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SF PERUSALS

Roadkill Confidential

A Noir-ish Meditation on Brutality

by Sheila Callaghan

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
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Premiered at 3LD in September 2010 by Clubbed Thumb, an OBIE award-winning company that commissions, develops, and produces funny, strange, and provocative new plays by living American writers.

Commission support provided by The New York State Council on the Arts.

ROADKILL CONFIDENTIAL premiered at 3LD in September 2010 produced by Clubbed Thumb, an OBIE award-winning company that commissions, develops, and produces funny, strange, and provocative new plays by living American writers. The production was directed by Kip Fagan, with set design by Peter Ksander, costume design by Jessica Pabst, lighting design by Jeanette Oi-suk Yew, sound design by Bart Fasbender, video design by Shaun Irons & Lauren Petty, sculpture design by Jessica Scott, and properties by Miranda King. The cast was as follows:

RANDY/FRIZZY HAIRED MAN . . . . . .Alex Anfanger
TREVOR . . . . . Rebecca Henderson
MELANIE. . . . . Polly Lee
FBI MAN . . . . . Danny Mastrogiorgio
WILLIAM/TV ANNOUNCER/DOCTOR . . . . . Greg McFadden

CHARACTERS

TREVOR – female, mid 30's, furtive and glamorous

WILLIAM / TV ANNOUNCER / DOCTOR – male, mid-late 40's, balding, dorky, well-meaning

RANDY / FRIZZY HAIRED MAN – male, 14, wiry and manic

MELANIE – female, late 20's-early 30's, bubbly and shrill

FBI MAN – male, 30's-40's, cool, level, mysterious, jaded

SETTING

A small New England county, upstate New York.
A road.
A dark nondescript room.

TIME

The end of fall, moving into the winter.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The setting should not be real, or naturalistic. It should not be a set for the piece to play within but rather something against which the piece can resonate: more installation than set.

An ellipses is set within parenthesis is used to indicate a gesture or some sort of vocal sound appropriate to the character and the situation. It is not a realistic sound, however.

The installation will begin as something simple, but will transform throughout the play, perhaps during the transitions at the hands of Trevor, until ultimately the entire playing space and beyond is one enormous diorama.

PLEASE NOTE: Trevor is onstage for the entire duration. When not specifically noted, she is working and watching television, and reacting to it all. She is especially present on stage whenever FBI MAN is talking, whether lit specially, or in her own realm of movement and expression.

FBI MAN is also always present, always watching her, whether on his surveillance equipment, or in the room with her separated by the membrane of reality. He is the eternal voyeur. We must feel his desperation and obsession in every second of the play. We see the play THROUGH him, always.

All scene titles are projected.

Special thanks to Suli Holum, Birgit Huppuch, Sam Gold, Heidi Schreck, Jenny Morris, Hannah Cabbell, Carla Harting, Sheri Graubert, Polly Carl, Brooke O'Hara, Brendan Connelly, Laura Heisler, Amy Mueller, Bill Coelius, Dan Illian, Max Jenkins, Jeff Biehl, Sam Wright, Robin Lord Taylor, Andrew Dolan, Mark Shanahan, Teddy Bergman, Gibson Frazier, Danny Manley, Matt Maher, Mather Zickel, Reed Birney, Adam Farabee, Darren Pettie, Joel van Liew, Alex Anfanger, Maria Dizzia, Ana Reeder, Rebecca Henderson, David Brooks, Sarah Leonard, Matthew Macquire, Christina Kirk, Steven Kurtz and the Critical Ensemble, Seth Glewen, Adam Greenfield, The Playwright's Center, the MAP Fund, Playwrights' Horizons, Diana Konopka, Meg MacCary, and The Millay Colony.

FBI MAN. You could say it all began a month ago

But that's not where I'll start
I'll start *before* it started

On a radiant Tuesday morning
In the lazy days of late spring

Trevor was contemplating her next project.
She didn't know what form it would take
Nor how much time
Nor even what material
She only knew
It was to be brutal.

*(***TREVOR** *is in her studio, watching TV news, as she does throughout the play.)*

Who is Trevor, you ask?

She might have been my greatest triumph.
But she was my demise.
So to speak.

*(***TREVOR** *flips the channels. Lots of violence. She settles on one station. A* **TV ANNOUNCER'***s voice is heard.)*

TV ANNOUNCER. And in sadder news
A child has died in the Berkshires this week
Seven year-old Callie Stewart touched a wild bunny
Outside her home in Austerlitz
The animal was infected with a rare bacterial disease
Causing Callie to perish within mere days.
The name of the disease is being withheld
For reasons of national security

But let it be known, Berkshire residents
The bunny has been detained.
You are in no danger.

*(***TREVOR** *is suddenly in her car, driving.)*

(THUMP. Squeal of tires. She pulls over.)

(She has hit a bunny accidentally. She stares at it. Emotion: compassion revulsion fascination etc.)

(She retrieves a camera and photographs it dying. Then – she gets an idea. She puts on a pair of work-gloves.)

FBI MAN. Jump cut.

Five months later

Trevor's in bed with a frizzy haired man.

ONE MONTH AGO: RUBBER FACE

*(***TREVOR** *is in her studio, now in bed with her lover, a frizzy-haired man. They are frozen.)*

(The **FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN** *is playing with* **TREVOR***'s face.)*

(Everything around them is covered in tarps.)

*(***TREVOR** *is staring at a flickering TV with the sound off. She wears a tie and white shirt.)*

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Rubber-face

TREVOR. I'm trying to think of way to tell you to stop that
Without using the words "aggravating" or "retarded"

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Ha!
Sorry.
I'll make coffee?
Should I make coffee?

(He finds a piece of paper.)

