed in burial clothing watch in wide-eyed horror, clutching their mouths and pointing at the crime scene.

Scene 5
Detective Johnson, Detective Cork

Two detectives enter, canvas and examine the room. Their guns are drawn and cocked. They don't notice the coatrack.

CORK What do you think, Johnson?

JOHNSON Dunno, Cork. Thirty-nine murders in forty-eight hours. And all of them presumably took place right here in this room. It doesn't add up. [*Reflects*.] Goddamn it, it doesn't add up. [*Pause*.] It doesn't add up, I say.

CORK It's gotta add up to something. Things add up, right? What are the clues again?

JOHNSON We don't have any clues. Jesus, Cork. Do you ever listen to me? I'm not your wife. How many times do I have to tell you?

CORK I don't know. I figure if I keep asking, somehow a clue will turn up. I mean, how do we know the murders took place in the vicinity? Doesn't a clue have to tell us that? What do you think, Johnson?

JOHNSON Put a cork in it. [*Guffaws*.]

CORK I'm serious. This is serious. Life and death, like.

JOHNSON My ass. If you can't laugh at the dark, you shouldn't grin like the Sphinx. Understand?

CORK No.

JOHNSON [*eyeballs the hole in the ceiling*] What's this bullshit? [*Points gun at the hole.*] Is anybody up there? Hey!

The jacket flies off the coatrack, soars across the room, slaps JOHNSON *in the head, and knocks him over.* CORK *shrieks.* JOHNSON *staggers to his feet and fires on the jacket, chasing after it.* CORK *continues to shriek and shoots haphazardly in every direction.*

The jacket flies around like a mad bat.

Eventually the detectives catch one another in crossfire. They fall over dead.

The jacket flies back to the coatrack and gently hangs on it.

Scene 6

Brief tableaux. The room is empty, but now a construction ladder angles down from the hole in the ceiling.

Scene 7

The jacket lies on the floor in a clump. Sound of heavy breathing as the fabric rises and falls, rises and falls.

Scene 8

Brief tableaux. *The jacket is back on the coatrack, but now the hat lies on the floor.*

Scene 9
Old Man

An old man with a long white beard wearing an undershirt, suspenders, and trousers enters stage right. Manipulating a cane, he hobbles very slowly across the room to the coatrack, bends over, emits a loud, painful groan, retrieves the hat, stands with another, louder groan, hangs the hat on the coatrack, hobbles across the room, and exits stage left.

Scene 10
Old Man

The same old man from SCENE 9 *appears in* SCENES 10-13*. In this scene, he enters stage left, hobbles very slowly to the coatrack, and puts on the jacket, which strangles him to death.*

OLD MAN [*dying*] Mother! Help me!

Scene 11
Old Man

The jacket is back on the coatrack (as it is when the lights dim on in SCENES 12 and 13). *The old man enters stage right, hobbles very slowly to the coatrack, and puts on the jacket, which strangles him to death.*

OLD MAN [*dying*] Father! Go to hell!

Scene 12
Old Man

Trembling, the old man enters from the hole in the ceiling, climbing down the ladder one precarious rung at a time, with the cane tucked into an armpit. He hobbles very slowly to the coatrack and puts on the jacket, which strangles him to death.

OLD MAN [*dying*] God! Let me be!

Scene 13
Old Man

The old man pushes open a trapdoor in the floor, crawls out of it, hobbles very slowly to the coatrack, removes the jacket, stares at the jacket, stares at the hole in the ceiling, stares at the jacket, and hangs it back up. He removes the hat, inspects it, places it on his head, and makes a face, pinching his wrinkled eyes shut ... Nothing happens. Mumbling in consternation, he removes the hat, drops it on the floor, hobbles very slowly back to the trapdoor, crawls in, and shuts it behind him.

Scene 14
Father, Mother, Boy, Girl

This extended scene concerns a family of middle-aged parents and their young children.

FATHER *wears a button-down shirt, tweed slacks, and black galoshes.* MOTHER *looks like an over-the-hill stripper in a tight, short dress and high heels. A ten-year-old* BOY *and* GIRL *wear school uniforms with ankle boots and socks. They are fraternal twins but look identical; only* GIRL*'s pigtails differentiate them.*

FATHER *enters stage right and staggers around the room in bewilderment. He gripes to himself as he regards the ladder and the hole in the ceiling. He kicks the ladder. It falls on him.*

FATHER Mother! Mother! I'm stuck! I'm stuck! Help! Help! Help! Help!

Followed by CHILDREN, MOTHER *rushes into the room, shrieks, and falls down. She continues to shriek as she gets up, scanning the room in horror.*

MOTHER I broke my heel!

CHILDREN *shriek.*

FATHER [*squirming like a pinned insect*] Achtung, you people! Get this thing off of me! Get it off! I'm immobilized, by God!

MOTHER *and* CHILDREN *scurry to the ladder. Together they lift it so* FATHER *can crawl out.*

FATHER [*standing*] Holy hell! I wasn't expecting that. Usually I'm ready for anything.

MOTHER [*limping*] I can't walk right. My heel's broke and they took all my pumps!

FATHER They took more than our clothes, Mother. They took our furniture. They took our appliances. They took our pictures and our carpet ... They even took the monkey! Boo! Boo Radley, where are you! [*Reflects*.] Goddamn it. They wrecked my ceiling, too, breaking in here. Only things they left behind were my hat, my dinner jacket, and the stick of wood I hang them on. Sons of bitches! [*Picks up hat, slams it on coatrack.*] How the hell am I supposed to eat dinner? There's no food. There's nothing to sit on. There's nothing to eat off!

MOTHER I had a casserole in the fridge.

FATHER Casserole? Let's keep our eye on the ball, Mother. The refrigerator is gone. Hence the casserole is gone. It's part of history now. All we have to work with is the residual present and a potentially dangerous future.

MOTHER [*pacing in an effort to fix her shoe*] This damn heel won't go back into place!

CHILDREN *shriek.*

FATHER CHILDREN!!!

MOTHER Stop yelling at them, dear! They love you! They love you so much!

FATHER Apologies. Extreme circumstances beget extreme behavior.

CHILDREN *run to* FATHER *and hug him*.

FATHER It will be all right once I get my dinner. Now then. I need a table and chair. I need food. I need satisfaction, is what I need. Achtung!

CHILDREN *scamper offstage.*

MOTHER *removes her shoe and tries to fix the heel, jerking and tugging on it, grunting as if lifting a heavy rock.* FATHER *creeps up behind her, reaches under her arms, and begins to massage her breasts, sometimes gently, sometimes forcefully. Obsessed with the shoe,* MOTHER *ignores him.*

When CHILDREN *re-enter,* FATHER *abruptly releases his grip, throwing* MOTHER *off balance. She falls down and continues to struggle with the shoe on the floor.*

GIRL *drags a lightweight table into the room; behind her,* BOY *drags in a chair.*

CHILDREN [*seeing* MOTHER] Father!

FATHER What's wrong? What's the matter? She's my wife! She— [*Notices table and chair*.] Ah! Well done, children. I won't ask where you got

them—a good day's work should never be put in question. But the day isn't over. Food!

CHILDREN *scamper away.*

FATHER [*annoyed*] Goddamn it, Mother. Stop paying so much attention to that thing and arrange this table and chair so I can sit down for dinner.

Frustrated, MOTHER *discards the shoe and breaks into tears.*

FATHER [*assisting* MOTHER *to her feet*] I'm here, darling. Don't fret. Let me help. [*Removes other shoe and escorts her to the table.*] There you are. I'll be sitting down in no time.

MOTHER [*sniffling*] I'm sorry, dear. I don't know what's come over me. [*Pushes the table to the center of the room next to the coatrack, then arranges the chair behind it, facing the audience*.] Bon appetite.

FATHER Let's not get ahead of ourselves. We'll see what the children muster from the kitchen of life. For now ... [*Strides to the table, sits in the chair, and allows* MOTHER *to push him in. Sighs deeply.*] That's more like it. A man needs a proper seat before he can take the bull by the horns and make it into his bitch. [*Laughing,* MOTHER *begins to rub his shoulders*.] That feels good. That feels *right*. All will be well, Mother. Focus on the happy moments. They don't happen often, but I must remember that they do in fact *happen*. Otherwise I become fixated on the monotony

of existence. That fixation produces anxiety. And anxiety—the root-cause of it, I mean—always ends in the same place: fear of the inevitability of death and nothingness. Fear of the Dark, Mother.

MOTHER I don't like the Dark.

FATHER I abhor the Dark.

MOTHER I don't want to die.

FATHER Everybody dies. That's life.

MOTHER I don't want it to hurt.

FATHER It might hurt. That's an important question. How much will it hurt? Once I'm gone, it doesn't matter. But it matters when it's happening.

MOTHER Once you're gone, nothing matters. Not even what happened before you left.

FATHER [*long pause*] That's a good point ... and not a happy one. Where's my goddamn dinner! I hope the children don't forget wine. Punitive measures may be in order.

MOTHER [*dreamily*] I could use a glass of wine.

Freeze-frame.

