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Ghost on Fire

Michael Weller

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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GHOST ON FIRE was first presented by the La Jolla Playhouse on August 11, 1985 with the following cast:

DANIEL RITTMAN	Peter Zapp
LAUREL	Hannah Cox
NEIL TOOMIE	William Russ
JULIA RITTMAN	Helen Shaver
TOM COOPER	Timothy Shelton
ADEN PALTZ	Edward Zang
RALPH	James Hurdle
MICHELLE-MARIE TOOMIE	Holly Hunter
GINA	Kary Lynn Vail
AVRAM SCHENKER	Jan Triska
SYLVESTRE	Brett Weir
NATHAN BERGER	Bill Cobbs
NURSE	Kary Lynn Vail

Directed by **Timothy Near**

Sets by Thomas Lynch; Costumes by Jennifer van Mayrhauser; Lighting by Kent Dorsey, Music by Michael S. Roth and Holly Near

GHOST ON FIRE opened at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago on January 19, 1987 with the following cast:

DANIEL RITTMAN	Joe Guzaldo
LAUREL	Dawn Arnemann
NEIL TOOMIE	J.T. Walsh
JULIA RITTMAN	Celia Weston
TOM COOPER	Peter Aylward
ADEN PALTZ	Richard Fire
RALPH	Robert Langdon-Lloyd
MICHELLE-MARIE TOOMIE	Becky Gelke
GINA	Carol Huston Messing
AVRAM SCHENKER	Sidney Maryska
SYLVESTRE	Ron Crawford
NATHAN BERGER	Bill Cobbs
NURSE	Carol Huston Messing

Directed by **Les Waters**

Sets by Loren Sherman; Costumes by Martin Pakledinaz; Lighting by Stephen Strawbridge.

GHOST ON FIRE was first presented in New York by the students at the T. Schreiber Studio. The cast was as follows:

DANIEL RITTMAN	Gordon MacDonald
LAUREL	Kendra Moyer
NEIL TOOMIE	Nelson Avidon
JULIA RITTMAN	Lillo Way
TOM COOPER	Bill Matthews
ADEN PALTZ	Max Miller
RALPH	Fredrick Hahn
MICHELLE-MARIE TOOMIE	Paige Pickens
GINA	Hatsuko O
AVRAM SCHENKER	Fredrick Hahn
SYLVESTRE	Gib Von Boch
NATHAN BERGER.....	William Charles Mitchell
NURSE	Shawn McGruder

Directed by **Joseph Furnari**

Asst. Direction & Stage Management by Alan Hofmanis; Sets by Joseph J. Egan; Lighting by Joe Saint; Costumes by Tracy M. Campbell; Sound Design by Joseph Furnari & Nelson Avidon; Technical Direction by Mark Gorman.

On March 12, 1998, the professional New York premiere of **GHOST ON FIRE** was presented by The Hypothetical Theatre Company, Inc., Amy Feinberg and Nelson Avidon, Producers, at The Irish Arts Center with the following cast:

DANIEL RITTMAN.....	Lee Sellars
LAUREL	Aasne Vigesaa
NEIL TOOMIE	Nelson Avidon
JULIA RITTMAN	Betsy Aidem
TOM COOPER	Ed Fry
ADEN PALTZ	Robert Bowen, Jr.
RALPH.....	William Wise
MICHELLE-MARIE TOOMIE	Dannah Chaifetz
GINA/NURSE	Tracy Appleton
AVRAM SCHENKER	Yuval Bulow
NATHAN BERGER	Bill Mitchell

Directed by **Amy Feinberg**

Stage management by Jack Halpin; Sets by Beowulf Boritt; Lighting by Violet Lee; Costumes by Rachel Gruer.

