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SF PERUSALS

Dead City

A modern riff on Joyce's *Ulysses*

by **Sheila Callaghan**

A Samuel French Acting Edition

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First Produced in New York City by New Georges
Susan Bernfield, Artistic Director;
Sarah Cameron Sunde, Associate Director

DEAD CITY was commissioned by Playwrights Horizons with funds provided by The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Commissioning Program. It was developed with The Lark Theatre, New York City, 2003-2004, New Georges, New York City, 2004-2005 and The Public Theatre, New York City, 2005. It was produced by New Georges (Susan Bernfield, Artistic Director, Sarah Cameron Sunde, Associate Director) in New York City in the spring of 2006, and then subsequently by Dog and Pony Theatre in Chicago in the fall of 2006. The following is the New Georges cast.

JEWEL.....April Matthis
SAMANTHA.....Elizabeth Norment
GABRIEL, HANK, HOMELESS MAN, ET AL....Peter Rini
ROSALIND, GLORIA, A.A.M., ET AL....Shannon Burkett
NORA, BEATRICE, ET AL.....Rebecca Hart
VOICE, JACOB, CABBIE, ET AL.....Dan Illian
YOUNG MAN, ERIK, WAITER, ET AL.....Alfredo Narciso

CHARACTERS

SAMANTHA, female, mid-forties, optimistic, cheery, round, good-natured, attractive.

JEWEL, female, 22, undernourished, broody, bad teeth, a poet and intellectual.

GABRIEL/HANK/HOMELESS MAN/SAM ONE, male, mid forties, sexy-as-hell.

BEATRICE/WOMAN ONE/NORA/SAM TWO, female, mid-late twenties, bull-like, loud, hot shit.

HENDRA/ROSALIND/GLORIA/PIPER/A.A.M./SAM THREE, female, mid-thirties, sharp, together, very stylish.

VOICE/MAN ONE/JACOB/WOMAN TWO/SAM FOUR/CABBIE, male, 45-55m somewhat crusty and lecherous.

CHILD/YOUNG MAN/ERIK/WAITER/SAM FIVE, male, mid-twenties, an adorable boyish young man.

A stroke (/) marks the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue. When the stroke is not immediately followed by text, the next line should occur on the last syllable of the word before the slash—not a full overlap but a concise and intentioned interruption.

The **VOICE** should be miked the entire show.

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(*Dates, times, and settings will be projected above the stage, or on a screen, or on the proscenium wings, or on the floor, or wherever is most effective for viewing.*)

PROJECTED: June 17, 2004—The day after.

0. Samantha dreams of Jewel walking along the pedestrian path near the West Side Highway, towards Tribeca. 5:45am, sunrise.

(**SAMANTHA** *appears, dreaming of* **JEWEL**.)

(**JEWEL** *clutches a bag from McDonalds. She is slightly jaunty… she has been walking all night.*)

JEWEL. got my Patti Smith walk my Patti Smith knees
sausage-egg-n-cheese-sausage-egg-n-cheese-sausage-egg-n-cheese

(*She smells her bag of food desperately. She continues.*)

the Hudson choking up its morning rot
Momma stopped smoking but her lungs did not
sausage-egg-n-cheese-sausage-egg-n-cheese-sausage-egg-n-cheese

(*She smells her bag of food desperately once again. Sound of traffic… she has reached the West Side Highway.*)

…the west side highway is now laid across my lap and the crossing is all that lies between myself and this day's most absurd parade and if I could levitate I would choose this very moment but I cannot so I wait for the sign to stop blinking and I wrap my mind around a single image that continues to open into itself in an infinite stumble through space don't walk and it is forever changing shape in my mouth the brittle bones the paper hand don't walk the ashen breath rosary beads don't walk and the hunger in the pit of my core that

all the sausage-egg-and-cheeses in the five boroughs might be able to quench and she's…

JEWEL *tears into the McDonalds bag and jams an entire sausage egg and cheese into her mouth. She eats ravenously. She screams though a mouthful of food.*

GOOD MORNING, TRIBECA!!!

PROJECTED: June 16, 2004—The day before.

1. A spacious, tidy apartment on the Upper East Side. The day before. 8:00am.

(**SAMANTHA** *is preparing breakfast happily in her kitchen. She wears an expensive and tasteful black business suit. Pale orange light streams through the window.*)

(*Behind her in the bedroom,* **GABRIEL** *sleeps soundly on a luxurious satin-sheeted bed.*)

(*We hear a* **VOICE** *from the radio.*)

VOICE. You're listening to NYPR, New York Public Radio. It's 8AM and we have a sunny June morning outside, and the smell wafting off the East River is delightful. However, expect clouds and murkiness with patches of barometric gloom, right… about… now.