Tableaux of MOTHER *standing behind* FATHER*. Fists clenched on the table, he grimaces like an ape. She smiles dumbly with her head tilted to one side.*

Punctuated by a clash of brass instruments, an oval of light

momentarily falls on the coatrack, blacking out MOTHER*,* FATHER*, and the rest of the room.*

Action resumes in slow motion. By degrees, MOTHER*'s hands pick up speed until we return to realtime.* FATHER *remains inert—stone-faced and statuesque.*

MOTHER [*squeezing an eye shut*] I have the worst headache. It's killing me.

FATHER I don't believe in headaches. In any case, a headache can't kill you. Only the symptom can kill you. Only the dark matter lurking beneath the jigsaw pieces of your skull.

MOTHER I don't like dark matter.

FATHER I abhor dark matter.

MOTHER I don't—

MOTHER *is interrupted by* CHILDREN*, who return with dinner. Panting and disheveled,* BOY *has secured a half-empty bottle of wine,* GIRL *a shabby-looking rotisserie chicken. They circle the room in a frenzy. Shaking, they place the food and drink on the table in front of* FATHER*, cling to* MOTHER*, and await a response.*

FATHER *moves his gaze back and forth between the wine and the chicken, like a jeweler scrutinizing diamonds.*

FATHER [*impassive, fixated on chicken*]: Children? [CHILDREN *whimper.*] Children? [*They whimper harder*.] Children, you've done it! You've done it, by God! It's dinnertime!

Elated, MOTHER *hugs* CHILDREN*, admiring them, then they all arrange themselves around the table and sit on the floor.*

FATHER *closes his eyes and bows his head. Everybody follows his lead.*

FATHER Lord? Please give me everything I want, when I want it, no matter why I want it or who it hurts. Lord? Please kill the interlopers who broke into my house and took my things. And Lord? Please bless Boo Radley. I already miss that hairy son of a bitch. May he be swinging through the jungle of eternity. Amen.

MOTHER CHILDREN Amen.

MOTHER *and* CHILDREN *push themselves to their knees so they can peer over the table and watch* FATHER *eat. He tears a drumstick from the chicken, sniffs it, turns it over in his hands, and brings it to his mouth.*

FATHER Wait. [*Angrily flings drumstick at audience*.] I can't eat this! I'm naked! Mother, I'm naked! Achtung! Achtung!

MOTHER [*gesticulating*] No you're not! You have your clothes on! I can see them! Look!

BOY [*terrified*] We can see them, Father!

GIRL [*desperately*] You're all right, Father!

CHILDREN [*in unison*] Please, Father, please!

FATHER Goddamn it, you people! You know what I mean. What's wrong with all of you? This is dinner. A man can't rightly eat dinner without his dinner jacket.

MOTHER Ah! [*Jumps up, loses balance, and falls down. Jumps back up and scrambles to the coatrack. Exclaims.*] Here it is! [*Removes jacket*. *Drones*.] Here it is. [*Steps behind* FATHER. *Whispers.*] Here it is.

CHILDREN *dive under the table. Trembling in fear, they clench one another.*

FATHER [*pushes himself from the table and extends arms*] Right.

MOTHER [*tentatively*] Are you sure?

FATHER [*glances over shoulder*] Sure about what?

MOTHER Well ... technically, you don't need a jacket to eat. In fact, even if you were naked—authentically naked, I mean—you could chew and swallow food. You could drink your drink, too. You could do it all, dear.

FATHER Authentically naked? Are you kidding me?

MOTHER I don't know what to do ... Should we put your hat on first?

FATHER We? Hat? [*Pauses*.] Who wears a hat to the dinner table? It's sacrilegious. It's wrong.

MOTHER I've seen men eat dinner with hats on. I've seen them!

FATHER That's enough out of you, Mother. Gimme that damn thing. [*Snatches the jacket*.]

Long freeze-frame.

The action resumes in slow motion as FATHER *puts on the jacket and a wide-eyed* MOTHER *backs further and further away from him. Sound of garbled instruments. Once he has his arms in the sleeves and buttons the jacket, fast-forward to realtime.*

FATHER [*glances across the room at* MOTHER*, then under the table at* CHILDREN] What's going on? What am I missing? Would you please stop acting like so many weirdos? We're a family. Let's start pretending like we're one.

Slowly, MOTHER *returns to the table and takes her spot on the floor.* CHILDREN *crawl out from underneath the table and take their spots. They all sit cross-legged, heads buried in laps.*

FATHER That's more like it. Now then. [*Swigs wine from the bottle*.] Disgusting. [*Takes another swig and sets the bottle aside*.] The second sip is always worse. I'll get to the third soon enough. [*Tears off remaining drumstick from chicken and bites into it*.] Ak! [*Makes a face but continues to chew.*] This tastes like my goddamn shoe. It's horrible! [*Takes another bite, chewing with his mouth open.*] I've eaten shitty birds before, but holy hell if this isn't the shittiest. Christ! [*Takes another bite*. *Continues to eat and talk, using the lapel of the jacket to wipe grease from his mouth.*] It doesn't matter, the taste of food and drink. It's fuel—that's how you have to think about it. If one gives one's taste buds too much leeway, the buds will entirely take over and have the run of the house. It's the same thing that happens to dictators with tiny peckers. In order to compensate for their Great Lack,

they conquer the world and turn it into their personal crapper. Do you hear me, children? Taste buds are no different, the greedy whores. Give them an inch and they'll take an ell. Before you know it, all of the troops are dead and you're the size of a goddamn whale! Sons of bitches. If I were half the man that my father was, I'd yank my tongue from my mouth and throw it out the window. That's what I'd do! Nonetheless, I persevere. I may not be my father, but I know how to control myself. Which is more than I can say for my mother. You should have seen her! Her footfalls were like meteor strikes. She would eat an entire rack of lamb in one sitting, supplementing the meat with a loaf of garlic bread and an entire key lime pie for dessert. Nary a vegetable entered the dining room on her watch. She hated fruit, too, and she only drank wine under protest; she blamed her hangovers on the grapes. By God, I miss the old pig. When she read me bedtime stories, I could hear her stomach trying to work things out as the folds of her belly smothered me. Her heart beat like a machine gun. Those limp-dick bones of hers weren't meant to carry so much weight. Let me tell you something. If I were my mother, I—"

A mouthful of chicken flies from FATHER*'s mouth as the jacket suddenly, viciously attacks him; the arms coil around his neck like tentacles, snapping the popcorn bones of his arms. Everybody screams.* FATHER *falls sideways from the chair and writhes on the floor. Still screaming,* MOTHER *and* CHILDREN *dash offstage.*

FATHER*'s scream weakens and dwindles to a loud gurgle as the jacket tightens its grip and eventually breaks his neck with a deafening, echoic crack.*

Scene 15
Janitor

A tall, muscular, age-weathered man wearing an orange prisoner jumpsuit and ankle chains enters stage right and removes everything from the room—table, chairs, coatrack, hat, ladder, jacket, and corpse. He takes the items offstage one at a time. He puts on the hat before moving the coatrack. He drags the corpse of the father by the ankle. Finally, he returns to the empty room, sweeps it with a giant industrial broom, and exits stage left.

Scene 16

Brief tableaux of the empty room. Offstage, the sound of a windstorm and several exploding bombs. Distant screams. Random throat-clearing.

Scene 17
Ick, Ink, Irk

Stage left, three homunculi slowly crawl into the room. They are naked and hairless. Gills in their necks and ribs. No genitals. They speak to one another as they move around the room in straight lines, turning in different directions when they hit a wall upstage or run out of space downstage.

ICK My gills aren't working, Ink.

INK We're not underwater, Ick.

ICK Oh.

IRK Where are we, Ink?

ICK I don't know, Irk. I can't breathe.

INK And yet you continue to live, Ick.

IRK And breathe. Look at your chest, Ick. It's expanding and contracting. Like the universe.

ICK *bends his neck and pushes his chin into the hollow of his clavicle, scrutinizing his chest. He runs into a wall.*

IRK Watch out, Ick. That's how saber-toothed tigers went extinct. They kept looking at their chests and slitting their own throats.

ICK That's a myth, Irk!

INK He's right, Irk.

ICK Saber-toothed tigers died because they ran out of prey, Irk. Their favorite foods were horses and buffalo and they ate them until there weren't any left. This was about nine million years ago.

INK You're wrong, Ick. Saber-toothed tigers died in the Quarternary extinction along with all of the horses and buffalo they preyed upon. It either had to do with climate change or the rise of humanity. People probably killed them. People kill things.

IRK Ak!

INK I know, Irk.

The homunculi crawl around stage for several minutes without a word.

ICK My gills hurt, Ink. They're all dried out, Irk.

IRK Gills can't dry out, Ick. They're not grapes.

INK Anything can dry out, Irk. Don't be ridiculous.

IRK What about sand? Can sand dry out, Ink? What about dry ice? It's already dry, Ink!

ICK I can hear my heart beating in my chest, Ink. It doesn't feel right, Irk. What do I do?

IRK Try not to go extinct.

Lights flicker to the sound of a loud, telltale heartbeat, then return to normal.

ICK I don't want to go extinct.

INK You're not going to go extinct, Ick. Only groups of organisms can do that. Your heart is fine. When it stops beating, then we'll have something to talk about.

IRK We've got too much to talk about as it is, Ink. If nothing else, we'll never get bored.

They crawl around stage for several minutes without a word.

ICK It feels like something is missing.