CHARACTERS

DANIEL RITTMAN — a teacher, late 30's

LAUREL — a graduate student, early 20's

NEIL TOOMIE — a camera operator, late 30's

JULIA RITTMAN — Dan's wife, mid-30's

TOM COOPER — soap opera star, late 30's

RALPH — dissolute English doctor/poet, 40's

ADEN PALTZ — philosopher, early 40's

MICHELLE-MARIE — Neil's wife, mid-20's

GINA — Avram's companion

AVRAM SCHENKER — Israeli millionaire, 40's

NATHAN BERGER — rural black man, mid-70's

NURSE — (may double with Gina)

ACT I

(DANIEL speaks to us, smoking a cigarette.)

DAN. My name is Dan Rittman, I'm a teacher here in New York. Picture this: one morning we wake up to absolute devastation—buildings down, power out, crops dead on the stem, the Apocalypse, whatever. Overnight, we've been reduced to a savage world of kill or be killed, eat or be eaten... no diversions, no escape to the gym or the movies, no more fancy problems. *(Beat.)* I have dreams about such a world, vivid dreams. I see my friends for the first time as they truly are: some cunning, some brave, some loyal and strong, others weak and treacherous, but always strikingly different from how they are in everyday waking life. And here's what's weird; sometimes I stop and catch myself longing, desperately longing for that world, like a great and welcome burning away of all the lies and evasions. It's terrifying. I mean, why should I harbor such a deep desire to see the only world I know utterly annihilated? I'm an ordinary person, like you, alive in this most pleasant of centuries—possibly the last—and like you, I want nothing more than to get through each day without hassles, doing as little harm as possible, minding my own business. *(Smiles.)* I have what I consider a highly civilized attitude toward life.

(*DAN's office—desk, books papers, movie cans, etc. LAUREL, a student, sits. DAN, script in hand, paces, then stops.*)

LAUREL. I'm listening.

DAN. You're looking out the window.

LAUREL. *And* I'm listening. I can do both at once.

DAN. Would you like to schedule this some other time?

LAUREL. What other time, it's the end of the school year.

DAN. Fine. (*Beat.*) Alexis falls in love with Ken. Ken is an older man. He's married. Alexis knows this—

LAUREL. Meaning what?

DAN. I'm summarizing what you wrote.

LAUREL. I know what I wrote, I wrote it.

DAN. Laurel, the object of the exercise here is to help you with your screenplay. You're welcome to reject everything I say, but as long as you're enrolled here and I am your advisor, you might as well listen. Students have actually been known to learn from this process.

LAUREL. Alexis falls in love with Ken. Ken is an older man. Alexis knows he's married. I'm listening.

DAN. Alexis and Ken have a fling—

LAUREL. A love affair. They fall in love.

DAN. The fall in love. (*Beat.*) But Ken won't leave his wife. Who by chance is flying to California on business. The plane crashes. She is killed. Ken is now free, but still he won't commit to Alexis. One day he tells her it's over—

LAUREL. And won't explain why.

DAN. Ken tells her good-bye. As he crosses the street, a car runs out of control and kills him. Alexis lays flowers on his grave. There are tears in her eyes. Fade. The End. Is that a fair synopsis of your story?

LAUREL. Yes, that is a fair synopsis of my story. So?

DAN. Don't you think it's just the tiniest bit arbitrary, killing off two of your main characters for no reason at all?

LAUREL. There's plenty of reason.

DAN. Yes, Alexis hurts, and she'd maybe like to see them both dead, but you aren't writing a spook movie about a girl with psychokinetic powers who makes people die when she doesn't get her way. It's a simple narrative about a love affair that doesn't work out, as many affairs tend not to, and that's what you have to show here.

LAUREL. It's my screenplay, I can do what I want with it.

DAN. Laurel... fiction has to reflect life, and life is never arbitrary; if you want to make stories, you have to find a unifying order beneath events so they unfold in a way that feels... well, right.

LAUREL. Okay. Then why *did* Ken leave Alexis? After all the incredible times they had together? After he told her she was the only one he'd ever been able to really talk to? Why do you think he'd just call it off one day, no explanation, nothing?

DAN. I'm not here to write your screenplay.

LAUREL. How long are you going to pretend you don't know what this movie is about?

DAN. This is classroom time.

LAUREL. Why did you walk away? Don't I even deserve an explanation?