What is this?

(He reads.)

Friendly Fire
The Roadside Explosives
Mortar Rounds
The Drive Bys
The Ethnic Cleanse
Checkpoint Fuckyou

TREVOR. Band names

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Who's in a band?

TREVOR. No one
I couldn't sleep.
Nightmares
My hands were like this the whole time

(He flips the paper over and reads.)

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. "Thanks for the help. You're a swell kid. Sorry it didn't work out. With Affection, Trevor."

TREVOR. That's from yesterday
I thought you were leaving much sooner

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. What did you eat for lunch yesterday

TREVOR. Why?

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Because sometimes what you eat
Like eating badly affects your dreams
The shattering of one's self-image

TREVOR. You're much cuter when you're focused on pleasing me

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. I need a little break
My jaw hurts

TREVOR. All right
I'll tell you what I dreamed, then

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Please

TREVOR. I was the keeper of the marvel

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Wow.
You aren't ordinary.

TREVOR. I know.

*(***FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN** *kisses* **TREVOR**. *He is about to turn off the TV.)*

TREVOR. Don't touch that.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Okay
I'm so happy to be here –

TREVOR. What about my coffee?

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Right.
Sorry.

(He stands.)

Ow.

TREVOR. Your back
Poor thing
I have advil

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. They were heavier than I thought
Are you using more wood, or

TREVOR. Metal

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Oh my gosh
I can't wait to see them
This is so huge for me, Trevor

TREVOR. I know, baby

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. I mean the first time I
Your opening at the Whitney
I mean visceral and dark but um with
Like this brutal intimacy
And so fucking beautiful
I'd never / seen anything

TREVOR. Okay why not drive back to campus
And yammer from the comfort of your dorm room

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Oh.
But just a second ago –

TREVOR. I changed my mind.
Go now.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Okay.
Um.
Need me to move anything else?

TREVOR. No thank you.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Okay.
(…)
Want a sandwich
I can get you a sandwich

TREVOR. Good lord.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Could I just see one of them?
I won't take a picture or anything
See?
Here's my cell phone
I'll leave it / over there

TREVOR. You're about to make me into someone
Who demonstrates incredibly bad romantic judgment

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Well I helped you and everything
And we did have pretty okay sex

TREVOR. Okay.
a) No one sees these until they're done, not even my husband
b) Dignity, maybe? and
c) Goodbye. Truly.

(He hesitates.)

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. (…)
I fucked up.
I peeked beneath the tarp

TREVOR. When

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Just for second
I saw fur

TREVOR. Did you touch it?

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Just for a second
I couldn't help / myself

TREVOR. You touched it

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Hardly, it was more like a

TREVOR. With the gloves on?

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. I took them off

TREVOR. Oh God

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Just for a second

TREVOR. You idiot
I said not to touch it

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. I know

TREVOR. I said "don't touch the art"

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Nothing broke or

TREVOR. "hold the base by the straps"

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. The glue / was

TREVOR. Why did you touch it

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. DRY, okay
I didn't even SEE anything
I just FELT it

TREVOR. Oh God

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Trevor

TREVOR. Oh God

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Trevor
I'm sorry
Please

TREVOR. (…)

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. What was the exact crime
Let me understand

TREVOR. Get out.

FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN. Trevor, I'm a –
Please don't be mad
I'm not like those freaks on the lawn with the camcorders
I'm a fan Trevor but I'm not disgusting
I'm not
I'm not

*(**Something beautiful and violent and dramatic happens to* **TREVOR** *here.* **FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN** *does not hear or see her. Maybe he has disappeared, or is frozen.)*

*(***TREVOR** *drives home from her studio. She wears special gloves.)*

(She hits several small animals along the way. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.)

(Each one she hits she stops and retrieves, with compassion and horror. Some of the animals are still alive.)

(It is a dance; the Hit Animal Dance.)

(It is funny.)

(meanwhile.…)

FBI MAN. Later that night
I got a disturbing phone call
(He gets a phone call. He answers it.)
Yello.
(…)
Uh-huhm.
(…)
Uh-huhm.
(…)
Uh-huhm.
(…)
Uh-huhm.
(…)
I'm there.
(He hangs up.)
Hospital upstate.
A matter of national security
And so it begins.

THIS COULD BE THAT

(The **FBI MAN** *stands next to a* **DOCTOR**.*)*

(They both stand over the corpse of the **FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN**.*)*

(The **FBI MAN** *reads from a small piece of paper in a plastic bag, which he handles with rubber gloves and tongs.)*

(The **DOCTOR** *is very, very nervous. He keeps looking over his shoulder.)*

FBI MAN. The Drive Bys
The Ethnic Cleanse
Checkpoint Fuckyou

DOCTOR. Was in his back pocket
Admitted this morning
Dizziness, fatigue, fever
We assumed it was a severe pleuropneumonic infection
Dangerous but not enough to, um
But then we found that paper
So we did some tests
By the time we figured it out, well
(…)
Rapid diagnostic testing is not widely available for this

FBI MAN. Uh-huhm

(He revolves around the body, examining it, like a dance.)