(*The light through the window turns grey.*)

In today's news, Samantha Blossom is preparing a breakfast tray for her lovely sleepy husband. He was out so late last night….

(**SAMANTHA** *butters toast.*)

SAMANTHA. Not too much I-Can't-Believe-It's-Not-Butter, you know how he is about his figure. Will he take tea or coffee? Tea for his vocal chords, coffee for his mood….

(**SAMANTHA** *pours coffee into a mug.*)

Ahhh. Fresh ground organic blend from the bulk coffee aisle…

(*She lifts the tray and begins to head toward the bedroom.*)

Oh, don't forget the mail. Baby likes to read his mail while he eats his gluten-free toast.

(**SAMANTHA** *places the tray back down and exits. She returns with two envelopes. She examines the first.*)

Elizabeth… nineteen next month…must email her…

(**SAMANTHA** *moves onto the next letter. The envelope is much different…*)

Mr. Gabriel Blossom. Embossed parchment. Long flourish on the G. Return address, A.A.M…

(*She smells the envelope.*)

Jasmine.

(**SAMANTHA** *freezes a moment, in a panic.* **GABRIEL** *calls from the bedroom sleepily.*)

GABRIEL. Sammy?

VOICE. Shake it off, woman…deep breath. Deliver that letter. Coffee, toast, tray, hands, feet, breathe. You're listening to NYPR, New York Public Radio. Support for NYPR comes from Hawk Pharmaceuticals, making chemical dependency a vital part of YOUR life/

(**SAMANTHA** *turns off the radio and enters the bedroom with the tray.* **GABRIEL** *raises his head. He wears a satin lavender beauty mask and silk pajamas. He pulls a pair of earplugs from his ears.*)

SAMANTHA. Good morning sleepy…

GABRIEL. Mm… time is it?

SAMANTHA. A little after eight…

(**SAMANTHA** *places the tray on the bed.*)

GABRIEL. Tea?

SAMANTHA. Coffee.

GABRIEL. Perfect.

(**GABRIEL** *begins eating.*)

SAMANTHA. How was the show?

GABRIEL. A drag. First the rain, couldn't get a cab to 44th to save our lives, subway was a mess, the F was running on the C track, got there forty-five minutes late and couldn't do sound check so the levels were completely off for the first number, had to stop and re-do levels in the middle of the set.

SAMANTHA. Oh dear...

GABRIEL. But it was a good crowd. Sober, engaged.... They listen harder at the expensive places…

(**GABRIEL** *begins to look through the letters.*)

GABRIEL (CONT.). Elizabeth. Nineteen next month, hm? Should write her a letter...

SAMANTHA. Why not shoot her off an email? You so rarely email her…

GABRIEL. Those tiny letters make me go cross-eyed…

SAMANTHA. You can change the font size, you know. In your browser preferences.

GABRIEL. The what?

SAMANTHA. In the drop down menu at the top of the screen, under appearance…

GABRIEL. I prefer ink and paper. It's more, it's more, like…

SAMANTHA. Utilitarian

GABRIEL. Personal.

SAMANTHA. Right.

(**SAMANTHA** *watches him as he looks at the other envelope.*)

SAMANTHA (CONT.). Who sent that one?

GABRIEL. A drag. First the rain, couldn't get a cab to 44th to save our lives, subway was a mess, the F was running on the C track, got there

SAMANTHA. (*quietly*) Who.

GABRIEL. forty-five minutes late and couldn't do sound check so the levels were completely off for the first number, had to stop and

SAMANTHA. (*more quietly*) Who.

GABRIEL. re-do levels middle of the dreamed last night I was spinning and I had many arms, all of them flailing, and my throat was closed so I couldn't sing, and I was losing my teeth, or rather a little boy was picking wildflowers in my mouth, and I thought it might have been Zach, and I wondered why he didn't want me to have teeth any more, and I thought you might know.

(*A beat.*)

GABRIEL (CONT.). He was four. He wore green overalls.

(**GABRIEL** *sips his coffee.*)

GABRIEL (CONT.). Good coffee.

SAMANTHA. Organic.

GABRIEL. Perfect.

(*A beat.* **SAMANTHA** *begins to leave.*)

GABRIEL. What time's that funeral in Queens?

SAMANTHA checks her watch.

SAMANTHA. Eleven.

GABRIEL. Doing anything after?

SAMANTHA. (*brightly*) Nora from Beau Monde dot com just texted me, so I may check in with her about the banner ads…

GABRIEL. Beau Monde dot com...

SAMANTHA. I've never actually been to their office... I've got some stats to show Queen Nora...

GABRIEL. And after?

SAMANTHA. I'll probably stop by the picture archive at the library, see if anything moves me…

GABRIEL. Going to the spa at all?