INK Under the anvil of extinction, only memory remains.

IRK Memories are the exhaust fumes of reality,
And in the absence of its residue, reality
doesn't exist.

They crawl.

ICK Ink?

INK Yes, Ick?

ICK *makes a choking noise and crumples into himself. Crunch of bone.* IRK *emits a long, peircing screech as* INK *hurriedly crawls offstage.*

Scene 18

Long tableaux of the empty room. Offstage, the quiet sound of a jungle at night.

Scene 19

Long tableaux of the empty room. Offstage, the distant sound of thunder and lightning.

Scene 20

Long tableaux of the empty room. Offstage, a barbershop quartet sings the following lyrics through a gramophone:

Western wind, when will thou blow?
The small rain down can rain.
Christ, if my love were in my arms
and I in my bed again.

As the quartet draws out the word "again," the gramophone needle skips and the lyrics play from the beginning. Repeat

three times, at which point the quartet finishes "again" and the needle drags across empty vinyl.

Scene 21

Long tableaux of the empty room. Offstage, the sound of dull surf.

Scene 22

Long tableaux of the empty room. Offstage, the sound of a short circuit.

Scene 23

Long tableaux of the empty room.

Scene 24

Long tableaux of the empty room.

Scene 25
Boo Radley

Stage left, a chimpanzee in a t-shirt lopes into the room and paces back and forth, as if looking for something. He pauses center stage. Pushing out his neck, he squints and blinks at the audience. There is a single word on the chest of the t-shirt, BOO*, which is the same irradiated maroon color as the jacket and hat.*

The chimp hoots, grunts, gibbers, and chortles, oscillating between glee and despair, then falls silent and exits stage right.

CURTAIN

THE FINGERMEN

A SAVAGE DISRUPTION

Dramatis

Gino
Fritz
Knox
Van
Beryl
Amp
Little Gino
Little Fritz
Little Knox
Little Van
Little Beryl
Little Amp
Waitress
Strippers
Bouncers

Mise

Stage right, a group of six men sit in a half circle that opens to the audience. They are all missing one of their index fingers, and they all wear leisure suits and neckties of a different color. Respectively, GINO*,* FRITZ*,* KNOX*,* VAN*,* BERYL*, and* AMP *are blue, green, red, yellow, orange, and brown.*

Stage left is a red telephone box. It has tinted windows and we can't see inside.

A balcony hangs overhead where children enact episodes from the fingermen's past when they recount them to one another. Sometimes they mirror the action onstage. The children wear the same suits in the same corresponding colors. A spotlight shines on them during enactments; otherwise they linger in darkness.

ACT 1

Lights dim on. Everybody is asleep, slumped over or slouched down in their seats. Several of the fingermen snore peacefully.

AMP [*snorting awake*] Digitus? [*Discombobulated, he glances around the stage, blinking and fidgeting. His eyes rest on* FRITZ.] Well. It looks like we have a new member. Hello, member. Welcome to the group.

Nobody wakes up.

AMP Hello! Hello! Hello! Hello! Hello!

The fingermen irritably awaken. VAN *screams, falls backwards out of his chair*. *Pause*.

VAN [*loudly*, *supine, gazing upwards*] I had a horrible dream! I dreamt I was Ronald Reagan, but it was 1990 and I never became President of the United States of America. Carter beat me in '81. That was the end of my political career. I had to go back to acting to support my family. My children had grown up. They were all losers, and Ron Jr. got addicted to angel dust. Nancy was devastated. The only parts I could land were in B movies. I didn't even get starring roles. In some of them, I didn't even have lines. I had to make all this schlock just to pay for Ron's rehab. I did a gay porno so we could buy Christmas presents. I—

KNOX Drama queen.

AMP Well spoken, Knox. Get off the floor and get back in your seat, Van. Christ, you go on and on. Get up now. [VAN *rises, sits.*] Fine. As I was saying, we have a new member. Let's welcome him.

Pause.

ALL [*droning*] Welcome, member.

AMP Right. [*To* FRITZ.] Tell us about yourself.

FRITZ Okay. Hi. My name's Fritz. I—

AMP Take it easy, boy. There'll be plenty of time for you to talk. Let's go around the room and introduce ourselves. Who wants to start? Fellas?

Pause. Tentatively Gino raises his left hand.

AMP You don't have to raise your goddamn hand, Gino. Go.

GINO Hi. I'm Gino. [*Nods politely to* FRITZ.] Hi.

Pause.

AMP Anything else?

GINO No. [*Pause*.] Yes. [*Pause*.] Like what?

AMP [*sighs*] Like your missing link. My god.

GINO Link? [*Pause.*] Oh, right. Sorry. [*Lifts right hand, spreading apart three fingers and a thumb. No index finger—just a nub.*] I used to wear a lotta rings. One time I was washing dishes and a ring slipped off and fell in the garbage disposal. It was my favorite ring. Not much to look at. I got it from a street vendor in Belfast. I grew up in Dublin, but my mom used to take me up north to watch the buildings burn. Ironically, she died in a fire. Not in Ireland, though. She died in Cleveland. She fell asleep in bed smoking a cigar. She smoked Auroras. Smoked 'em her whole life. Thing is, she always fell asleep smoking.

The cigar would just fall out of her mouth and burn a hole in the sheets before smoldering out. I guess if you cheat the Devil too many times, the Devil—

AMP Being succinct is being the best you can be.

GINO Sorry. [*Pause.*] I'm sorry.

KNOX Stop apologizing!

GINO Okay! Apologies. [*Pause*.] Anyway, my ring fell in the garbage disposal and I reached in there to get the ring out, like. The garbage disposal came alive. Nobody turned it on. I certainly didn't turn it on. I feel like that disposal just didn't like me or something. I feel like it wanted to show me who was Boss. Well, it showed me. [*Brandishes nub*.] It makes me feel like I—

AMP That's the third time you've said the word feel in a matter of seconds. You know the rules. This is a support group. We're not interested in your feelings. Talk to your therapist about your feelings. I swear to God, without me as moderator, we wouldn't get anywhere. [*Pause*.] Van?

BERYL I have to go to the bathroom, Amp.

AMP [*irked*] So go. Nobody's stopping you! I don't understand you, Beryl. This isn't a classroom and I'm not a fascist dictator.

KNOX If you say so.

AMP I say so! That's what I say! [*Reflects.*] Do whatever you want, Beryl.

BERYL I will. I was just saying I have to go. I'll wait.

AMP Why are you making emancipation proclamations about the state of your bladder? Jesus in Limbo. [*Pause*.] Van, go.

VAN Hi. I'm Van.

ALL [*droning*] Hi, Van.

AMP Stop that! We don't need to do that. We all know each other except for Fritz. Tell this guy what happened to you already, Van.

VAN *falls asleep*.

AMP Van!

VAN [*jarred*] Hello! [*Pause.*] I can't remember how I lost my finger. Something happened and I got amnesia. I don't remember what happened. Something traumatic, I guess. I barely remember my name half the time, but I bought the biggest van I could find to remind me. It's parked outside. [*Points offstage*.] You'd be surprised how small it is for a big van. They don't make them like they used to. So that's why they call me Van. I'm supposed to talk about my name, right? What are we talking about, Amp?

AMP Fabulous, Van. Thank you so much. [*Makes a face.*] Jesus, Beryl. You look like you're trying

to pick up a blade of grass with your butt cheeks. Would you go to the bathroom? Nobody'll think any less of you if you go. It's a natural function that I personally endorse.

BERYL [*strained*] Whaddya mean? I'm fine. Nothing's wrong.

KNOX *springs forward, tackles* BERYL*, and pins him to the floor.*

KNOX [*hysterical*] Go to the bathroom! Go to the bathroom! Go to the bathroom!

BERYL I'm fine!

KNOX You're not fine!

BERYL I am fine!

KNOX You're not! You're unfine! You're unfine!

AMP [*standing*] Pope in a pulpit! Knock it off! Boys, pull these weird bastards off of each other! Somebody's gonna get killed!

GINO *and* VAN *get up and pull* KNOX *off of* BERYL*. The children emulate the scuffle.* LITTLE BERYL *slips and falls from the balcony onto the stage.*

Bewildered, FRITZ *remains seated but alert.* LITTLE BERYL *stands, blinks at the audience, and darts offstage.*

AMP You're setting a wonderful example for our new member, you sons of bitches. [*To* FRITZ.] They're usually not like this. Really. Usually nobody has to go to the bathroom and everybody behaves like a corpse in the grave.

KNOX [*under his breath*] If I'm a corpse in the grave, you're a turd in the hallway.

AMP What's that you say, Knox?

KNOX [*sitting*] I didn't say anything, Mr. Moderator, sir.

AMP I see. [*Reflects*.] You know, your counterpoint is stupid. Other than a turd being in a hallway rather than in a toilet where it belongs, that was a dumb thing, what you said. [KNOX *stares at* AMP *until* AMP *looks away*.] Just get on with it. Tell Fritz why you're here.

Pause.

KNOX I went on a date with this girl. She got mad and bit off my finger. [*Shows the group*.]

Pause.

AMP Is that all?

KNOX No.

AMP Right. Well then; it's my turn.

BERYL What about me?