Dan. (*Beat.*) Well, for one thing, my wife is not dead.

LAUREL. She would be if I had anything to do with it.

DAN. I assure you the feeling is mutual.

LAUREL. She knows?

DAN. That it happened, yes. Who it was, no.

LAUREL. So you talk to her but you won't talk to me.

DAN. There's no point, Laurel.

LAUREL. (*Tries new tactic.*) You've been daydreaming in class. They think maybe you're losing interest. I think it's something else that we could talk about.

DAN. No, Laurel, it's just me losing interest.

LAUREL. Oh, how smart and cool and above it all. Nothing gets to you, does it! Was I the first?

DAN. The first what, affair, student, student his year?

LAUREL. You're such an incredible shit.

DAN. So you've been saved from a fate worse than death. And yes, you were the first in all three categories. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to return to the thing I'm paid to do.

LAUREL. Oh fuck the script. It's stupid, I can't write, I can't do anything. I'm sick of this school. I'm getting out of here, don't worry—you won't have to put up with me next year.

DAN. Oh dear.

LAUREL. You find it amusing to watch your silly little fuckees go through their silly little agonies?

DAN. Listen to me! You show signs of real promise. You write excellent dialogue, interesting characters. All in all, you're one of the most promising students I've ever had, taught; sorry—taught.

LAUREL. What did I do wrong? No! I didn't say that. Fuck, I was going to be so grown up about all this, but it hurts, it just hurts. I miss you all the time.

DAN. Maybe we should assign you a different advisor next fall.

LAUREL. You're absurd, Dan. (*Laughs.*) You don't understand anything about anything, and you're supposed to be

my teacher. What a laugh!

DAN. But I am, you see, I am your teacher, and that's exactly the point. The two of us... it's absurd: starting over with someone who hasn't seen my ledger books. It's pointless, Laurel, and it's wrong, because I had a responsibility to you, to the school, to my wife. You'll understand one day. Don't quit school. Please, for your own sake, don't do that.

(NEIL TOOMIE peers around the office door. He wears mirror sunglasses, a Hawaiian shirt, and ankle-high Keds.)

NEIL. Greetings, peckerwood! Is major knowledge being exchanged here?

DAN. *(Beat.)* Toomie?

NEIL. Don't let me interrupt. In fact, I'll join in, see if we can make a memorable event happen, all three of us—?

LAUREL. *(Rises abruptly.)* Thank you for your help, Mr. Rittman. I'll try to make my story less arbitrary. Like life.

(LAUREL exits.)

NEIL. *(Towards door.)* Holy tamole, what a nubby little item. No wonder you teach. Well, Ritterfuck, ask me if it's good to be back.

DAN. What the hell are you doing here?

NEIL. Oh man, you are so New York, Danzer. All that head-on stuff. Ya already forget how we do it back in Hollyweird? "Hey, babe, you're looking good, been paying tennis, I like that tan"—you know, talk about how we look, admire the surfaces.

DAN. Unbelievable, you haven't changed a bit.

NEIL. Only more or less entirely, dickbrain, but how sharp of you not to notice. What brings me to the Big Macintosh? Movie of the Week for TV. A hard-hitting look at drug abuse. Or was it child abuse. I don't know, one of the "abuses." I haven't read the script yet, but the producer assures me it's gritty and real and uncompromising. In other words, another ninety minutes of prime-time toro poo-poo, your truly behind the lens, Toom the Zoom, cameraman *extraordinaire*.

DAN. Yeah, I've noticed your name on a lot of TV stuff lately. Things are happening for you, huh?

(NEIL shows DAN a snapshot from his wallet.)

NEIL. My house. My yard. My swimming pool, of course. My illegal alien, Rosita the maid. My kids, Timmy, Alec, and Jennifer, they speak perfect Spanish, get by in English.

DAN. Is there a wife in all this?

NEIL. Came with the house. Michelle-Marie. She'd be right about in there—what she calls the "viewing den."

DAN. Michelle-Marie? She's French?