SAMANTHA. Could pop in for a quick wrap before the funeral…

GABRIEL. Would you pick up me up some glycerin pomade with the nettles and rosemary and comfrey root?

SAMANTHA. Comfrey root. No problem.

GABRIEL. Thank you.

(*A beat.*)

SAMANTHA. Well. Have a good day.

GABRIEL. You too. I love you.

SAMANTHA. You too.

(**SAMANTHA** *exits cheerfully.* **GABRIEL** *smells the second letter. He snuggles down in the bed to read it.*)

2. The corner of 73th Street and Lexington. 9:00 am.

(**SAMANTHA** *is trying to hail a cab. She holds a folded piece of paper. She is eating a bagel.*)

(*A* **YOUNG MAN** *appears, also trying to hail a cab. He has smoky eyes and obsidian hair. He is chewing on a large street pretzel. He chews slowly, staring at* **SAMANTHA**.)

(*They begin chewing in unison. They both take one step closer to each other. They chew. Then another step. They chew.*)

(**ROSALIND** *suddenly appears between them. She does not see the* **YOUNG MAN**.)

ROSALIND. Samantha Blossom.

SAMANTHA. Rosalind! How perfect to see you!

(*They air-kiss.*)

SAMANTHA (CONT.). How are you, darling?

ROSALIND. Fabulously wealthy, as always. Let's share a cab. Where are you off to?

SAMANTHA. 86th and Park. I was going to walk but it's so dreadfully hot…

(**SAMANTHA** *continues to peer over to the* **YOUNG MAN**, *who continues to chew slowly.*)

ROSALIND. Well Lord knows what possessed you to wear black in the middle of June

SAMANTHA. I have a funeral later.

ROSALIND. Oh fiddle, whose?

SAMANTHA. Hank Thorn. Gloria's husband.

ROSALIND. Oh, what a shame! He always had such good taste in shoes. Showed up to the Neiman Marcus luncheon last year in these divine leather Gravati's, dark brown with a double buckle...

SAMANTHA. I wonder if she'll bury him in the oxfords or the loafers.

ROSALIND. They never did get along, did they. Awful thing, death. Taxi!

(*They both hail. A taxi zooms by. The* **YOUNG MAN** *takes another step.* **SAMANTHA** *watches him.*)

ROSALIND (CONT.). You've had some death recently too, haven't you?

SAMANTHA. No darling, we've been quite lucky these days.

ROSALIND. Wasn't his name Hank as well?

SAMANTHA. Zachary. You know Elizabeth just finished her first year at Vassar, she adores it there

ROSALIND. What was he, three, four

SAMANTHA. He was newborn. You know she's spending the summer in Colorado as a counselor for Lacrosse camp

ROSALIND. Must have been what, three, four years ago/

SAMANTHA. (*firm*) Twenty-two. Twenty-two years ago.

ROSALIND. Death. It's an opiate. Numbs you to the world. Taxi!

(**JEWEL** *appears, brooding.*)

ROSALIND. Do you know the carpenter Jacob Jupiter?

SAMANTHA. He re-did our kitchen last April…. right before

his wife got sick, poor thing.

ROSALIND. Isn't that his notoriously gifted daughter who won that prestigious international poetry award at twelve for her epic about a dying moth?

SAMANTHA. Where

ROSALIND. Crossing the street and brooding

SAMANTHA. I believe you're right… she teaches somewhere around here, middle school I think…

ROSALIND. Not anymore… Scandalous. Got knocked up by the Principal, got fired two weeks later due to "excessive tardiness."

SAMANTHA. Delightful.

ROSALIND. Taxi!

(*They both hail. A taxi zooms by.* **JEWEL** *disappears. The* **YOUNG MAN** *takes another step.*)

ROSALIND (CONT.). So, what is that SCRUMPTIOUS little husband of yours up to these days? I've been seeing his name everywhere…

SAMANTHA. He has a new booking agent…

ROSALIND. Well, Jeremy and I MUST make one of his gigs this summer….

SAMANTHA. You MUST. He'd be DELIGHTED to see you there….

(**ROSALIND** *faces* **SAMANTHA** *squarely and makes a confiding gesture.*)

ROSALIND (CONT.). Samantha. I saw you through the window of that cafe last week, I was waving like a ninny outside but you were utterly spellbound by your computer

SAMANTHA. Well you know most of my work is, is internet-related…

(*The* **YOUNG MAN** *slowly approaches* **SAMANTHA** *as* **ROSALIND** *speaks. Something flashes behind and inside them all, like a siren light, or a glinting knife.* **ROSALIND** *changes somehow… she is in* **SAMANTHA***'s mind. Perhaps she speaks through a microphone…*)

ROSALIND. Chat rooms got you hooked, eh? Consorting with some fleshy young fawn with smoky eyes and dunes of obsidian hair? Of course that is your mind's eye doing the work of the blind sculptor… you know him only by his screen name. And his enigmatic use of punctuation. And his penchant for quoting postmodern French philosophers. But each time his cursor flashes hungrily for a reply you feel some sharp thing shatter in your loins. Hm? And that folded piece of paper in your hand is your latest and most salty discourse, printed out gingerly in the back of the cafe, its end marked with a most urgent plea… will you meet me, LadyEffloresce248? Will you meet me?