The telephone rings. All but FRITZ *stiffen and turn to the booth. Nobody makes an effort to answer the phone.* FRITZ *cocks his head and glances around the stage. When the phone stops ringing, the fingermen resume their conversation.*

AMP Didn't you have a turn, Beryl? You did.

BERYL I didn't, Amp. I didn't.

GINO
KNOX
VAN [*harmonizing*] He didn't.

AMP No singing! This isn't a cartoon. This is life. Act like real men.

VAN Real men sing. Same as fake men.

AMP That's enough. Okay, Beryl. Floor's yours.

BERYL Can I go to the bathroom first? [AMP *stands defiantly.*] I'm just kidding. I actually don't have to go anymore. I feel good, as far as feelings go.

Long pause. AMP *stares angrily at* BERYL*, who stares back at him, blankly, until he sits.*

BERYL Hi, Fritz. I'm Beryl. [*Confused*.] Where was I? I don't know what to say. [*Reflects.*] Oh, right. [*Confused*.] What was I saying?

KNOX You were saying you have difficulty talking to people.

AMP No helping!

KNOX We'll be here all day if I don't help! I've heard his dumb story a million times!

AMP Calm down! Stop yelling!

KNOX I'm not yelling!

AMP You're yelling!

KNOX You're yelling!

AMP You're right!

KNOX Okay!

Pause.

AMP [*together*] Beryl!
KNOX

BERYL Ak! [*Pause*.] That's right. Knox is right. I have difficulty finding ways to talk to people. [*Reflects*.] It's hard. Once I get talking, I'm okay; I can do it all right. See? [*Points to mouth*.] Finding a way to start talking is my problem. I can never think of a social icebreaker to start things moving. So, a few years ago, I scheduled an appointment with my plastic surgeon and he removed my index finger. Not the middle finger. Not the pinky or the thumb. Definitely not the other finger. What's its name? The one between the little finger and the middle finger. What do they call it?

GINO [*harmonizing*] The ring finger.
KNOX
VAN

AMP Hey!

BERYL That's it! The ring finger. [*Reflects.*] Nobody cares about that finger. The thumb isn't really

a finger, and the other two don't matter. The index finger is the thing. It's the centerpiece of any hand, and if you remove the centerpiece, well, it's shocking. I mean, is a hand still a hand without it? That's a philosophical question, but you catch my drift. People don't know how to react when they see it, or rather, when they don't see it. But they always have plenty to say, and they usually want to talk about it. So I hacked off my finger and now I got a built-in icebreaker. Whenever I meet somebody new, I just scratch my nose with my surgically tailored hand. It works. I'm happy.

KNOX Surgically tailored? Moron.

GINO If you're happy, what are you doing here?

BERYL Minding my own business, Gino. That's all.

KNOX Who the hell has their own plastic surgeon? What are you, the President of the United States of America?

BERYL Only in my dreams.

VAN That's my dream!

FRITZ What do you tell people if they ask what happened, Beryl?

AMP That's a good question, Fritz. Nobody has ever cared enough to ask it. I'm not particularly interested in the answer, but for formality's sake, let's pretend I am. [*Pause*.] Beryl?

BERYL [*confused*] What was the question?

AMP [*reflects*] I forgot.

FRITZ What do you tell people when they ask what happened to your finger?

BERYL Not the truth. Never the truth.

KNOX Middle fingers are as important as index fingers. I'd argue that thumbs are more important than any of them. Prehensility is underrated by default; without a thumb, the art of grasping is a lost cause. Still, there's something to be said for thumblessness. A mutated perch bit off my friend Rex's thumb in Lake Erie. He goes to a meeting on Euclid Avenue. They have a great time, he says. They laugh and get along.

AMP Nobody laughs and gets along, Knox. Who's the drama queen now?

KNOX What do you know, Amp? You know dick.

GINO I know somebody who lost his pinky. The meeting he goes to is bigger than my church congregation. I guess pinkies get lost more than anything else. It's like life. Nobody pays attention to the smaller things, which suffer the most. There's nothing worse than a product of neglect.

AMP Temper your imaginations, boys. Nobody's going to any other meetings. You know damn well nothing else exists unless I'm there to

see it. Which brings me to ... *me*. [*Applause offstage*. *Confused,* FRITZ *glances over his shoulder*. GINO*,* KNOX*,* VAN*, and* BERYL *don't react*.] I lost my finger long before anybody else here. I'm kind of a control subject, as it were. I—

VAN I remember!

AMP Ak!

VAN I remember how I lost my finger. [*Reflects.*] Holy cow!

AMP What is it? You had your turn!

KNOX Let him speak, you son of a bitch!

AMP He always speaks! All of you always speak!

KNOX *stands, points at* AMP with his missing finger*, and sits*.

AMP Goddamn it.

VAN [*eagerly*] I was in my van. I was driving through the mountains. It was getting cold outside. The leaves had fallen off the trees. The sun hung in the sky like a fruit—I could've plucked it if I reached out the window, but I was smoking a cigarette. I didn't want the wind to blow ash all over the interior of the van. I'm good to my van. I treat it like I treat myself. You should see the upholstery on the swivel-chairs. The pattern reminisces the boutique style of the 1960s while gesturing towards some unspoken vogue of the future.

AMP What is this, a shitty novel? You don't need to set the scene. Nobody cares about context.

GINO I only read shitty novels. Good novels are terrible.

VAN There I was, in my van, puffing on Newports.

KNOX Newports?

VAN At some point, the smoke got so thick, I couldn't see anymore. The air conditioning blew the smoke all around my head, but I refused to open the window and risk the welfare of my van's interior. I kept going—not once did I let up on the accelerator. I never look back; I always go forward, and I don't stop until the end.

GINO You sound like a commercial for masculinity.

KNOX Hardly. Aren't Newports menthol? That's what girls smoke!

AMP Goddamn it!

VAN I can't remember where I was going. I do remember that I hadn't reached the end. [*Reflects*.] I may have even sped up, just to stick it to Destiny. No cloud of self-generated, potentially self-annihilating smoke was going to tell me what to do. [*Reflects*.] Hmm.

BERYL What's wrong?

VAN [*confused*] That's all I know.

AMP Oh come on! What about your finger?

VAN What finger?

AMP Jesus!

GINO Did you crash?

VAN No. Of course I didn't crash! I've never even been in a fender-bender. Eventually I put my cigarette out and the smoke evaporated. I drove through the night and when the sun came up I was in Vegas. I won a lot of money playing the slots and I ate dinner at Margaritaville. Jimmy Buffet was there, but he never sang the restaurant's titular song. He didn't sing any of his own material. He only sang Neil Diamond covers. [*Reflects*.] Jimmy Buffet kind of looks like Neil Diamond. They might be the same person, you know.

AMP This needs to stop. Neil Diamond looks like my grandfather. When he was younger, he looked like Jim Morrison. At no point did he ever resemble Jimmy Buffet! Jimmy Buffet had blonde hair!

BERYL His hair was as brown as Neil Diamond's during the Floridays tour in the 1980s. Same style, too.

AMP Both of their hairstyles changed like the wind. They're entertainers, for Chrissakes! They gotta mix things up! [*Stands*.] You're all crazy! What is this? [*Gesticulates*.] Jimmy Buffet is dead! Neil Diamond is dead! So help me God

and Mary and every lifeless soul in Heaven,
Jim Morrison is dead, dead, dead!!!

LITTLE AMP *falls off the balcony and slams into the stage with a great thud. Startled,* FRITZ *jumps out of his chair.* LITTLE AMP *doesn't move.*

FRITZ Is he okay? [*To the child*.] Hey, are you okay, young man?

BERYL That's not a young man. [*Swallows.*] It's fine. Don't pay attention. It's fine.

KNOX It's not fine. But ignore him anyhow. [*Covertly.*] We're supposed to ignore them. [*Glances up.*]

AMP That's enough! This is an important meeting! I want order!

KNOX [*firmly but calmly*] Everybody knows what you want, Amp. Take it easy. Sit down. [*Pause.*] SIT. DOWN.

KNOX *and* AMP *stare each other down. Eventually* AMP *crumbles. As he takes his seat,* LITTLE AMP *reanimates and scurries offstage.*

FRITZ Geez.

The telephone rings. Everybody turns and looks at the booth.

FRITZ Should I get that?

AMP No!

FRITZ Why? Who is it?

GINO [*harmonizing*] Nobodyyyyyyyyyyy.
KNOX
VAN
BERYL

They stare at the booth until the phone stops ringing, then turn back to each other.

FRITZ [*sitting*] This doesn't make a lot of sense.

GINO Maybe not. But it does make nonsense, and you know the old adage: *One never questions nonsense*.

BERYL That's not true. If something doesn't make sense, I want to know why.

KNOX Me too. Who doesn't? That's not an old adage. That's a bunch of bullshit. You made that up.

GINO I've never made anything up in my whole life.

VAN I don't give a care what makes sense.

KNOX Hoot. Shit. Rat's ass.

VAN [*confused*] What?

KNOX You don't give a *hoot* what makes sense. You don't give a *shit* what makes sense. You don't give a *rat's ass* what makes sense. Those are all okay. You can't not give a *care* what makes sense. That's improper English. Dummy.

BERYL I agree.

VAN Well, shit. [*Reflects*.] Hoot, I mean. [*Confused*.] Rat's ass?