DOCTOR. We are so glad you are here
The disease is called "tularemia"
"Rabbit disease"
S-sm-smaller mammals act as reservoir hosts
Prairie dogs, hares, muskrats, squirrels, voles
Humans can contract it several ways
Through ticks or flies or mosquitoes
Or by handling the meat and skins of infected animals

FBI MAN. Uh-huhm

DOCTOR. Or um
From food or water that has been contaminated
Or through the air
If um, sprayed

FBI MAN. Uh-huhm

DOCTOR. Um
Symptoms include:
Rapid onset
Sudden fever
Headaches
Muscle aches
Diarrhea
Joint pain
Dry cough
Progressive weakness
It's one of the m-m-most infective bacteria known to m-m-man
What, um, what

FBI MAN. It was used by the Russians during World War II
Before that by the Japanese against Manchuria
The US developed strains of the disease in the 50's
Part of their biological warfare program
Terminated in the early 60's
When used as a weapon
The defense department classifies this
As a category 8 agent

DOCTOR. Wow
Um

FBI MAN. The disease cannot be spread from person to person
It infects through mucous membranes, the gastrointestinal tract, the lungs
The skin

DOCTOR. We have no vaccine
Everyone is so paranoid around here
We sent the receptionist home
The nurses think we moved him to CPU

FBI MAN. Good

DOCTOR. This
Of course this could be a single incident
Like Austerlitz
The little girl
Um
This could be that
If it weren't for the note

(The **FBI MAN** *takes off his Ray Bans and leans into the* **FRIZZY-HAIRED MAN**, *to inspect him more closely.)*

(We see he has a long scar across one eye.)

(a beat)

He was twenty-one
He was a student

(The **FBI MAN** *returns his glasses to his face and looks at the back of the letter.)*

FBI MAN. "With affection
Trevor"

(The **DOCTOR** *disappears.)*

(The **FBI MAN** *is in a spotlight, thinking. A dramatic moment for him. Maybe music.)*

(He opens his cellphone. Dials a few numbers. Into the receiver:)

It's time.
How soon can you get it to me?
Perfect.

(to us)

I won't lie
I'm at my best

FBI MAN. *(cont.)* When the fate of the nation is at hand
Domestic situations however are not my specialty
International was always my bag

(He opens a trunk of costumes.)

(He dons an exterminator's outfit, "Bugs B-gone," and a cap.)

Like any good agent
I adapt.

Voila.
Upstate New York.
Mission?
Discover whether or not target is knowingly utilizing
A classified biological weapon
For the threat toward and/or destruction of human life

So I motored up to Albany
Got myself a shitty, heatless efficiency
the heart of the Hudson Valley
And readied myself for the ride

(meanwhile….)

PRUNE CEDARWOOD

*(***WILLIAM***,* **MELANIE***,* **TREVOR***, and* **RANDY** *are all seated at dinner.)*

*(***MELANIE** *is a little giddy and tipsy.)*

(She is dressed elegantly.)

*(***TREVOR** *is unreadable, but slightly on edge.)*

*(***RANDY** *eats in complete silence. He wears headphones.)*

WILLIAM. *(sipping wine)* Prune
Cedarwood
Um

MELANIE. As a rule I'm not a red wine person but *this*

WILLIAM. The fellow recommended it /
A little oaky, but

MELANIE. Mmmmm
Okay
Should we toast?

WILLIAM. To…

MELANIE. Trevor's new series?

TREVOR. Well that's swell of you Melanie
But how can you toast to something you can't possibly grasp?

(slight beat)

Having not seen it, of course.

MELANIE. Oh I know!
To the first of many neighborly dinners!
Thank you for having me, Trevor

TREVOR. Well you just kind of stopped by –

MELANIE. But you didn't have to let me in!

TREVOR. That is absolutely true.
Cheers.

(They drink. The doorbell rings.)

WILLIAM. Well gosh, now who could that be?

*(***TREVOR** *gets it. It's the* **FBI MAN** *in his exterminator's outfit.)*

TREVOR. Exterminator

FBI MAN. Keep eating
I'll find my way around

(No one looks at him.)

(He winks theatrically at us, then begins to inspect the house. He surreptitiously scrutinizes door hinges and vents.)

MELANIE. Do you have vermin?

TREVOR. Just bugs
Flies mostly.

WILLIAM. 'Tis the season!
Right?

TREVOR. My studio in the woods is filled with 'em
They buzz around in circles like drunken pilots
They know they're supposed to be dying
Their bodies tell them so
But it's not cold enough to knock them out
So they kinda just flail around in a hazy purgatorio
until their engines peter out
Pretty soon my window sill will be covered
in a writhing pile of half-dead insects.

*(***MELANIE** *finally notices* **RANDY**.*)*

MELANIE. He certainly does enjoy his forks!
(…)
Ohhhh!
A lyric just popped into my head.

Red redwiiiiiiiine
Goes to my heeeeaaaad
Makes me forget that I'm

No no wait it goes:
Red redwiiiiiiiine

MELANIE. *(cont.)* Stay close to me
Don't let me be alone
Just mrahmrahngarahnga

And then there's a rap, I can't remember

Didn't you two used to make wine?
When Trevor first moved in?

(to **TREVOR***)*

I remember you on your knees picking grapes outside
You were so young!
I asked what you what you were doing
You said "we're making wine"
But my brain heard "we're making love"
I was so ashamed –

WILLIAM. *(suddenly remembering)* Ah!

(rapping)

Red red wine you mek me feel so fine
You keep me rockin' all of the time

MELANIE. *(delighted)* Yes!

RANDY. Dad.

WILLIAM. *(feeling a little foolish but going for it)* Red red wine you mek me feel so grand
I feel a million dollar when yajusin ma 'and

MELANIE. It's like a code!
Keep going!

WILLIAM. *(uncertain)* Red red wine you mek me feel so sad
Any time I see ya go it mek me feel bad

RANDY. Dad! I'm eating!

WILLIAM. *(uncertain)* Red red wine you mek me feel so fine
Monkey back and moosaban a sweet ep line

MELANIE. WHAT?!

WILLIAM. *(getting into it)* Red red wine you give me oleeba-zing
Oleeba-zing mek me do me own ting

MELANIE. *(applauding)* Yay!

WILLIAM. I'm sweating!