(*The* **YOUNG MAN** *has approached* **SAMANTHA**. *He slowly feeds her the last piece of his pretzel.*)

YOUNG MAN. Society functions as an expansive terrain designed to further extend the symbolic distance between the metaphoric and the authentic. Semicolon.

SAMANTHA. Brooklyn1448?

YOUNG MAN. If you want me to be.

SAMANTHA. You're almost exactly what I had in mind

YOUNG MAN. I'm not real, you know. But nothing is. Ellipsis…

SAMANTHA. Ah. You're wearing your Baudrillard today.

YOUNG MAN. Indeed.

SAMANTHA. Go on

YOUNG MAN. I am *reality for its own sake,* the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination.

SAMANTHA. I adore a literate man…

YOUNG MAN. I know…

SAMANTHA. Tell me how I must inhale such fumes

(*He raises his hand to her.*)

YOUNG MAN. Deconstruct your protected world of illusions. Drive your hand through the membrane of the hyper-real and feel my flesh pressed against the other side of your fears. Meet me tomorrow, at the place of your choosing. Will you meet me, LadyEffloresce248?

SAMANTHA. Will I…

YOUNG MAN. Will you. Period. Meet. Period. Me. Asterisk.

(*He holds his hand to her face but does not touch her.*)

(*A beat.* **ROSALIND** *changes back to normal.*)

ROSALIND. Ah, the internet. It's an opiate. Taxi!

(*Lights change.* **ROSALIND** *disappears.*)

3. The spa, 86th and Park. 9:15 am

(*Two women dressed in white spa uniforms begin to wrap her in a huge ream of foil from neck to feet.*)

(*Steam floods the room. Calming rainforest world-music is piped in, slightly scratchy; bad speakers.*)

(*The women's voices overlap slightly as they wrap.*)

WOMAN ONE. Toxins lift from your skin and alight the air like dust mites/

MAN ONE. Smoke-colored boys and their cerebral seductions/

WOMAN ONE. Rosalind Leech and her crude innuendos/

MAN ONE. Windows teeming with kitchy gifts and dead chickens hanging by their necks and/

WOMAN ONE. neon psychic signs and endless rows of leather pants and/

MAN ONE. Jackhammers cables scaffoldings traffic-cones SUV's/

WOMAN ONE. This is your narcotic/

MAN ONE. This is your religion/

WOMAN ONE. And now you are at the ultimate state of relaxation and amnesia.

(*The two women plop* **SAMANTHA** *on a relaxation cot and begin massaging her head and feet.*)

(*Soothing.*)

WOMAN ONE. Such glum occasions, funerals

MAN ONE. At least you'll be fresh all day

WOMAN ONE. You mustn't forget Gabriel's glycerin pomade

SAMANTHA. I won't

WOMAN ONE. His shape through the shower door

MAN ONE. No hot water left

WOMAN ONE. Baritone throated songs

MAN ONE. Towel on the floor

WOMAN ONE. Peeing while he cleans himself

MAN ONE. What is comfrey root?

(*They switch positions. Menacing.*)

WOMAN ONE. Did you wipe down the sink after you washed your face this morning?

MAN ONE. Did you put the coffee beans back in the freezer door?

WOMAN ONE. How tall do you imagine Brooklyn1448/

MAN ONE. Will you ride him in the grass/

WOMAN ONE. On a roof/

MAN ONE. In a bathtub/

WOMAN ONE. In his bed/

MAN ONE. In yours/

SAMANTHA. Yes/

WOMAN ONE. Will you cry afterwards like you did with the last one?

MAN ONE. Why are you so lonely

SAMANTHA. I don't know

WOMAN ONE. Just don't think of Gabriel's mistress/

MAN ONE. Just don't think of Gabriel's mistress/

WOMAN ONE. Just don't think of Gabriel's mis/tress

MAN ONE. Just don't think of his mis/tress

WOMAN ONE. Just don't think his/mistress

MAN ONE. His/mistress

WOMAN ONE. His

(*They switch positions. Soothing again.*)

MAN ONE. Blue corn chips, reindeer, an oboe.