AMP Are you people finished? What is this, kindergarten? Can we move on please? [*To* KNOX*, sarcastically*.] With respect, sir.

KNOX Don't patronize me, Bossman. I don't care what we do. I only come here because my therapist makes me.

GINO Me too.

Pause.

BERYL I come here because I'm single. I figure one of these days a nice lady will show up.

KNOX You wouldn't know what to do with a nice lady, little boy.

BERYL I know what to do with nice ladies! I've been with plenty of nice ladies. Plus, if one shows up, we both wouldn't have index fingers, right? That's two social icebreakers. That's a double whammy. We'd have all kind of things to start talking about.

KNOX *lets out a Bronx cheer*.

AMP [*assertively*] Right. Well then. I'll tell my story and then we can hear from Fritz. [*To* FRITZ.] Apologies for the delay. I don't know what's gotten into everybody.

FRITZ I don't mind. It's Thursday.

BERYL Is it?

KNOX What happens on Thursday?

FRITZ Nothing. That's the thing.

KNOX That doesn't make any sense.

GINO It's nonsense. [*Covertly*.] Don't question it.

AMP Here's how I lost my finger, Fritz. There was a building in my neighborhood that caught fire. I happened to be on the roof across the street. I saw it go up in flames like a pillar of gunpowder. This was over ten years ago now. I could see people burning in the windows. They were yelling their heads off. I distinctly recall an old man who saw me looking at him. He pointed at me with his mouth open as if I were responsible for his crummy demise. Well, I had to do something. I couldn't just let everybody burn and die. I leapt onto the fire escape and clamored down the stairs ...

On the balcony, the children pretend to catch fire. They scream and cry, muffling AMP*'s voice. He tries to continue but it's no use. The children get louder and more hysterical*.

AMP [*looking up*] You godless freaks! Stop that! Stop burning, I say! [*Bellows*.]

The children fall silent.
Pause.

KNOX [*calmly*] She was in the wrong.

GINO Who?

KNOX That broad who bit off my finger. It wasn't my fault. It was her fault.

AMP I'm the middle of a story, goddamn you.

KNOX I was a perfect gentleman. I followed the rules. She was very attractive. I opened doors, pulled out chairs, complimented her hair and shoes, asked her questions about her life, pretended to be interested in her beliefs and ideas. All of the things you're supposed to do, I did. And I looked good. I had combed my hair, ironed my dinner jacket, and put on Old Spice. Then, during dessert, when I wasn't looking, she grabbed my hand ...

GINO What were you looking at, Knox?

KNOX I said I wasn't looking, Gino.

GINO You had to be looking somewhere. Were your eyes closed? How could you see to eat?

KNOX Don't be a fool. My eyes were open. My eyes are always open.

AMP Knox?

KNOX So she grabbed my hand. Next thing I know, I'm spurting all over the restaurant like an oil well. I still remember the crunching noise her teeth made. Look at this thing. [*Holds up damaged hand*.] All the way to the base knuckle. She had a mouth like a catfish.

BERYL Did she eat your finger?

AMP Knox.

KNOX Eat my finger? What's the matter with you? She wasn't a cannibal. She spit it out. She was crazy. She wasn't insane.

BERYL What's the difference between crazy and insane? They're both crazy.

GINO They're both insane, too.

KNOX Insane is more crazy than crazy. You know what I mean, Gino. So do you, Beryl. Wise up or get lost.

VAN Why did she do that?

KNOX [*deadpan*] Do what.

VAN Bite off your finger. You must have said something.

KNOX I don't know why she did it. I didn't say anything. [*Reflects*.] She's a woman. Women do things.

GINO You're a dirty liar. There had to be a motive. You had to have said something, or done something. Maybe you *didn't* do or say something. Ever consider that? Maybe your words and your actions fell short of her expectations.

KNOX Dirty liar?

AMP Knox!

KNOX What is it, Amp, you niggling son of a bitch!

Pause.

AMP We've all heard this before.

KNOX No you haven't. I've never said anything more than what I've said before.

AMP Precisely. [*Reflects.*] And you've said that before.

KNOX Said what?

AMP That.

KNOX What's that? All I said was what I said.

AMP [*deflated*] Christ on Golgotha. Fine. As I was saying ...

GINO Can I revise my story? I don't like mine. Knox's is better. It has more pizzazz, like. Getting your finger ground up in a garbage disposal is too cliché. That happens to everybody.

AMP Gino!

GINO Let's say, like, I see this building, and it's on fire, and people are burning up and getting really upset, so I'm gonna save the day. I run across the street and—

AMP [*frenzied*] GINO!!!

KNOX [*pointing at* AMP *with a thumb*] Now *that*'s insane. See the difference? Usually when he opens his mouth, it's just crazy. That right there was insanity.

BERYL I understand.

GINO I run across the street and ... [*Reflects*.] What happens next? How do I lose my finger? Do I trip and fall on it? Does it get burned up or something?

VAN You can't fall on your finger.

BERYL I've fallen on my finger. I fell on it yesterday. It hurt like a mother.

VAN Which finger?

BERYL This one. [*Holds up middle finger of left hand*.] No, this one. [*Holds up ring finger of right hand.*]

KNOX Bull. I don't believe that for two seconds. Show me.

BERYL *stands and awkwardly tries to fall on his finger. He misses and falls on his hip.*

BERYL Ak!

LITTLE BERYL *mimics* BERYL*. He slips and falls off the balcony, but he catches himself on the platform, gripping the edge. Hanging there, he cries out for his mother. The fingermen stare up at him like a passing airplane. The other children reach down and pull him up.*

AMP [*dumbfounded*] This is beyond unacceptable.

KNOX [*to* BERYL] Try it again. You can do it.

BERYL [*clutching himself*] My hip! It's broken!

KNOX You're fine. Get up.

GINO I think he might actually be hurt. Listen to him.

As BERYL *moans and fidgets,* KNOX*,* GINO*, and* VAN *lean forward and listen intently.*

KNOX I don't hear anything.

VAN He's clearly making noises, Knox. He's clearly hurt.

GINO I do hear something.

BERYL Would you stop talking about me please? Somebody help me up!

Nobody moves.

AMP [*glaring at the fingermen*] Well? Who will help him? Hello? [*Pause*.] Hello? [*Pause*.] Hello! Hello! Hello!

KNOX That'll do, Herr Direktor.

FRITZ *stands and steps towards* BERYL.

AMP Not you, Fritz! You're just a neophyte. You shouldn't have to do any hard work. [*Pause*.]

Serpent in a garden! Doesn't anybody here have any manners? This isn't a zoo. We're not animals.

All at once, KNOX *barks like a dog,* GINO *bleats like a goat, and* VAN *cock-a-doodle-doos like a rooster*.

AMP Good lord!

BERYL Help me!

FRITZ *offers a hand to* BERYL *and pulls him to his feet*.

BERYL Thank you. You are a good, fine man, Mr. Fritz.

KNOX Yeah, thanks. Try it again, Beryl.

BERYL I'm not trying anything. I'm barely alive as it is. [*Sits*.] Ak! [*Falls out of chair*.]

AMP There's no need for melodrama. We're all adults here.

FRITZ Right. Adults. Not animals.

Again, KNOX *barks like a dog,* GINO *bleats like a goat, and* VAN *cock-a-doodle-doos like a rooster*. BERYL *joins in, mooing like a hobbled cow*.

The phone rings and silences everybody. The fingermen stare at the booth. BERYL *climbs into his chair.*

FRITZ Shouldn't somebody get that? Who's calling at this time of day? [*Reflects.*] What time of day is it?

Pause.

BERYL [*hypnotized*] I know who it is.

AMP Stop that, Beryl. You don't know who that is.

Long pause.

BERYL We all know who it is.

AMP Nobody knows who that is. Nobody knows anything, okay?

Long pause.

BERYL I'm going to answer the phone.

AMP You're disoriented, Beryl. Just sit there and relax. You're not yourself.

Long pause.

BERYL I know who I am, Amp.

AMP No you goddamn don't.

Pause.

BERYL [*standing*] I'm going to answer the phone. [*Stepping forward.*] Somebody always answers the phone. It might as well be me.

KNOX Aren't you supposed to be hurt? You're not even limping.

BERYL *starts limping*.

KNOX Fake limp! Fake limp!

BERYL I'm not faking! [*Ominously*.] I'm answering the phone.

BERYL *limps forward.*

AMP Somebody do something. Somebody stop that man.

KNOX [*officiously*] He's his own man.

VAN [*echoing* KNOX*'s tone*] He's his own man.

Pause.

GINO He's a man, anyway.

GINO [*harmonizing*] Anywayyyyyyyyyyyy.
KNOX
VAN

BERYL *reaches out and clutches the handle of the booth.* LITTLE BERYL *emits a horrified shriek from the balcony.* BERYL *pauses, then opens the door and disappears into the booth. The door closes behind him, the phone stops ringing, and* LITTLE BERYL *collapses and dies.*

INTERMISSION

The lights of the theater remain off throughout this interlude during which play the songs "Margaritaville" by Jimmy Buffet, "Solitary Man" by Neil Diamond, and "Touch Me" by the Doors.

The actors loosen their neckties as a waitress in a skimpy cocktail dress walks onstage and serves them ice cream. The children in the balcony are served by a little girl in a white sun dress. The audience gets nothing, and if anybody tries to leave the theater, security guards bar their way.