NEIL. From the Bordeaux region of Texas. Met her on location, Taco Bell, express lane. Express romance, express marriage, express family. boom-boom-boom, three kinds in five years. You know us Catholics.

DAN. Well, looks like you got yourself a life.

NEIL. She's a good kid. Goes to church every week, puts up with me, God knows why, and He's dead so pick your reason. Mind like a prairie, Michelle: flat, endless expanse with one lone steer, grazing in the distance to symbolize a thought! *(Beat.)* So, this is where you spend your days now, eh?

DAN. This is where I spend part of my days.

NEIL. (*Smiles.*) Ah, that old Talmudic accuracy, that fine splitting of hairs, you dreadful Jew, you. How's Julia? Still the mad passion with you guys? She ever mention me?

DAN. Shit, I have to get to class. Listen, why don't we meet afterwards, grab a beer.

NEIL. Don't move a damn inch, scuzzbrain. I got a proposition you can't refuse.

DAN. We'll meet downstairs. An hour, tops.

NEIL. Gotta catch a train. Rhode Island. Visit the folks, you know. This'll only take a minute.

DAN. You have sixty seconds.

NEIL. (*Beat.*) Hey, Danny, it's good to see your ugly face again.

DAN. Fifty-nine, fifty-eight, fifty-seven...

NEIL. All right, all right, I found us a backer.

DAN. For what?

NEIL. For what? For a film, asshole, what else is there? And he wants you to direct.

DAN. I'm not a director.

NEIL. Straight, man, this is money in the hand. Avram Schenker's his name, he's one of your tribe too, but the real McSchwartz: Israeli... fertilizer king of the Negev, made melons bloom in the desert, something like that. He's filthy rich, green as grass, and he's dying to break into film.

DAN. Cut the hustle. Israelis don't just wander out of the desert and throw money in your face.

NEIL. He saw some of our early work, student film festival, Haifa University, that's where he went. Get this—the guest speaker was François Truffaut, and he called our films the most original and deeply American work he'd seen on over a decade, quote unquote. Avram was impressed.

DAN. Neil, you're talking like fifteen, sixteen years ago we made that stuff. When was this festival?

NEIL. Avram's our age, so must be fifteen, sixteen years ago. Israelis have a long memory, what can I tell you. They're still ragged out over Palestine and that was what, two thousand years back?

DAN. Forget it, Neil. I haven't made a film in fifteen years.

NEIL. Like those three features don't qualify, the last one five years ago, I shot it remember?

DAN. TV movies.

NEIL. That counts.

DAN. They were shit, Neil.

NEIL. But classy shit.

DAN. Shit is shit.

NEIL. Okay, if you want to get technical.

DAN. Look, I appreciate your thinking of me. I do. But I'm a teacher now. It's taken me five years to put that other life behind, and I'm not about to upset the balance, not now. Not ever.

NEIL. (*Beat.*) Okay, then just come with me for the weekend. You're the one he wants to meet. He's got this incredible estate in Maine, we'll blow some flake, do some jays, you tell him I'm hot, my script is dynamite... maybe he'll back me on my own. (*Beat.*) You owe me that much.

DAN. (*Pause.*) What's the film and make it quick, I'm already late for class.

NEIL. Ar-harr, first intelligent quesiton of the day. Are you ready for this? Major mysterioso opening! Shot: Highway, edge of industrial town, night, fleabag motel, one window lit, eerie music. (*Hums music.*) Slow zoom towards window. Cut inside: nervous balding guy with stethoscope. Girl

on bed with legs up, trembling with fear. Shot: doctor's bag, hand reaches in, pulls out shiny chromium instrument—

DAN. Toomie, just tell me the fucking story.

NEIL. You're hooked, right! Just setting it up. Cut outside. A girl screams. Hold. Window slides open, doctor leans out, garbage can right under window sill. Doctor tosses in bundle wrapped with newspaper. Lid back on can, window shut, lights off inside. Music louder. (*Hums loudly*) Suddenly the garbage can trembles. Lid slowly lifts... a tiny, unformed hand reaches out covered with specks of wet newspaper, music real loud now, head pops up—THE EMBRYO, IT'S ALIVE, TADAAAAH!