(*The women are done.*)

(*Sweetly.*)

WOMAN ONE. Ninety dollars, please.

SAMANTHA pays the woman and exits.

4. The Cemetery of the Evergreens Queens. 11:00 am.

(**HANK** *lies dead as can be, downstage. He wears two different shoes and a watch on each wrist.*)

(**GLORIA** *is perched near* **HANK**. *She is nine months pregnant and struggling to hold herself together.* **JACOB** *is by her side.*)

(**SAMANTHA** *enters to pay her respects.*)

SAMANTHA. Gloria…

GLORIA. Samantha… thank you for coming… OH!

GLORIA receives a stabbing pain in the gut.

SAMANTHA. (*to Gloria*) You alright?

GLORIA. Just a little labor... Samantha, you know Jacob Jupiter, from Harmony Hardware…

SAMANTHA. Of course, Jacob re-did our kitchen last April.

GLORIA. He put in our deck AND sunroom

SAMANTHA. How are you, Jacob?

JACOB. Drunk.

SAMANTHA. Oh.

JACOB. Unemployed.

SAMANTHA. Oh.

JACOB. Visitin' the misses over yonda. Been a ye-ah since

we lost huh. Ain't easy, this death shit.

(*He offers* **SAMANTHA** *a hit off his whiskey.*)

JACOB (CONT.). Wild Turkey?

SAMANTHA. No thanks.

(**JACOB** *shrugs and takes a pull himself.* **SAMANTHA** *and* **GLORIA** *regard* **HANK**.)

SAMANTHA (CONT.). He looks peaceful.

GLORIA. I didn't know which watch to give him... obviously this is a special occasion so the Cellini Rolex is appropriate but then so is the TAG Heuer sports watch because he might need a chronometer/

SAMANTHA. Of course/

GLORIA. And I couldn't decide between the Oxfords or the loafers so I chose one of each/

HANK. Gloria, I look like a madman

GLORIA. Well maybe you should have laid out your burial outfit before you decided to hurl yourself into the East River!

(**GLORIA** *receives a stabbing labor pain in the gut. She gasps.*)

JACOB. Always a bitch when they ansuh back....

(**GLORIA***'s contractions are getting closer. She holds her belly in pain.*)

GLORIA. I should probably go give birth. I'll be at St. Vincents if anyone needs me...

SAMANTHA. Do you need me to take you?

GLORIA. I have a car waiting.

SAMANTHA. Alright. I'll stop by later...

GLORIA. Thanks....

(**GLORIA** *disappears, doubled over in pain.*)

(*A beat as* **JACOB** *and* **SAMANTHA** *silently pay their respects.*)

(**JACOB** *sings.*)

JACOB. Oohhhh. The bleached bones buried
The bleached bones buried
With the souls of the bruised
Oohhhh. The heave-ho's hurried
The heave ho's hurried
When a chump's abused

SAMANTHA. Lovely singing voice

JACOB. Thanks.

(*An awkward beat.*)

JACOB (CONT.). So... how's work?

SAMANTHA. Slow… Like everything else these days…

JACOB. Still doin' that… ah, internet, ah…

SAMANTHA. Consulting.

JACOB. Ah.

SAMANTHA. Marketing and branding, identity and research, business to business solutions…

JACOB. Right.

SAMANTHA. But the economy has not been kind to freelancers…

JACOB. But hubby sets you up nice…

SAMANTHA. We do all right…

JACOB. Been seein' his name everywhere lately…

SAMANTHA. He has a new booking agent.

JACOB. And how is yuh dawta?

SAMANTHA. Oh Elizabeth adores Vassar…

JACOB. Still into sports?

SAMANTHA. As always

JACOB. And Disney movies?

SAMANTHA. Posters everywhere

JACOB. And chasing boys

SAMANTHA. But not her studies

JACOB. Squeakin' by?

SAMANTHA. Barely….

JACOB. Not really the uh, thinkin' type…

SAMANTHA. Takes after her father

JACOB. You wouldn't wanna brooda, believe me… crack yuh pumper right open.

SAMANTHA. How *is* Jewel these days? I think I saw her on the street… she looked, ah…

JACOB. PPff. She don't talk to me. All jammed up inside huh head.

SAMANTHA. Oh...

JACOB. Ever since my wife passed last June.

SAMANTHA. Oh.

JACOB. Headed straight for the guttuh. Can't do a thing about it.

SAMANTHA. They do say writers are more sensitive than regular people…

JACOB. Huh motha's death bed? Lungs all rattlin', breathing huh last…. "pray for me" she says. Hand clutchin' huh beads. "Jewel, pray for yuh motha's soul". What'd Jewel do? NUTHIN. The hell kinda kid won't kneel at huh own motha's death bed?