ACT 2

VAN I take it back. Jimmy Buffet doesn't look anything like Neil Diamond. He doesn't look like Jim Morrison either. He looks like Glen Campbell—now and forever.

INTERMISSION

Glen Campbell's "Galveston" and "Wichita Lineman" play as the waitress returns and serves the fingermen martinis. The children overhead have eaten too much ice cream and fallen asleep, draped over the railing of the balcony.

The fingermen sip the drinks leisurely but with resolve.

Before the end of the second song, the waitress retrieves their empty glasses and exits the stage as the fingermen loosen and tighten their neckties, trying to collect themselves.

ACT 3

KNOX I'm drunk. I should never drink. I can't handle my liquor.

AMP [*covertly*] That's not what you're supposed to say, Knox.

KNOX We're all saying what we're supposed to say, Mein Führer. We can't say anything else. It's impossible.

FRITZ Where did Beryl go? I'm worried about him. Is he okay?

AMP You worry a lot if people are okay. Don't worry so much. Everybody's okay. Even when they get killed, they're okay. Okay?

FRITZ [*distraught*] Is he dead?

AMP No. Jesus, don't be silly. It's nothing like that. He just answered the phone.

VAN *falls asleep and emits an egregious snore that may or may not be performative.*

KNOX Fake snore! Fake snore!

VAN [*snorting awake*] Ak!

KNOX Fake awakening! Fake awakening! [*Gesticulates*.] He's faking!

AMP Knox! Control yourself, goddamn it! You're off track, you deranged hobo!

VAN Why would I fake waking up, let alone snoring?

KNOX See! If he had been sleeping, he wouldn't know that he was snoring, and he wouldn't know that I called his snore fake. Ha!

AMP [*covertly*] Give me a break, Knox. Take it easy. This is serious.

GINO He's right, Amp. Van's faking. He's a little faker.

VAN I'm not a little faker!

GINO [*harmonizing*] He's a little faker, don't you
KNOX know. He's a little faker, watch your dough.

AMP Fine, he's a faker. Fritz? You were saying.

FRITZ I was? [*Confused*.] Oh, yes. [*Reflects*.] I was saying something. We all say things, right?

GINO There you go, boy. Now you're getting the hang of it.

KNOX *passes out, falling forward out of his chair*.

AMP [*in a hushed tone*] Let's reconnoiter, then. I was telling my story. Where did I leave off? I was on fire, I think, with one child tucked beneath each arm. I shielded them from the flames that were consuming me as I scrambled to get them outside, but I got trapped and I had to drop them to punch through a window ...

KNOX [*awakening*] I'm up!

AMP Ak!

KNOX I feel refreshed. I just needed to sleep that one off. Thank God for unconsciousness. [*Cracks neck*.]

GINO I don't think you slept for more than fifteen seconds, Knox.

KNOX I slept plenty. It was a power nap.

GINO The power nap to end all power naps.

KNOX Mind your business, Gino.

VAN I have to go to the bathroom. Am I allowed to go? What's the prototype? I forgot.

KNOX Protocol.

VAN [*confused*] Protocol?

KNOX Stop trying to use words. [*Pause*.] I need a Bloody Mary over here!

VAN [*squirming in chair*] I really have to go. It's uncomfortable.

KNOX So go. [*Pause.*] Waitress! Baileys and coffee!

GINO You just got up. Do you usually drink this much in the morning?

KNOX It's not the morning. [*Reflects*.] Is it? [*Reflects*.] I drink what I drink, is all.

FRITZ That's what my mother does.

AMP Gentlemen, please.

KNOX Gentlemen my ass. Waitress! I'm starting to shake. I'm getting the DTs. [*Observes hands.*]

AMP [*deep-voiced*] *Delirium tremens*.

AMP*'s intonation echoes across the theater. The fingermen glance around dumbly.*

GINO You got the DTs after one martini? That's bad. You're a lightweight.

KNOX You're right. I already admitted that!

VAN Boy, I really have to go to the bathroom.

KNOX *springs forward, tackles* VAN*, and pins him to the floor.*

KNOX [*hysterical*] Go to the bathroom! Go to the bathroom! Go to the bathroom!

VAN I'm fine!

KNOX You're not fine!

VAN I am fine!

KNOX You're not! You're unfine! You're unfine!

AMP Fire in Hell! Fritz, Gino—do something, goddamn it!

FRITZ *and* GINO *stand and pull* KNOX *off of* VAN*. The children emulate the scuffle. This time, all of them fall from the balcony onto the stage, then scurry offstage*.

AMP I hate life. [*Reflects*.] Waitress!

KNOX Waitress! Help us! We're dying of thirst!

The waitress returns with another round of drinks. She serves everybody and exits. AMP*,* KNOX*, and* GINO *drink them in quick, ravenous gulps*. FRITZ *watches them, then does likewise*.

KNOX [*burping*] That hit the spot.

GINO *bleats like a goat and* VAN *cock-a-doodle-doos like a rooster*.

Pause.

KNOX [*confused*] Where am I?

VAN I shouldn't have drank that. My bladder was already overfull.

KNOX [*disoriented*] What's that you say about your bladder?

VAN Nothing. [*Reflects*.] I didn't say anything.

Pause.

AMP Right. As I was saying, I dropped the children. They burned up. It was like I dropped two balls of newspaper into a fire. I can still hear their little screams ...

KNOX What the hell are you talking about, Amp? You killed some children? Son of a bitch.

AMP You know what I did, Knox.

KNOX Then why are you talking about it? Why are we talking about anything? [*Confused.*] What is this place? Who are you people?

GINO You can't go to the bathroom, Van. We're at a meeting. Get it out of your head.

VAN It's not in my head. There's nothing in my head. I don't even know where the bathroom is. I've never gone before.

KNOX Horseshit. I've gone to the bathroom with you.

VAN [*laboring*] That is not true. I have never gone to the bathroom with you before. I only go to the bathroom alone.

KNOX I was in the bathroom with you last week. You were talking to the toilet attendant when I got there. Remember? We went into adjacent stalls and talked about Amp's anxieties and insecurities while we crapped. Remember?

AMP [*continuing with story*] My fingers were a mess. What was left of them anyway. There was barely anything. I recall looking in horror at the scorched and shredded nub of my hand. It was more like the window attacked me. My thumb was okay, thank God ...

The phone rings.

AMP [*talking over the phone*] Despite the literal and metaphorical heat of the situation, somehow I was able to find my severed fingers. All four of them. I ran to my personal surgeon's office, and goddamn it, he sewed them back on ...

KNOX Personal surgeon? You too? My ass.

GINO Everybody has a personal surgeon. [*Reflects*.] Right?

AMP All but one of them. This one. [*Brandishes fingerless hand*.] "The finger is dead," my surgeon told me. "Let it go," he told me.

The phone stops ringing.

AMP But I can't let it go. [*Pause*.] I'll never let it go.

The phone rings.

GINO I think I know who that might be. Excuse me. [*Stands.*]

AMP Gino!

KNOX Stop yelling! It exacerbates my anxiety! Why d'you think I'm such a prick? I got the anxiety. [*Shakes*.]

GINO *strides to the phone booth*.

AMP Gino!

KNOX Ak!

VAN Go to the bathroom for me, Gino! I'm dying!

GINO I can do that, Van. [*Reflects*.] I can do anything. Watch.

AMP No!

Without hesitation, GINO *opens the door and steps inside. The phone stops ringing, and* LITTLE GINO *dies.* KNOX *passes out*.

Long pause.

FRITZ So they're both in there now?

AMP [*dazed*] Calm down, Fritz. Where were we? [*Confused.*] Where were we!

VAN Ak! [*Pause.*] Dunno where we were. [*Reflects*.] I was gonna revise my story, I think.

KNOX [*awakening*] You already revised it! [*Falls off chair*.] Ak!

FRITZ No, that was Gino.

KNOX [*from the floor*] What was Gino? Who are you? [*Returns to chair*.] Where am I? What is this? I'm alive, right?

AMP [*covertly*] Easy, Knox.

KNOX Don't you tell me to be easy, Amp! I got the anxiety! [*Shakes*.]

FRITZ Gino revised his story, I meant. Not Van. This will only be the first revision for Van.

VAN He's right.

AMP What's with all this revision? And plagiarism! Since when has this behavior been an acceptable form of ontology?

KNOX Ontology? Thanks, Professor Plum. Keep your Big Words to yourself.

AMP It's not a big word. There's only four syllables and one vowel in ontology.

VAN Three vowels.

AMP [*confused*] Three vowels? There's one vowel. The *o*.

VAN Yeah, but there's three *o*s in the word, right? [*Spells word aloud.*] O-n-t-o-l-o-g-y. [*Reflects*.] That's three *o*s, right? Hence three vowels

KNOX You're goddamn right, Van.

VAN Right. So, like, there's three. I mean, if you see three people, you don't just say there's one person.

KNOX Right again. [*To* AMP.] You're an asshole.

AMP That's not true! Assholery has nothing to do with linguistics.

KNOX [*posturing*] A professor is one who talks in someone else's sleep.

VAN *and* KNOX *snicker.* FRITZ *smiles.*

AMP That's not funny. [*Reflects*.] That's not funny! It's plagiarism!