MELANIE. That was AMA/ ZING

WILLIAM. *(out of breath)* We used to
in grad school
we'd play it over and over
ah

MELANIE. Do you need some / water?

WILLIAM. I have the spins
I'm okay

*(***MELANIE** *pours him some water.)*

(They all freeze.)

(Spotlight on the **FBI MAN***.)*

FBI MAN. Indulge me a moment

(He removes a tiny platinum box from his jacket pocket and smiles broadly.)

(He opens the lid and carefully dips his pinkie into the box. He shows us something practically invisible on the tip of his finger.)

See this?

(He walks into the audience. He confides in us. He whispers to us, cajoles us. Flirts.)

Too small?
Could be nothing, even?
A grain of sand, a flake of paprika?
A freckle?
Pin prick from a tailoring misadventure?
Ball-point pen mark?
Insect dropping?
Rat ovum?
I could go on….

FBI MAN. *(cont.)* Well it isn't nothing
Not by a longshot
What you don't see here
Is a two hundred MILLION dollar piece of surveillance equipment

(He scrutinizes his pinkie.)

Quadruple the signal-to-noise ratio and lux sensitivity of any previous machine close to its class
double the TVL and an optional ten thousand frames per second
thermal/infrared sensor fusion
multi-spectral nighttime imaging
360 degree non-angular field of view
rapid scan frequency
an UNLIMITED operation temperature – records data whether you're at the north pole or the gates of hell
half-mile operating distance
AND
Ninety-eight percent accurate color reproduction

You know how many of these exist in the world?
You're looking at it
Sui generis.
Version one-point-zero.
Classified top secret hush-hush sub-rosa.

You know who they give this to?
No one.
It's never been used.
Tested only twice by the husband-wife team who developed it
Stowed in a platinum box in a crystal drawer in a steel vault in an iron bunker
Dug a hundred miles down into the deep dark molten heart of the earth
Where it was kept for precisely twenty weeks

FBI MAN. *(cont.)* After which time it was removed
And placed directly into my care.
Three hours ago.

(He places it carefully into the platinum box.)

Why give it to *me*, you ask?
I seem like an ordinary fellow.
Hygienic but not suspiciously so
Decent taste in footwear
Marginally fit on a good day
A sheen of competence akin to a mid-level executive

I am not an opera
I am not a threat
I'm a block of clay-shaped clay
I could even be you

So.

Why is it *me* holding this tiny precious box?

The simple answer?
Because I'm a patriot.

(He drops his trousers. Beneath, he wears American flag boxer shorts.)

I realize I have not given myself a proper introduction.
I'll do so via an oblique anecdote

These under-wears were a gift from a lady-friend
Who, it turns out, was too much lady
And not enough friend.

One pair from a set of five.
On the day she bought them
She had gotten her hair permed
She asked me to smell it
I did
pressed my face into her new curls
the chemicals burned my eyes, nose, and throat
I stayed there for a very long time

FBI MAN. *(cont.)* Burning
Because my loyalty to her was unwavering and bottomless
And the pain was but a small consequence.

(a beat)

Precisely forty-seven weeks after the perm
I was called away for my job
Far away

When I returned, I was a few parts short
A fingernail
A toe

(He removes his glasses.)

An eye.

(a beat)

I told my lady friend how I had spent my time away
But ladies don't like to hear such things
Ladies prefer to imagine their sojourning mates, oh,
Doused in sunshine
sipping fruity drinks…

Not suspended from ceilings
Beaten with chains
Shocked with batons
Or injected with drugs.

(He pulls up his trousers.)

My position often requires long bouts of reflection
Which, at this point, led me to two conclusions:

One:
As unwaveringly loyal as I was to my lady friend
I am precisely five hundred times more loyal to my job.

And two:

(He places his glasses back onto his head.)

I am bottomless.

FBI MAN. *(cont.) (He retrieves the tiny box again and peeks inside.)* Did I mention this is water-proof?

(The scene unfreezes and **FBI MAN** *continues to work.)*

*(***FBI MAN** *addresses the room.)*

Critters like hinges and ducts
Warm places
You got an animal, animals?
Rodents, rabbits, prarie dogs? Voles?

WILLIAM. No –

MELANIE. Unless you count the ones in Trevor's Art Project
But they're all dead so maybe they don't count?
I don't know what I'm talking about

FBI MAN. All right.

MELANIE. I was thinking about going on the President's hike
Or maybe the trolley museum
We could pick apples

WILLIAM. Trevor's allergic to apples

MELANIE. REALLY???

MELANIE.
Wow.
Wow.
Constricts?

WILLIAM.
Yes.
Her throat constricts

TREVOR. Imagine you're standing at the top of a steep hill
Wearing a pretty scarf
One end of the scarf is tied to a tractor in neutral
The other end is being pulled by someone who doesn't like you.
That's what it feels like.

MELANIE. (…)
And the film festival!
We need to get tickets early
This controversial movie about child prostitution in Cambodia

I'm not really interested but it sounds like something you might like

TREVOR. Well Melanie
It's been a real pleasure
I'm so happy you stopped by
You are a stunning conversationalist
And have flawless skin

MELANIE. You're leaving?

TREVOR. I need to get back to work

MELANIE. I brought blueberry crumble!
I made / it!

TREVOR. Goodnight everyone
Don't need me for a few hours

MELANIE. Okay.
We'll save you a piece

TREVOR. Thank you

*(***TREVOR** *exits. We see her in her studio, working, fretting.)*

(an odd beat)

WILLIAM. Hey Randy.
How's Dr. Fredrick working out?