SAMANTHA. I don't know…

JACOB. Straight for the guttuh. What can I do? Keep an eye on huh, will you?

SAMANTHA. Oh, I don't often run into/her, but

JACOB. You're a classy broad, Sammy. A good listener, you CARE 'bout folks, yuh don't let crap get you down

SAMANTHA. Well thank you Jacob/

JACOB. Even when people shit on you again and again. Good to the core, I tell you.

(*Small beat.*)

SAMANTHA. People whom?

JACOB. Uh. People, I dunno…

(*A beat.*)

JACOB (CONT.). Well. See ya.

(**JACOB** *staggers off.*)

(**SAMANTHA** *approaches the dead body.*)

SAMANTHA. To the core...

(**SAMANTHA** *checks her watch and realizes she's about to be late.*)

SAMANTHA (CONT.). Shoot.

(*She runs off. A gong sounds. A chorus of cheers is heard, "Way to go John!" and "Another sale, that's awesome!" and "you rock, Jenny!" etc.*)

5. An online culture/politics/news magazine office. Midtown. Around noon.

(**SAMANTHA** *is in an elevator. She is talking to herself.*)

SAMANTHA. She's on top of her game, that Samantha Blossom. Bold, creative, smart as a whip…

(*Elevator doors open. Much chaos, phones ringing,* **PEOPLE** *walking quickly.* **NORA** *is swirling in the middle of all the action, clearly delighting in it.* **NORA** *speaks with an accent [English, German, Irish– something European]*)

(**NORA** *is on the phone for the entire scene.*)

NORA. (*to the phone*) Right right right right—no wait, back up, strike that, wrong wrong wrong, DREADFUL actually—HOLD.

SAMANTHA. H-hello, am I interrupting/ anything

NORA. Well, a DELIGHTFUL and SURPRISING personal appearance from our beloved B-2-B Facilitatress, you know I don't get many consultants in from the physical realm these days, all is tick-tick-tick-tick-send…

SAMANTHA. You texted me this morning…

(*A gong sounds, along with cheering.*)

SAMANTHA (CONT.). What IS that?

NORA. Sales, baby.

(*Checks watch.*)

ALRIGHT CHILDREN, it's 12pm, the PITCHING HOUR!!! Slash it out!

(*Back to the phone.*)

Alright, go. Right, right, right, strike that. Better.

(**ERIK** *and* **PIPER** *run in, jockeying with* **SAMANTHA** *for* **NORA***'s attention.*)

SAMANTHA. (*fumbling with some files*) Ah. So, I drew up some, some demographics,/it seems most of your clients have a downtown

NORA. (*to phone*) Hold.

(*She points to* **ERIK.**)

You.

ERIK. (*manic, half-sung*) Okay OP-ed piece covering the paving of roads in the rain forest and OIL OIL OIL, and drilling in Alaska for fossil fuels as a fat-bottomed wife wearing baseball earrings hands out Mars Bars to children dying of leukemia!

NORA. (*points at* **PIPER**) Capital. You.

(**PIPER** *reads from her Blackberry.*)

PIPER. Okay…

Fuck the Michael Moore

Fuck the Lucy Liu

Fuck the Janet and Condee and Britney and Paris and Gwenyth and Oprah and Ashton and Lindsay and FU-FU-FUCK YOU!

NORA. (*pointing to* **ERIK** *and* **PIPER** *respectively*) You. Huzzah. You. Ta-ta.

(**ERIK**, *ecstatic, begins typing furiously.* **PIPER** *skulks off.*)

SAMANTHA. Anyway so you have three clients who/are

looking for something in the more dark kind of edgy

(*Gong. People shouting.*)

NORA (CONT.). SELL IT SELL IT SELL IT YOU GREEDY HORNETS…

SAMANTHA. Excuse me,/I have

NORA. (*at Samantha*) Hold.

(*To* **ERIK**.)

Now where the eff is our little Punk-rock pauper-poet? I thought you said she'd be coming in this week, at long last…

ERIK. She's on her way…

NORA. Right. And Bin Laden is tucked away in my purse, knitting Christmas socks. Samantha, you haven't happened upon her, have you?

SAMANTHA. Sorry, who?

NORA. The carpenter's daughter? Jewel Jupiter?

SAMANTHA. Oh, actually/I saw

NORA. Of course not. She's vanished. Along with all my tidy little dreams of an illustrious come-back… "She had disappeared into the ether. Superstar at twelve, washed up at thirteen. But wait! She is RESURRECTED, children…at Beau Monde dot com."

(**NORA** *leans into* **SAMANTHA** *confidentially.*)

NORA (CONT.). To be honest, B-2-B, her pitch was a bit bonkers…

SAMANTHA. Pardon?