DAN. (*Beat.*) That's the movie?

NEIL. The grabber, buddy boy, the hookeroo. The rest is how the embryo terrorizes the town, lurking at bedroom windows on the lookout for couples making love without contraception and rips them to shreds with superhuman strength: *The Revenge of the Unborn*.

DAN. You can't be serious.

NEIL. Why not? Dynamite premise. Topical. Get the Pro-Choicers and Right-to-Lifers screaming bloody murder—zip, free publicity. Do some good visual effects; the embryo'll glow sort of milky white in the dark.

DAN. Neil, it's grotesque, it's the sickest thing I ever heard.

NEIL. (*Beaming.*) Ain't it dogshit! The kids'll eat it up, make an easy fifty million, and here's the beauty part: I own the script, so we're in for a cut of the gross. We'll be rolling in the green stuff, enough to make our very own film at last, and with complete artistic control. Our dream, Danny boy.

DAN. You are out of your mind, Toomie. You come bouncing in here after five years of total fucking silence and try to

hustle me with some ludicrous story about Jesus Christ—I've never heard such an incredibly twisted idea in my entire life—and you behave like we just had lunch together yesterday. I mean, what the hell is the matter with you!

NEIL. Aha, the sleeping beast is roused at last, and he is beautiful to behold. One weekend, Danzer. It won't shatter the whatever... delicate equilibrium of your precious existence underground.

DAN. (*Beat.*) Call me when you're back from Rhode Island, we'll talk over dinner. Julia's become quite a cook since... the time she wasn't such a good cook.

NEIL. I'd rather you didn't tell her I was here.

DAN. Why?

NEIL. You know, wait till the film's all set up, return in a blaze of glory. This is more of a you-and-me thing, okay?

DAN. I don't get it.

NEIL. Then walk in mystery, pal-o-mine, 'cause there's a whole shitload of stuff I still don't understand about things you did once upon a time, if you know what I mean, so let's let sleeping dogs lie. (*Pulls out an airline ticket.*) LaGuardia, 5:30 Friday, Eastern, Flight 219 to Bangor, Maine. If you're there, great; if not, no hard feelings, but may generations of your offspring enter the world crippled and mute.

(*NEIL starts to exit.*)

DAN. Neil, hang on. You're going to Rhode Island?

NEIL. Yeah.

DAN. To see your folks?

NEIL. My folks?

DAN. That's what you said. To visit your folks.

NEIL. (*Beat.*) I was speaking meta... thing, meta... you know, what's the fucking word? *Phor*, that's it, metaphorically. Lay flowers on the grave, a pilgrimage, peckerface, mid-voyage on spaceship Earth; time to recollect and pay tribute to things begun—

DAN. Neil?

NEIL. (*Covering up intense emotion.*) Sorry. Been happening lately. I get all... things just look so, I don't know, luminous. Like a gift. I'm gonna end up a very sentimental old man, I just know it.

(*NEIL exits. DAN stares after him, puzzled.*)

(*JULIA is naturally elegant, even in jeans and work-shirt. She talks to us.*)

JULIA. Older? Oh yes, older definitely, with a vengeance. You know, a little jiggle where the flesh used to be tight. My hands: the skin here (*shows the back of her hand*) stays white a little too long when you press it with your finger. Sometimes it feels like the only real thing happening to me, getting older. But it has its good points. Like how you finally start to know what you really want out of life (a) and that (b) you probably won't get it. I mean this in the good sense, recognizing limits, et cetera. You see, I'm one of those people who used to think, "My time on earth matters, I'll live among people who leave the world better than we found it." That was my dream. I hate waking up. I'm not what you call a "morning person," but sooner or later you have to face the day, right? Right. So, what I finally know I want, really and truly want... okay, here goes: to be surrounded by exquisite and beautiful

things all day long. Oriental rugs, genuine. Handmade terra cotta tiles. Antique furniture. A private white sand beach on the ocean. Vineyards would be nice. Oh, and a limousine with cool leather seats that always smell new. I don't tell Danny, of course. He'd just laugh and tell me I'm trying to fill some middle class spiritual void with pointless possessions. That's how he talks. Oh, I'm sorry, Danny is my husband. Well, it's a little complicated at the moment. He's a film director. Used to be; also complicated. Show me a life and I'll show you a mess, right? I didn't say my name, did I? Typical, Danny first, then me. I'm Julia. Julia Rittman. *(Pause.)* What was I about to say? There was something.