(to **MELANIE***)*

He's the highest rated adolescent therapist in the count…

*(***RANDY** *exits, to his room, where he fight/dances.)*

(A beat as **MELANIE** *and* **WILLIAM** *eat.)*

WILLIAM. *(cont.)* Why did you come over, Melanie?

MELANIE. Crumble.
(…)
I wanted to get to know her a little better

WILLIAM. Why?

MELANIE. What do you mean, why? She's Trevor Pratt.

(beat)

Do the dead animals bother you, William?

(small beat)

WILLIAM. Of course not.

*(***WILLIAM** *freezes..)*

*(***FBI MAN** *pulls out a much-folded piece of paper from his wallet.)*

(He reads.)

FBI MAN. "Dear You."

"Hi. This is an asignment" – one "S" – "from Mrs. Katzler's 8th grade comp class. Otherwise I wouldn't be doing it.

"You're now 40. You are probably married and divorced and married again. You have a dog and a cat and a kid from each marriage, and they all hate you. You like your wife fine but she doesn't hump you anymore. You stopped smoking maybe, or you have a stash in your basement that you secretly." ?? "You are not a millionaire. But you're a boss of something lame. I think you drink. You having an affair with the secretary.

"You won't remember me, so here: I'm quiet. I'm taller than the other kids. I smoke. I eat alone. I like Jennifer Schultz and I touched her ass once. I have brown hair. I watch a lot of TV."

"Times up. Bye."

"Love,
you."

*(***FBI MAN** *folds up the paper again and smiles at us.)*

FBI MAN. *(cont.)* One of the myriad reasons I was hired for this job – "hired" being the loosest of terms in a rogue operation – is my ability to spelunk the deepest recesses of an individual's psyche.

I spent seven years in the sacred mountains of Japan

Eating soybean paste and loquats

Studying the ancient martial art of Kory

Re-acquainting myself with myself

They said they needed to ease me back in

Fine, I said
Just give me what you got
And I'll show you what I am.

(gestures to the folded paper)

I wrote this letter to myself at 13. I saved it not because I have a special misty-eyed nostalgia for the myopia of youth, but because I thought I might need to remind myself that I once aspired to mediocrity.

And why do I invoke it now, you ask?

Exhibit A.

(He gestures to the frozen **WILLIAM**.*)*

(Spotlight on the frozen **WILLIAM**.*)*

William Whiting
44
Art historian
Sweats a lot
Has a fondness for cardigans
Never learned to swim
Was not in the car when his first wife died
Drinks tea with milk and sugar
Broke his nose once walking into a wall
Enjoys sad songs
Buys used books
Thinks it would have been "cool" to be a knight
Wishes his car were cleaner
Thinks his butt is squeezable
Hates cellular phones

(Does an incredible, eerie impression of **WILLIAM**.*)*

"A little oaky, but
Red redwine you mek me feel so fine
Trevor's allergic to apples
Trevor's allergic to apples"

IT'S ON THE MIDTERM

*(**WILLIAM** appears at a podium, lecturing.)*

*(**FBI MAN** dresses into college student gear.)*

WILLIAM. And I hope you dug last week's lecture,
"Vito Acconci and the Aesthetics of Contemporary Narcissism".
It's on the mid-term!
Okey dokey smokies
Today we're gonna hit two controversial and "killer" artists
Guillermo Vargas and Trevor Pratt.
(…)
Guillermo Vargas
Costa Rican fella
Famous for tying a sick dog to a gallery wall
And allowing it to starve
Yikes, right?

Some say the dog was fed in off hours
Others say it scurried off in the night
But Vargas claimed it died from neglect
No one knows the truth, oooooh
But the *point* was to expose hypocrisy
Vargas accused those who expressed outrage at the dog's treatment
Of ignoring the same starving dog in the street
(…)

Question:
If we knew the dog had survived
Would it change the way we feel about the work?

Which brings us to my former student
Trevor Pratt

WILLIAM. *(cont.)* As many of you know, Trevor and I
(…)
I am Pratt's legal partner
Heretofore to be referred to in the third person

Pratt's exhibit "Impact" eight years ago
For which she acquired massive notoriety overnight

*(***WILLIAM** *gestures to a series of slides as he talks:)*

(Of a car accident, and maybe life-sized photos hanging in a gallery, along with a blow-up of a police report and some other related documents. They are beautiful. Vivid colors. Blood.)

Photographs of a dead woman
Killed in a head-on collision
Priorly related to Pratt's partner by marriage
Pratt enlarged the images
And hung them

(Photo of a woman's body on asphalt. She looks like roadkill.)

Where did she find them?
On a shelf in the closet of her professor's bedroom
(…)

*(***FBI MAN** *dons a baseball cap, a backpack, and a slouch.)*

(He raises his hand to ask a question.)

WILLIAM. Yes, in the front?

FBI MAN. Like, her professor gave her permission to use these photos
Why?

WILLIAM. Ah.
Excellent question
Was it an act of say, public mourning?
A poor decision in the throes of grief?
A fascination with the ethical implications?

WILLIAM. *(cont.)* Why not let us consider the larger question:
If we did not know the relationship of the artist to the subject
Would we still feel the emotional impact of the work?

I address this in my new book, actually.
(…)
which will be in stores.
(…)
at some point.

*(***FBI MAN** *raises his hand again.)*

WILLIAM. Ah, yes?

FBI MAN. Like, do you think he regrets the decision?

WILLIAM. We can only speculate upon how he feels…
Although I imagine he…
(…)
Picture the kind of man
Who butters toast every day
Married to a woman
Who butters toast every day
Two toast butterers
Sitting in a butter-colored kitchen
Breathing together
For fifteen years.