NORA. A bit willy nilly, a bit Wally-Two-Tails… But I thought, HECK. This gal scored major on a fucking expiring moth, there must be SOME chunk of magic in her…

(*To the phone.*)

Go. Luscious. Perfect. EMANCIPATE THE GRAVITAS….

(*She exits, or else goes off to a corner to read a printout, or something.*)

SAMANTHA. What is she talking about?

ERIK. Jewel's pitch… for her article… it's about Patti Smith, like, how she uh… she channelled people on stage. Like dead French boy-poets.

SAMANTHA. Patti Smith?

ERIK. Yeah… The, the channeling is what Jewel is, um, you know… pitching... and the excess of energy, and.

(**JEWEL** *enters, slowly. She watches* **ERIK** *screwing up her pitch. No one sees her.*)

(*During the following. she reacts exaggeratedly and painfully to* **ERIK***'s botched attempt.*)

ERIK (CONT.). Um here's where I get a little woooeyy… It's about how like, you know how each of your experiences is burned into your synapses by electrical impulses, right? They're energy, energy doesn't just vanish, it fills the molecules around you… and what Jewel is trying to, um... so if you're sensitive to the air, like um Patti Smith, you can like open yourself to it, and um. Which isn't channeling actually, Jewel calls it... uhhhh... me- me- metempsychosis.

SAMANTHA. Metemspychosis?

ERIK. From the Greek? Meta and empsychos, to animate, and from en and psyche, of the soul, so so essentially, the uh, the passing of the soul at death into another body, either human or ah. Whatever.

(**NORA** *re-enters, still on her phone.*)

NORA. (*to Erik*) Zip it.
Alright Kyle, bring me home…

(*She notices* **JEWEL**.)

NORA. (*to the phone*) Hold.

(*She notices* **JEWEL**.)

NORA. Eureka! Wonders never cease…

SAMANTHA. Oh! You're the, the poet…

JEWEL. (*to* **SAMANTHA**) Do I know you?

SAMANTHA (CONT.). No, ah. You LOOK like a poet...

JEWEL. What exactly does a poet look like.

SAMANTHA. I don't– it was a joke/

JEWEL. Funny. Nora, I REALLY need an advance/on my piece…

NORA. (*to* **JEWEL**) What have you got for me, Triple P? I wither in anticipation…

JEWEL. I'm…

(*A painful beat.* **JEWEL** *takes out a piece of paper, folded. She unfolds it and tries to decipher what she wrote. Everyone leans in to hear.*)

(**JEWEL** *flips the paper over. She digs in her pocket again. She tries to read her notes. Etc.*)

NORA. Now am I to assume the flapping of your lower jaw signifies yet another woeful lack of copy?

JEWEL. I've got an outline/and I have some

NORA. Right.

(*To* **ERIK.**)

Why don't you go recreate and lubricate, I gotta cross town for a new-media gang-bang.

(**NORA** *begins collecting her things to leave.*)

JEWEL. Nora, please, I just lost my job at the school, I have no/rent money this month

NORA. Listen. I'm growing increasingly unconvinced that anyone gives a THUNK about your literary resurgence…

JEWEL. But I'm close, I've/got all this

NORA. You're OLD. And getting older by the nanosecond. Crackle crackle, Triple-P, or I'll snip your strings. Now scuttle. Scuttle scuttle. Where's my chapeau?

JEWEL. THIS MAKES SENSE! Patti makes sense! Spinning molecules…

NORA. (*to the phone*) Go. AHHGGKKK. WRONG. Horrific, repulsive, stunningly bad….

(*All ignore* **JEWEL** *except* **SAMANTHA**, *who doesn't quite know what to say.*)

ERIK. Come on, J…

JEWEL. (*to* **ERIK**) I'm fucked, Erik…

ERIK. I can help…

(**ERIK** *whips out a flask and flashes it for* **JEWEL**.)

JEWEL (CONT.). Right...

(*She grabs the flask. They exit.* **SAMANTHA** *watches them leave.*)

NORA. (*to the phone*) You are slaughtering me, Kyle. Begone.

(*She hangs up. To* **SAMANTHA**.)

Youth. They'll work for gummi worms, but BOY do they make a ruckus.

(**NORA** *is about to leave.*)

SAMANTHA. Sorry, did you want to meet about the banner ads?

NORA. Whatever gave you that impression?

SAMANTHA. You texted me this morning….

NORA. Ah, right, no, we're doing a piece on your better half at his gig this week and we need his new contact.

(*A tiny beat.*)

SAMANTHA. Amelia Avalon Mellon. She goes by her initials.

(**NORA** *scribbles this down.*)

NORA. A.A.M. Got it. Good work, Samantha Blossom.

(**NORA** *sniffs at* **SAMANTHA**.)