(DAN and JULIA's living room—upper West Side, New York. Comfortable, slightly bohemian, done on a small budget but with warmth and taste. New clothes in boxes and shopping bags on sofa. TOM stands in the front door, watching JULIA. He wears sunglasses and is extremely good-looking, like a soap opera star, perhaps.)

TOM. I got held up in traffic, it's insane out there. Is he here yet, what's his name?

JULIA. *(Frazzled.)* Don't say a word unless you like it. Not exactly what I asked for, but Antonio said leave it to him and so I did and it's awful, right?

TOM. I think it's very sexy.

JULIA. Wrong, wrong, wrong, it's supposed to be efficient and professional.

TOM. That's what I mean, it's very efficient and professional.

JULIA. Why did I just sit there and let him do this? Now I'll have to go back for the final interview with this whole new thing on my head and it'll look like I'm trying too hard. What about the jacket?

TOM. Take it easy, Julia. It's just a job. If you get, great, if you don't—

JULIA. I'll kill myself. Head international buyer for the entire jewelry department is not just a job, Tom, it's my destiny: spending millions and millions of dollars buying the best of the best for the best—oh shut up, Julia. You're right. It's just a job. How could they even take me seriously; part-time floor sales is all I've ever done before. It was a joke, the whole application—let me show the other jacket.

TOM. You really honest-to-God don't see it, do you, what an incredible woman you are: smart, energetic, fun to be with. They gotta be dying to hire you.

JULIA. You're such a sweetheart. Thanks for coming over. (*JULIA hugs him affectionately. TOM responds with a kiss. JULIA starts to yield, then turns her head away.*) I think maybe not.

TOM. (*Regrouping.*) So where's the genius?

JULIA. In Maine.

TOM. What's in Maine?

JULIA. Business. Something.

TOM. He's away for the weekend and didn't tell you what he's doing?

JULIA. Room to breathe. Private space. It's the new regime.

TOM. Bullshit.

JULIA. Change of subject, shaky ground.

TOM. (*Pause.*) When they shoot a criminal in China, they

send his family a bill for the bullet. That way he's punished for his crime, and his family's disgraced for bringing an evil person into the world. I read that last week. Been dying to share it with someone. Is this a safe topic?

JULIA. Much better. See how civilized we can be?

TOM. (*Unplanned.*) I love you, Julia.

JULIA. (*Beat.*) Well, I love you too; now drink your wine before it turns to vinegar.

TOM. I know, I know, I promised not to bring it up again, but... you and Dan are back together, and that's really great. And you and me are still whatever we are which I'm not sure what that is anymore except it's better than nothing, I guess, but... I'm sorry.

JULIA. What happens if the criminal's family refuses to pay the bill? (*Pause. TOM smiles. The doorbell.*) That must be him. Open the red and pour me a glass. Half a glass. (*JULIA opens the door to ADEN, a precise, diffident man. From behind him bursts RALPH, a hulking Yorkshireman who retains strong traces of his North Country accent.*) Ralph, what on earth are you doing here?

RALPH. I'm drunk. I'm quite drunk. But I'm not quite drunk enough. Is there any booze about?

JULIA. Sideboard, top right-hand door.

RALPH. In other words, get it yourself, Ralph. Good idea, good idea. (*Sees TOM.*) Do I know you from somewhere?

TOM. I don't think so.

RALPH. Odd, you look bloody familiar. You're not gay by any chance?

TOM. Sorry.

RALPH. No, no, no, don't apologize, neither am I, all that often, but the more possibilities in life, tra-la. Booze.

Boooooze! Lovely word, that.