Then
One toast-butterer
Gone
The other… listless, shellshocked…

(Long beat. **FBI MAN** *changes this scene with his eye… lights? Music????)*

*(***WILLIAM** *crunches into himself.)*

WILLIAM. *(cont.)* And THEN

A tiny lanky creature reaches into the wreckage to touch him

Her hands get sliced by the shards

But she doesn't flinch

She isn't afraid of bleeding

Or even of pain

She is fear-less

Because she's the blade, you see

the blade fears nothing

It only cuts

I'd never been that close to a cutting-person

For me it was

she was…

Catechismic

I realized I could never butter toast again

I could only be cut.

(Sound stops. Lights normal.)

(We're back in the classroom. **WILLIAM** *straightens.)*

Um.

Theoretically speaking.

*(***FBI MAN** *raises his hand again.)*

WILLIAM. Yes?

FBI MAN. Is she working on anything right now?

WILLIAM. I will leave that to her people to divulge

FBI MAN. Aren't you her people?

(beat)

THINKING

*(**FBI MAN** is alone in his studio. Crappy smelly bed. Jammies. Gross unwashed coffee mug. Flickering bare bulb.)*

(He's thinking.)

FBI MAN. I'm just thinking.

(beat)

(He drinks from his coffee mug.)

This coffee has been sitting here for two days.
I could make a fresh pot
But I won't
I prefer stale bitter cold
I want to taste the rot
It helps me think

What kind of woman
I mean
It's just
(…)
You know?

I would say it's despicable
But I'm not here to judge
I'm here to probe, to sift, to root
To bore

You know I didn't even know she was famous
Until I googled her name.

I've been out of the loop.

However.
I'm no stranger to the capriciousness of the female mind.
My mother was a beauty queen
Miss University of Florida
I never saw her without make-up
Not even when she was drunk on the kitchen floor
Lying in the lap of someone who was not my father
While my brother and I cleaned up their vomit…

(a long long beat)

FBI MAN. *(cont.)* What was I saying?

*(***FBI MAN** *thinks, drinks more bad coffee, then turns on his monitors to watch the house.)*

(He watches an empty room for a little while. Music… We see his intense loneliness. Maybe he clips his toenails. Maybe he puts on lotion from a little blue jar. Maybe he does some crunches, some yoga stretches. It is a dance – the Sad Man Alone dance.)

(suddenly:)

*(***TREVOR***'s face appears on the screen.)*

TREVOR. Hello?
Exterminator?
Did you put a teeny tiny camera in my house?
A teeny tiny camera to watch what I'm doing?
Are you watching me right now?

*(***FBI MAN** *stops breathing a moment.)*

I'm used to it
All eyes on me
I thrive on it
I'm a fucking narcissist after all
I have an inflated sense of self-worth
But somehow I feel invisible anyway
You know that feeling?

FBI MAN. I do

TREVOR. You have an inflated sense of my worth too
Otherwise you wouldn't be watching me right now
Eating cereal
Scratching my ass
Getting drunk
Peeing
Let me know if I get boring

FBI MAN. I make no promises

TREVOR. I need to go now
I need to work
Will you be here when I come back?

FBI MAN. Yes

TREVOR. Good.
Though I suppose you should know
If you're looking for the hornet's nest
You won't find it here

(She exits.)

FBI MAN. Intriguing…
I suppose she wants me to follow her.

I don't "follow."
I lead.

*(***FBI MAN** *tries to sleep. Restless.)*

(Somewhere, elsewhere, **TREVOR** *is working, watching TV.)*

TV ANNOUNCER. And in local news
A student has died in the Berkshires this week
Twenty-one-year-old Benjamin Fizz
Apparently he contracted the same rare bacterial disease
Which claimed the life of young Callie Stewart.

(Photo of the **FRIZZY HAIRED MAN** *somewhere, looking goofy.)*

No need to panic, Berkshire residents.
But please stay out of the woods
And away from the squirrels
And do not touch your pets without gloves
And do not go hiking
Or fishing
Or swimming
Or hunting
Or birding
Or leaf-peeping

TV ANNOUNCER. *(cont.)* And do not play outdoor sports
And do not mow your lawn
Or trim your bushes
Or garden
Or weed-whack
Or rake
Or hoe
Until further notice

Thank you.

*(***TREVOR** *panics.)*

TREVOR. I am fucked.
I am fucked.
I am fucked.
I am fucked.
I am fucked.

(then:)

(The family appears for breakfast on the surveillance camera. **FBI MAN** *wakes up and watches.)*

THEY FED ME VEGGIE BOOTY

*(**WILLIAM** and **RANDY** sit at the table eating corn flakes.)*

*(**WILLIAM** wears pajamas and reads the paper.)*

*(**RANDY** retrieves a briefcase and opens it. Inside is a fork collection. He considers his choices, then reaches for a tiny shrimp fork. He spears some sausages with it.)*

(Ding-dong.)

*(**WILLIAM** answers.)*

*(**MELANIE** enters wearing a fine-looking track suit and carrying two small sacks of coffee grounds.)*

MELANIE. Morning, starshines!

WILLIAM. Melanie –

MELANIE. Did you notice the roads are so empty the past few days?

WILLIAM. It's the rabbit scare

MELANIE. Oh.

Good thing I don't pay any attention to *that* fluff!

People get so worked up over nothing, don't they?

(…)

So.

I was going for my morning walk and guess what I found?

A coffee roaster right next to the library!

It's new!

Isn't that FABULOUS?

I don't drink coffee but I know you and Trevor…

Oh!

Is she sleeping?

*(**TREVOR** walks in wearing her lab coat.)*

TREVOR. Ah, Melanie, it's you

For a second I thought I was hearing

The sound of a large inflatable latex raft

Being squeezed through a tiny metal hole

MELANIE. (…)
So!
I know it's early
I was just passing by on my walk
I brought over some beans.
I hope you have a grinder!
May I?