NORA (CONT.). You smell like paradise, what is that

(**SAMANTHA** *touches her breast pocket.*)

SAMANTHA. Comfrey root.

NORA. Fantastic. Now go over to Creative and chat up your banner ads. They will slash out MASSIVE.

(*She exits, leaving* **SAMANTHA** *alone.*)

(*The gong sounds again and again, chaos in the next room. This time it sounds like a massacre.*)

6. A stylish eating establishment. Midtown. 1:00 pm.

(**SAMANTHA** *is sitting at a table with a menu and a glass of water with a lemon in it. She glances at her watch.*)

(*Nice dinner music is heard, and occasionally, a jackhammer and buzz saw outside.*)

(*The* **VOICE** *sits at a nearby table, drinking tea.*)

VOICE. It's one pm and Samantha Blossom is STARVING. Funerals sure do make her hungry.

(**SAMANTHA** *peruses the menu.*)

VOICE (CONT.). Mmmm, tilapia with onion relish… but you just had fish yesterday. Too bad you can't go home to the leftovers in your fridge... SHE might be there…

SAMANTHA. (*brightly*) She'd better not TOUCH my linguine. I'll rip her highlights out one by one…

(**SAMANTHA** *gestures to the waiter. Sweetly.*)

Okay, whenever you're…

(*Jackhammer and buzz saw outside. They begin to sound like music. A beat.*)

SAMANTHA (CONT.). Excruciating service. All lips and necks and bad posture.

VOICE. The carpenter's daughter is thin like that. She's very poor, isn't she. You can see it in the teeth. You thought girls her age cared about their teeth. Twenty-

two. Zach's age. Do you suppose that's how artists live, Samantha? Three shades away from homeless? Whiskey instead of food? Their young heads whirling with wild ideas…

SAMANTHA. A dying moth…

(*A beat.*)

VOICE. You mustn't forget about the banner ads for Soho Tattoo… what kinds of symbols are the kids into these days? Say, didn't you see a girl on the subway yesterday with a raven on her belly, a black raven? You could call Elizabeth and ask her opinion… but Elizabeth wouldn't know, would she. Elizabeth would never get a tattoo… happy girls leave their bodies pure.

SAMANTHA. Does the carpenter's daughter have a tattoo?

VOICE. Look around you, Samantha… you're the only one here eating alone.

(**SAMANTHA** *waves at the waiter again. She smiles.*)

SAMANTHA. Yes, no, take your time…

(*Jackhammer and buzz saw music again.* **SAMANTHA** *squints outside.*)

VOICE. So much noise… Perhaps they'll dig up bones again… They dug up a brothel last month, didn't they… found dozens of tiny infant skeletons. You couldn't stop thinking about it at the time. But don't dwell on it now, Samantha. You have many other things to think about….

(**A.A.M.** *appears. She has beige pants, gold highlights, pointy shoes and big movie-star glasses. She is fabulous. Her cellphone is to her ear.*)

(**SAMANTHA** *is alarmed.*)

VOICE (CONT.). Beige pants. Gold highlights.

SAMANTHA. Oh God.

(**A.A.M.** *does not see* **SAMANTHA**. *She radiates a moment, nearly floating.*)

(**SAMANTHA** *hides behind her menu.*)

VOICE. Keep walking don't look through that window don't push through those doors you don't want to eat here you do not do not…

(**A.A.M.** *disappears.*)

(*Slowly,* **SAMANTHA** *moves the menu. She is visibly shaken.*)

VOICE. She's probably headed straight there.

SAMANTHA. Heels on my kitchen floor... knees on my mattress... Swiss manicure on my husband's...

(**WAITER** *appears. He is slim and lovely and walks with his hips first.*)

WAITER. Care to hear our lunch specials?

SAMANTHA. I'm not really hungry anymore, thanks. I'll just have a club soda—a glass of Shiraz. Please.

WAITER. House red okay?

SAMANTHA. A whiskey. On the rocks. What's your name?

7. The Mid-Manhattan Branch of the New York Public Library on Fifth Ave. 2:00 pm.

(**SAMANTHA** *is sitting at a table, pictures of ravens spread out before her. She holds them up to the light and examines them.*)

(**JEWEL** *and* **ERIK** *enter the stacks on the other side of her.* **SAMANTHA** *cannot see them, but we can. They are giggling and drinking from* **ERIK***'s flask.*)

(**SAMANTHA** *clears her throat loudly. They do not stop.*)

(**JEWEL** *retrieves a folder full of pictures.*)

JEWEL. Here they are… this one's my favorite…

(**ERIK** *and* **JEWEL** *begin kissing and taking each other's clothes off.*)

(**SAMANTHA** *is appalled, yet she listens.*)

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