VAN It's funny.

AMP [*to* FRITZ] Did you think that was funny? Be serious, now.

FRITZ I don't laugh much.

AMP That doesn't answer my question.

FRITZ Isn't humor the most subjective type of human expression?

AMP That's another question. Another question doesn't answer my question.

Pause.

FRITZ Laughter is overrated. [*Reflects*.] Laughter has no valence. It's superfluous. It's residue.

AMP That's not untrue. Nonetheless my question remains unanswered.

FRITZ [*confused*] I forgot the question.

KNOX [*to* VAN] I like this guy. What's his name?

VAN Fritz, I think. [*To* FRITZ.] Hey Fritz. Wanna hear how I lost my finger?

FRITZ Yes?

AMP No!

KNOX [*singing with an affected lilt*] Yeeeeeeeesssssss.

VAN There I was, at a cockfight, puffing on Newports. My rooster's ego was bigger than the barn he lived in. Chaunticleer had nothing on him, and he had infinitely more wives and whores at his disposal. He was a mean son of a bitch, too. And tough. He beat up a Great Dane, once, just because the thing looked too pretty.

FRITZ Good allusion to Chaucer. Your story has style.

VAN Hey, thanks.

KNOX Horseshit. How the hell did you know if your rooster thought that dog was pretty? Don't even tell me it talked.

VAN It didn't talk, per se, but it had a speaking voice, like. It communicated with me, like. I understood it.

Pause.

KNOX I'm gonna kill you if you say something like that again.

AMP Nobody's killing anybody.

VAN It's okay. Most of us are already dead.

AMP Nobody's already dead.

VAN Okay.

Pause.

FRITZ Am I dead?

AMP I just said nobody's dead. That means nobody's dead. Okay?

The fingermen trade perplexed glances.

FRITZ What's your rooster's name, Van?

VAN What?

FRITZ Your rooster. Does it have a name?

VAN It's dead. I buried it. It's not my rooster anymore. That little devil belongs to God now.

FRITZ I'm sorry.

VAN Not a problem. It was just a rooster.

FRITZ Did it have a name when it was alive?

VAN [*confused*] Name? [*Reflects.*] It was just a rooster.

FRITZ Right. Well, what happened? You were revising your story.

VAN Actually, it's more of a new story than a revision. The only similarity so far is that I was smoking Newports. But I always smoke Newports.

KNOX You're not smoking Newports right now. I've never seen you smoke a Newport. I've never seen you smoke anything. You don't smoke.

VAN I smoke. But there's no smoking in here. [*Reflects*.] There's no smoking anywhere.

KNOX That makes sense.

VAN Well, it's the truth.

KNOX It's fiction. Like everything about you.

VAN What's that supposed to mean?

Pause.

KNOX You're telling a story, is what I say.

VAN That's the same thing as telling the truth. Do you want to hear my story or not?

KNOX Everybody knows how it's gonna end.

VAN How is that? I don't even know how it ends.

KNOX The rooster bites your finger off. Or some other rooster. Right? You're at a cockfight.

VAN [*dejected*] Oh.

KNOX *passes out. Long pause*.

AMP Well, I guess that's it for today. Thanks for coming everybody.

VAN [*to* KNOX] We haven't heard his story yet. [*To* FRITZ.] What's your name again?

AMP You know his name!

VAN No I don't! I got amnesia! [*Reflects*.] I can't even remember what amnesia is! Ak!

KNOX [*startled awake*] Ak!

AMP I'm so sorry, Fritz.

FRITZ It's fine.

KNOX It's not fine. Nothing is fine. Everything is unfine. [*Pause*.] This play is falling apart.

AMP [*covertly*] This *world*, you mean.

KNOX World? What world?

AMP [*covertly*] You know. Don't call it a play, Knox. People are watching.

KNOX People? What people? [*Peers at audience.*] Waitress!

VAN *passes out. Almost immediately, he begins to grumble and fidget, harrowed by a bad dream. The fingermen stare listlessly at him.*

VAN [*awakening*] Nancy! [*Pause.*] Ak!

AMP [*confused*] Nancy? [*Reflects.*] Why does everybody keep falling asleep?

KNOX We're drunk, dummy. We're passing out. Plus, we're not people. We're unpeople. We don't act like real people. This is an acausal universe. You have to suspend your disbelief to believe what we do.

AMP Stop that! [*Intently.*] Would you stop that please?

VAN I had a horrible dream. This time, I was Jimmy Carter, but I put on a black wig and a suit with padded shoulders, and I told everybody I was Ronald Reagan. I don't know why. Nobody believed that I was either president, let alone myself. I gave a speech about the dangers of angel dust. My wife Rosie was an addict. I called her Nancy in the speech, but everybody knew who I was talking about. I dabbled now and then in angel dust, but I knew how to control myself, and I knew when enough was enough. I couldn't get through to Rosie, though, even after six stints in rehab. She blew through our savings and I had to start making pornographic films to pay my speech writers. I—

KNOX Boring!

VAN That's not boring. That's life!

KNOX [*Reflects*.] Waitress!

AMP You've had enough, Knox. Go back to sleep.

KNOX Don't tell me I've had enough. I know when I've had enough. And I know when enough is enough.

AMP Just relax, goddamn it. Jesus on the Mount.

Long pause.

KNOX Intermission!

INTERMISSION

The lights go red and begin to strobe as "Land of Confusion" by Genesis blares throughout the theater. A stripper pole descends from the rafters. The waitress enters with three scantily clad women who proceed to work the pole and give the fingermen lap dances. KNOX *loves it.* FRITZ *is apathetic, pokerfaced.* VAN *and* AMP *giggle and squirm uncomfortably. Riveted, the children peer down at the spectacle from the balcony.*

At the end of the song, the lights return to normal and the stripper pole retracts into the ceiling. Exit the waitress and her entourage.

ACT 4

KNOX [*to* VAN] Now *that's* life.

Pause.

VAN You only live once.

Pause.

AMP I've lived at least six lives.

Pause.

FRITZ I'm not entirely certain that I've ever lived at all.

Long pause.

KNOX Let's do another intermission. [*To the audience.*] Folks, you can go to the bathroom, if you like.

INTERMISSION

Lights dim off. Sound of snoring and sex.

ACT 5

The phone rings. Lights dim on.

AMP*,* KNOX*, and* VAN *sleep soundly.* FRITZ *stands center stage with arms crossed, watching them intently.*

FRITZ Hello! [*Pause*.] Ak! [*Pause*.] Hello! [*Pause*.] Ak! [*Pause*.] Hello! Hello! [*Pause*.] Ak! Ak! Ak! Ak!

AMP*,* KNOX*, and* VAN *spasm awake.*

KNOX Ak!

VAN Ak! Ak!

AMP Ak! [*Pause.*] Afterlife in the sky! What in God's name is happening now?

FRITZ The phone's been ringing for awhile. I feel like I should answer it.

AMP Goddamn you, Fritz! No feelings aloud!

KNOX [*to* FRITZ] Haven't you learned anything, boy?

VAN I'm sick of not being able to have no feelings. I have them! I have them despite the rules.

AMP Nonetheless. Rules are rules.

KNOX They're your rules. They don't mean anything.

AMP They mean everything!

Pause.

FRITZ The phone's still ringing.

KNOX We have ears!

FRITZ [*pivoting*] Why don't I just see who that is.

AMP*, and* KNOX*, and* VAN *scream as loud as they can. So do the children. The phone stops ringing.*

AMP [*covertly*] Christ, that was a close one. [*To* FRITZ.] Listen, son. Have a seat. The meeting's not over yet. It's only just begun.

KNOX Begun my ass. I've had it. I'm a hot mess.

VAN If I don't go to the bathroom ...

KNOX *tenses up*.

AMP Knox! We haven't even established a context yet, you unholy bastard. Fritz still needs to tell us his story. Then, based on our stories, individually and collectively, we need to figure things out.

FRITZ [*sitting*] Figure things out?

AMP Right. You know.

KNOX No he doesn't! Nobody knows what you're talking about. Nobody knows anything!

AMP Stop that, Knox! Yes, you do know something. We need to figure things out. That's why we're here, right? To understand ourselves. The better we understand ourselves, the better we can cope with our losses. [*Raises fingerless hand*.]

KNOX Says you. I'm here for the Beelines. With a capital B.

FRITZ Beelines?

KNOX Booze. Broads. Banter. [*Pause*]. The Beelines. [*Passes out*.]

VAN [*clutching his groin*] I can't remember why I'm here. I can't think straight.

The phone rings. AMP*,* VAN*, and the children scream.* KNOX *wakes up and screams. The phone stops ringing*.

VAN [*breaks into tears*] I can't take it anymore! I'm out of gas.

KNOX [*groggily*] Out of gas and full of piss.

Pause.

VAN [*sniffling*] If they call again, I'm answering the phone. I got something to say.

FRITZ They? Who's calling?

AMP [*covertly*] That's crazy talk, Van. If you got something to say, say it to the group.

VAN I've said enough to the group! We're barely a group anymore anyway!

AMP Baloney. There is only the group, and nothing else. Beyond the margins of the group lies chaos.

KNOX The group is a joke! Like the cosmos. Like this. [*Shows missing finger.*]

FRITZ Are Beryl and Gino coming back? What are they doing in there?