*(***MELANIE** *disappears into the kitchen.)*

*(***TREVOR** *pours herself a coffee and sits.)*

(Coffee grinding is heard. It hurts **FBI MAN***'s ears.)*

*(***MELANIE** *emerges again.)*

Well!
You're all ground up.
That's it I guess.
(…)

TREVOR. Would you like to stay for breakfast?

MELANIE. Oh no no no no
I was in the middle of my walk.
Eating defeats the purpose!
But maybe we could have tea soon?
Or pizza?
I don't really eat pizza
Or sandwiches?
Hundreds of options.
I mean we've been neighbors for so long
Let's start being neighborly!
Right William?

(beat)

WILLIAM. Thanks for the coffee Melanie
Very thoughtful

(beat)

MELANIE. Anyhoo.
Have a good morning!

(She exits.)

TREVOR. Think she's got an agenda knocking around that noggin
Or is it all impulse?

WILLIAM. Who knows.

(small beat)

You never came to bed

TREVOR. Sorry
I'm in hot pursuit

WILLIAM. That's cool, that's cool.
(…)
You sure there's nothing else?

TREVOR. Yeah, why?

WILLIAM. Dunno.
You seem a little
(…)

TREVOR. Um.

WILLIAM. Everything okay?

TREVOR. Yeah.
No.

WILLIAM. What is it?

TREVOR. Nothing.
Just some re-jiggering

WILLIAM. With the piece?

TREVOR. Yeah.
It's nothing.

WILLIAM. You sure?
Wanna talk it out?

TREVOR. I don't really know how, to be honest

WILLIAM. Just ramble.
I'll keep up

TREVOR. Okay, so.
There's an element to it
A very delicate, um
That um
Has the potential to get me into a lot of trouble

WILLIAM. With who?
The police?

FBI MAN. Or with me…

TREVOR. Um I don't know maybe

WILLIAM. Thrilling!
And controversial!
Oh! Is this about all the disease hysteria?
Are you addressing the cultural aggregation of paranoia in western consciousness?
Sorry I'll shut up.
Continue.

TREVOR. So my use of this "controversial" element
May or may not have been ah.
Leaked.

WILLIAM. So you're saying
you built in an ideological trip-wire
and it got tripped
so its function has been prematurely fulfilled

TREVOR. Yeah.

WILLIAM. Are you in any trouble?

TREVOR. I don't know yet.

WILLIAM. Hm.
Well
(…)
Could I just say something here?
Without knowing the details?
Maybe it's not about the piece itself, then
Maybe it's about the *context.*

TREVOR. Huh?

WILLIAM. The *event* of the piece exists in the past tense, right?
So now it's a conversation about what was *intended*
Rather than what it *is*
We're talking about *meaning* versus *being*
It's performative almost

*(***TREVOR** *blinks uncomprehendingly.* **WILLIAM** *becomes increasingly excited, geeking out.)*

So
The art IS the conversation
Or rather
The conversation is the art!
A bridge to further thinking!
Wow.
How elegant is *that?*

TREVOR. I sorta wish I could drive an auger down your neck
And crank it around

WILLIAM. I'm sorry
I know I'm not helpful
(…)
Just follow your instincts

RANDY. Are we gonna be famous again?

(small beat)

WILLIAM. Randy.

RANDY. Like last time

WILLIAM. You were six

RANDY. I remember
The lawn kids
The camcorders
They pitched tents
They fed me Veggie Booty
They took pictures of me
They took pictures of everything

*(**WILLIAM** and **TREVOR** exchange nauseated glances.)*

WILLIAM. It will be different this time

FBI MAN. Flashback: Fame Time.

*(**Something immediate here – flashback to fame-time, or maybe just a whirlwind moment with music that demonstrates the headiness and brutality of getting famous overnight – violent and out of control.)*

WILLIAM. *(cont.)* I need to shower
Good luck, muffin.

(He kisses **TREVOR**.*)*

And Randy
Kick ass at your audition

(He gives **RANDY** *an awkward thumbs up.)*

You're both superstars!

(He exits.)

*(**TREVOR** is alone with* **RANDY**.*)*

TREVOR. *(kind)*
Listen.
You need to be prepared.
This isn't a joke.
It *will* be different this time.

(small beat)

You're older now.
I want to know you can handle it.

Tell me you can handle it.

*(**RANDY** explodes with some angry loud song, maybe "Gravedancer" by Pig Destroyer.*[*]*)*

RANDY. *(sing-screaming)*
IN THIS TWO BEDROOM TOMB I'M SITTING ALL ALONE
WITH THE TELEVISION STATIC AND REFRIGERATOR DROOOOOOOONE

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*Please see Music Use Note on Page 3.

RANDY. *(cont.)* You don't scare me
I broke into your studio
Your stupid locks couldn't keep me out
Some freaky shit, man
Their eyes all bug

TREVOR. Did you touch anything?

RANDY. Sure
Fondled all the girl rabbits
Licked their little bunny twats.

(He mimes licking bunny twats. Then laughs. Then waits for the appropriate response from **TREVOR**. *Which he does not get.)*

Doesn't that make you wanna hurl?

TREVOR. Yes, Randy.
I want to hurl.

RANDY. Heh.

TREVOR. Let me ask you something.
How badly do you want to be famous?

RANDY. Enough to eat rabbit pussy

TREVOR. Enough to die?

(small beat)

RANDY. The fuck does that mean?

TREVOR. Just a question –

RANDY. Die?
Like –

TREVOR. *(carefully, touch of malice)* Because if you touched those animals
You're already dead.
But you're going to be more famous
than you could ever imagine.