(RALPH exits.)

ADEN. I'm so incredibly sorry about Ralph. He had, well, something of a setback today, and my wife felt he shouldn't be left on his own upstairs. Perhaps I should have called first, but well, frankly, I wasn't sure I'd ever again have the very good luck to arrange a meeting with—

JULIA. This is Aden Paltz. Aden, Tom Cooper.

ADEN. My God, I didn't introduce myself! It's just that I've never actually met a celebrity before and so I'm... did Julia explain?

TOM. You want to meet me, she didn't say why.

ADEN. No, she couldn't have told you that, really, because... well, because I didn't tell her, my God, your hair!

JULIA. What do you think?

ADEN. What do I think? Gosh. Well, I think it's just nothing like it used to be.

JULIA. Do you like how it looks?

ADEN. Well. It's a little bit as if you'd been sitting across the table from someone you know very, very well, and then you turn to them suddenly and they're Chinese. Actually, I do rather like it.

TOM. (*Politely.*) I have a rehearsal at two.

JULIA. (*To ADEN.*) Go on, it's all right.

ADEN. Ah. Yes. Well now, the thing is, I imagine people ask you for favors all the time. I mean, they even ask me, and I'm just a philosophy teacher, whereas you, on the other hand, are a television celebrity. Julia says you actually have a fan club!

TOM. Teenagers mostly. And bored housewives.

ADEN. Incredible! That's simply... well, now, I imagine these fans of yours don't spend a great deal of time thinking... about, say, certain things. Except, of course, they must think a great deal of the time about, well, you! So, if they were somehow to learn that you were very, very concerned about a particular subject... whales, for instance, then maybe they'd think they should be concerned about whales too. Julia says they actually write to ask where you buy your clothes.

TOM. Sometimes.

ADEN. Incredible! That's just never happened to me.

TOM. (*Beat.*) What did you actually, want?

ADEN. (*Cautiously.*) I don't know how you feel about nuclear weapons. You might think they're just the most incredibly wonderful things in the entire world!

TOM. What about 'em?

ADEN. (*Here goes.*) Next week, in Central Park, we're having a demonstration. I can't tell you how great it would be if you gave a speech. It needn't be a long speech. Just a few words to show your support for nuclear disarmament.

TOM. (*Beat.*) I see.

ADEN. This isn't somehow upsetting you, is it?

TOM. I'm afraid I can't help.

JULIA. Why not?

TOM. Are you in on this?

JULIA. Think what an effect you could have. If I were in your position—

TOM. Our sponsors get very upset when their actors become involved in political issues.

ADEN. My god, I never thought of it as a political issue. Does it really matter if we're blown to pieces by a Russian

bomb or an American bomb? If we're dead, we're dead. It seems more of a health issue.

TOM. Sorry, nothing personal, it's just in my contract.

ADEN. How incredibly depressing. I always imagined that to be so famous was a kind of wonderful freedom. Instead, I'm learning that it's more like a terrible prison. I mean, you don't do what you want to do; you have to do what they want you to do.

RALPH. (*Re-enters with whiskey.*) Are we done with the boring bit?

ADEN. I'm taking you upstairs, Ralph. My wife will make supper; you can stay with us tonight.

RALPH. Ah, so he said no, eh? Smarter than he looks. Oh face it, Aden, we're a race of children, all of us, great big grown-up children with great big grown-up toys. Forget nuclear weapons. Mere firecrackers to what we'll dream up one day: the Ultimate Toy! Mighty enough to shatter the earth in one fiery bang—only this one can't be tested, you see, because if it works, *finito la comedia*. So there it will sit in its dark chamber, gleaming and deadly beautiful, all us curious children pressed in the doorway staring at the red button aglow on its side, hypnotic, inviting, "push me, push me," it says. What child could resist? So for Christ's sake, let's at least have a good carry-on while the clock ticks down, eat, fuck, make merry—

JULIA. (*Furious.*) Shut up, Ralph, just shut up; it's not funny and we all know you don't mean it, so what's the point!