AMP You're hysterical, Fritz. Calm down.

FRITZ I'm not hysterical. I don't even think I raised my tone of voice. Did I?

Pause.

VAN Can we just take a break or something? I need to concentrate.

KNOX Concentrate on not going to the bathroom.

KNOX You don't have to concentrate on not doing something. Just don't do it.

VAN Easier said than done.

KNOX No. Easier done than said.

AMP Okay, boys. Let's keep our eyes on the ball. [*Pause.*] Okay, Fritz. Tell us about yourself.

FRITZ Really? Okay. My name's Fritz. I—

The phone rings. Still clutching himself, VAN *leaps out of his chair and darts towards the booth, screaming madly. At the ready,* KNOX *tackles him by the legs and brings him down.* VAN *flails like a stepped-on animal, kicking* KNOX *in the head until he knocks him out, then gets up and scurries into the booth.*

The phone stops ringing. LITTLE VAN *calls out for his mother and dies.*

AMP Oh my God!

FRITZ [*standing*] Is he okay?

AMP Of course he's okay! [*Looks at* KNOX *in horror.*] Tell us about yourself! Tell us about yourself!

FRITZ It's only you and me now. There is no us.

KNOX [*coming to*] Horseshit! [*Confused.*] I'm perfectly alive! [*Reflects.*] Ak! [*Dies.*]

LITTLE KNOX *dies. His body falls out of the balcony and lands on* KNOX.

AMP Oh my God!

The waitress returns, flanked by two muscled bouncers in black t-shirts and tight jeans. She swaggers to the bodies with a plastic grin. The bouncers pick them up by the ankles and drag them offstage.

The phone rings for two minutes. FRITZ *and* AMP *stare at the booth dreamily until it stops ringing.*

FRITZ Is this normal?

AMP Perfectly. This always happens.

FRITZ People dying?

AMP Sure. People die all the time.

FRITZ People you know? Right in front of you?

AMP Don't pay attention to that. That's just, like, theatrics.

FRITZ So Knox is alive?

AMP No, he's dead, I think. Very much dead.

FRITZ That can't be normal.

AMP You'd be surprised what's normal.

FRITZ Children falling out of the sky—is that normal, too?

Pause.

AMP Don't be dramatic. There's no sky up there.

FRITZ *and* AMP *peer upwards*. *The phone rings and they peer*

at the booth. Accompanying the rings are garbled bits of music and tortured, agonized moans.

AMP [*loudly*] Don't mind that. That's just people burning in Hell.

The phone stops ringing.

Fatigued, AMP *leans over, elbows on knees, hangs his head and breathes deeply*. FRITZ *paces back and forth, then sits*.

AMP [*straightening up*] I was just kidding about Hell. There's no goddamn Hell. Nobody's dead either. I was just kidding about that, too.

FRITZ I know. [*Pause.*] What do we do, then?

AMP I don't know. [*Pause*.] Tell me about yourself.

FRITZ Honestly, I don't like to talk about myself. Talking about myself makes me feel like hell.

AMP I understand. [*Pause.*] Tell me about yourself.

FRITZ I'd rather not. The idea of being narcissistic makes me cringe.

AMP It's not narcissistic to tell me about yourself.

FRITZ It feels that way.

AMP Not if you don't have feelings, it doesn't. That's why there's no feelings allowed here.

FRITZ Pretending you don't have feelings doesn't mean you don't have feelings. Everybody has feelings. Mass murderers have feelings.

AMP I see. [*Pause.*] Tell me something about yourself and why you're here today.

FRITZ Honestly, I barely remember why I'm here, let alone who I am.

AMP That makes sense. I feel that way all the time.

FRITZ [*confused*] But you're against feelings. You deny feelings. You're altogether anti-feeling.

AMP Yes. [*Pause*.] For the most part, anyway. [*Pause*.] Being against feelings or in denial of feelings or altogether anti-feeling is mostly just something you say, though. [*Reflects*.] We say a lot of things, after all. I mean, we have to say something, right? [*Long pause.*] Tell me about yourself.

FRITZ No.

AMP Please?

FRITZ It won't sit well with me, if I tell you about myself. I'd rather listen to other people tell me about themselves. I'm a much better listener than a talker. All talk, no matter what it's about, is about yourself.

AMP I get it. [*Pause*.] I'm all out of breath and all out of material, though. [*Pause*.] It's up to you.

FRITZ What's up to me?

Pause.

AMP Telling me about yourself.

Pause.

FRITZ I don't want to.

Pause.

AMP You don't have to. By not telling me anything, you tell me something. [*Raises fingerless hand*.]

They stare at the phone booth.

FRITZ Do you think they'll call again?

AMP They always call again.

Long pause.

FRITZ They're not calling.

AMP They'll call. Wait for it.

Long pause.

FRITZ Are you drunk?

AMP I'm no more drunk than I am sober.

Long pause.

FRITZ Are you alive?

AMP I'm no more alive than I am—

FRITZ Dead.

AMP No.

FRITZ What then?

Pause.

AMP I don't know. [*Reflects*.] You know.

Long pause.

FRITZ Are you you?

AMP You. Me. What's the difference? To me I'm me. To somebody else I'm somebody else. [*Pause*.] Subjectivity. Objectivity. [*Pause*.] The myth of perception.

Long pause.

The two remaining children in the balcony begin to cry.

LITTLE AMP I'm lonely!

LITTLE FRITZ I'm bored!

AMP [*harmonizing*] I'm lonelyyyyy. I'm booooored.
FRITZ

The children die.

AMP That was exciting.

FRITZ Are they okay?

Pause.

AMP No.

Pause.

FRITZ Are you sure?

Pause.

AMP No.

Long pause.

FRITZ I wonder if they'll call again.

Pause.

AMP They'll probably call again.

Pause.

FRITZ Is there a chance they might not call again? Did we miss something?

AMP Every moment that passes contains an infinite number of missed opportunities.

FRITZ I know.

Pause.

AMP Every moment is an empty shell.

FRITZ I know.

Long pause.

FRITZ I'm actually getting bored now. I think I'm getting lonely, too.

Pause.

AMP Wait for it.

Pause.

FRITZ Wait for what?

Pause.

AMP You know.

Pause.

FRITZ I don't know anything. [*Relfects*.] I don't really want to wait for it. I don't really care anymore.

Pause.

AMP Nobody cares if you don't care anymore. Concentrate, now.

Pause.

FRITZ Concentrate on what?

Pause.

AMP The future. [*Pause*.] History. [*Pause.*] The moment.

Long pause.

FRITZ It's too much to process. I can't pay attention.

Long pause.

AMP Don't pay attention. [*Pause.*] Never pay attention. [*Pause*.] We are who we aren't, and vice versa. [*Pause*.] Here it comes now, goddamn it. [*Pause.*] Hold on, Fritz. [*Pause.*] You're going to be okay. [*Long pause.*] Everybody's going to be okay.

Long pause.

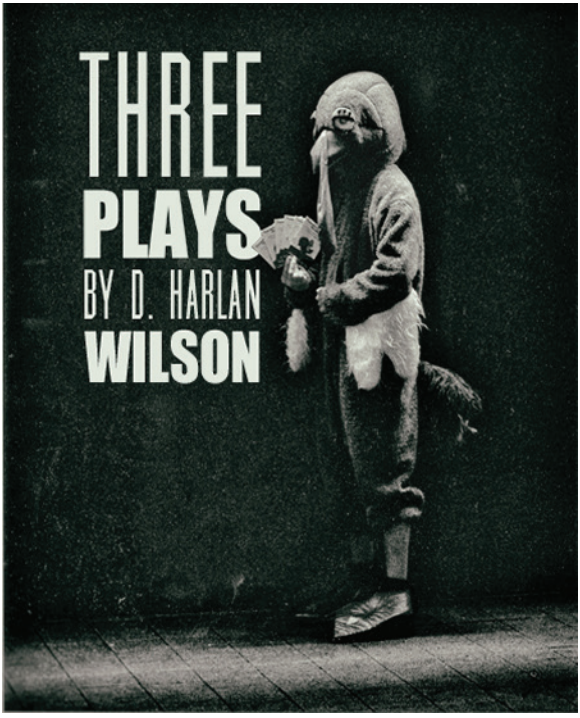
The phone doesn't ring.

Slowly, the door of the phone booth creaks open, casting a painfully bright light across the stage onto AMP *and* FRITZ*. We can't see inside.*

Tableaux.

CURTAIN

JACKANAPE AND THE FINGERMEN



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D. HARLAN WILSON was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1971. He is an American noveilst, literary critic, playwright, editor, and college professor, with over 30 book-length works of fiction and nonfiction to his name. He holds two M.A. degrees, one in English from University of Massachusetts-Boston, the other in Science Fiction Studies from University of Liverpool; he received his Ph.D. from Michigan State University in 2005. Hundreds of his stories, essays, and reviews have appeared in magazines, journals, and anthologies across the world in multiple languages. His writing has received nominations for and won numerous awards, among them the Locus Award, the Wonderland Book Award, the Pushcart Prize, the Not the Booker Prize, the Big Other Book Award, the Starcherone Innovative Fiction Prize, and others. Wilson lives in Dreamfield, Ohio, with his daughters Maddie and Renee.