*(***RANDY** *is slightly terrified.)*

RANDY. I –

TREVOR. Did
you
touch
them

*(***TREVOR** *and* **RANDY** *are quiet a moment. All we hear is the crunching of* **FBI MAN***'s popcorn.)*

RANDY. No.

TREVOR. What did you do?

RANDY. I looked through the window.

TREVOR. Say it again.

RANDY. I looked through the window.

TREVOR. Say it again.

RANDY. I looked through the window.

(beat)

I didn't look through the window.
I didn't do anything.

(He is about to cry.)

TREVOR. Okay.
You did very well.
You're a good little boy.
You've earned a treat.
I'll buy you some chocolate.
Would you like that?

*(***RANDY** *nods.)*

TREVOR. Okay.
Have another corn flake.

(They vanish.)

FBI MAN. Wow!
She's so mean!!
Ha!
It's nuts!
But is she mean enough to kill?

FBI MAN. *(cont.)* I was famous once

When I was eleven years old
Our neighbor shot his wife
I stood behind the crime scene tape
Local news rushed over
Woman with a microphone asked what I thought
(…)
What *I* thought?
No one had ever asked me that
I said the wife deserved it
They aired it
My mother was so proud

Years later
After my brother's suicide
The cameras came to *my* house

I smiled for them

(Time passes. Perhaps we see more of the Sad Man Alone dance.)

(He thinks. He does other things.)

*(***RANDY** *appears somewhere, still in his chicken leg, preparing for his audition.)*

FBI MAN. *(cont.)* That poor little mutant.

(Spotlight on **RANDY**. *Elaborate chicken dance.)*

Randy Whiting
14
No girlfriend
Has a fork collection
Could eat Doritos every meal
Lost his virginity last year
Collects vampire comics
Mother died when he was six
Likes to be clean
Ate a live beetle on a dare

Wishes his life were digital
Can't grow a mustache
Loves pizza bagels
Allergic to penicillin
Wishes he were famous

*(***RANDY** *starts dancing as before. He is dressed as a chicken leg.)*

(The **FBI MAN** *dresses as a chicken nugget.)*

RANDY. You no longer have to deny your chicken cravings just because they strike at night
We now have more than 750 locations throughout the country
offering a special Late Night menu
Satisfy those cravings with favorites like
Lil' Snackers, Crispy Strips, Pop-its-

(He stops dancing.)

(a beat)

RANDY. Look at me.
Look at me.
Look at me.
Look at me.

FBI MAN. Look at me.
Look at me.
Look at me.
Look at me.

WHAT ARE YOU ANYWAY

*(**RANDY** is sitting in a chair wearing his chicken leg. He is chatting to the **FBI MAN**, still dressed as a chicken nugget.)*

*(**FBI MAN** is sharing a bag of Doritoes with **RANDY**.)*

(They are at an audition.)

RANDY. Fuckin' people
Thanks dude

(long beat, with crunching)

What are you anyway, dude?

FBI MAN. A nugget

RANDY. Oh. I thought you were a thigh.

(Long beat. With crunching.)

I'm sweating balls
This is a shit gig
Fuckin' costume smells like cheese dick

*(**FBI MAN** stares at **RANDY** strangely.)*

You wanna fuck me or sumpthin'?

FBI MAN. You look so friggin' familiar, dawg
Can't figure it out

RANDY. What about now?

(Sudden screaming. And violent dancing.)

MOVE YOUR BODY TO THE PUNK BEAT
WHILE POUNDING YOUR OPPONENTS
TO A BLOODY PULP

THIS GRUESOME DANCE GAME COMBINES
STREET-STYLE FIGHTING WITH
HARDCORE MUSIC
FOR INTENSE COMPETITION
AND BLOODSHED LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN

FBI MAN. Holy shit!
That was you!
The "fan-mercial"

RANDY. Two hundred thousand hits, bro
I was like a YouTube phenomenon

FBI MAN. You wore bike chains
Black eyeliner
Spiked hair
And you had those contact lenses
Gave you crazy wolf eyes

RANDY. OOOOOOWWWWWWWWWWWW!
It's a dope fuckin' game, man
Ever play?

FBI MAN. Naw

RANDY. This gangster called Dwight
He's a MENACE, right
He owns everything
Total terrorist
And there's this chick, Ruby Sue
She's a cage dancer at this punk club
Basically he makes her his slave
She's like chained to the bar
And so it's your job to out-dance everyone in the club
But also, you're beating the shit out of them
Like crunk street fighting?

*(***RANDY** *shows a move.)*

Right?
Different moves get different points

*(***RANDY** *shows another move.)*

Fiddy!

FBI MAN. Sucka!

*(***RANDY** *shows another move.)*

A hundy!

FBI MAN. Taste it! Taste it!

*(***RANDY** *shows another move. And another. It is horribly violent.)*

RANDY. And there's blood everywhere
Like the walls are drenched
And your eyeball is hanging by its optic nerve
And then you get to Dwight
And you have to slice him from chin to nuts
And once you've done that
You have the option of eating his heart

FBI MAN. Tight, tight.
Sounds fucking rad

RANDY. I had to stop playing it at home
My step-mom has a thing about violence or whatever

FBI MAN. She's pretty whack?

RANDY. Um
Dunno
She's got issues

FBI MAN. Who doesn't

RANDY. Right?
You probably know her
She's like, actual-world famous

FBI MAN. Dude, who is she?

RANDY. Trevor Pratt

FBI MAN. I know that name, bro…

RANDY. She's an artist

FBI MAN. Heeey
Didn't she have those pix of the car accident?
With the dead chick?

(small beat)

RANDY. Yeah

FBI MAN. Oh snap
Dude, wasn't that your mom?

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