RALPH. That's what I love about you Yanks, such passion! At least if you lot push the button first, it'll be done with real feeling.

JULIA. I that's what you really think, why don't you just

go back to England and put a bullet through your head?!

RALPH. To kill oneself in England would be redundant, my dear.

ADEN. That's enough. (*Explaining.*) His poems were rejected by another publisher today.

RALPH. Yes, yes, I suppose it all comes down to that. Bloody depressing, really. (*Recalls.*) Ah, for you, my dear. (*Takes an envelope from his jacket pocket.*) No sign of allergy. I suspect generalized asthma, but to be safe I'll run a final series of tests next week, when I'm whole of mind and somewhat sober. Bugger 'ell, Doctor Ralph's not going to be sick, is he? Yes, he is. Excuse me.

(*RALPH exits.*)

ADEN. I just don't know what to say. I'm so very embarrassed. Julia, Mr. Cooper, you've been incredibly patient.

TOM. (*Fascinated.*) Is that guy, did he say he was a doctor?

ADEN. A very brilliant one. But professionally unwelcome. You see, he doesn't believe that doctors should take money except when offered.

(*RALPH reappears in the hallway arch quietly, unnoticed.*)

TOM. Why not?

RALPH. (*Comes forward.*) False alarm, thank Christ. And it's very simple, you see. When a man brings me his suffering, it seems in very poor taste, not mention positively ghoulish, to tell him, "Money, my friend, money first, then I'll ease your pain." Oh fuck, here it comes again. If you plan to talk about

me, please be good enough to wait until I return.

(RALPH re-exits.)

ADEN. I'd better see if he's... dear me.

(ADEN exits.)

JULIA. Well, it seemed like a good idea. You all right? Dinner tonight, my treat?

TOM. *(Muses.)* They come up on the street: "Brad Starkey, is that really you! Can I have your autograph? Is it true Roberta's leaving you for good this time?" I want to shake 'em by the collar and yell, "No, lady, I'm Tom Cooper, the actor, and Roberta's not my wife. It's fiction, lady, make-believe. Cant' you tell the difference?" But no, I play along, sign my name Brad Starkey. I'm not squawking, hell, I'm onto a good thing, but still, when you think about it, what a weird way to spend your life.

JULIA. The purple jacket. It's more me.

(Doorbell. JULIA, puzzled, rises.)

TOM. *(Oblivious.)* Five days a week. For six years.

(JULIA opens the door. MICHELLE-MARIE wedges inside.)

M-M. Julia? Julia Rittman?

JULIA. Can I help you.

M-M. I'm Michelle-Marie. May I please see Neil.

JULIA. Neil?

M-M. I'm not supposed to know he's here, is that the deal?

JULIA. I'm sorry, but I don't think I know you.

M-M. He didn't even mention me? Great! I'm his wife. You know, Michelle-Marie Toomie.

JULIA. Oh my God, Neil! You're Neil's wife!

M-M. Hey, you don't have to do a whole number here. American Express verified a charge from New York last Wednesday, so I figured it out all by my little ol' self.

JULIA. This is all starting to fit together. I have a feeling, in fact I'm quite sure, Neil is with my husband in Maine.

M-M. May I have the number, please.

JULIA. Danny didn't leave one. He said he'd call when he had a chance.

M-M. What'd Neil tell you—I was stupid or something? Never mind. Just tell him I'm at the HoJo Motel over on whatever it is, and I'd really appreciate it if he'd be in touch with me like real soon. It's pretty heavy duty, okay?

JULIA. I don't have the number. Why wouldn't I tell you if I did?

M-M. (*Pause.*) I'm just trying to figure out, you know, the next step kind of thing. Sorry, these pills. I'm a little whaddyacallit... (*spots TOM.*) Hi.

JULIA. Sorry... Tom Cooper.

TOM. How do you do.

M-M. Shitty, thanks. (*Revelation.*) Brad Starkey! Oh man, I must be hallucinating. It isn't the pills, is it? You are Brad Starkey!

TOM. In the flesh.

M-M. Wow, first day in New York! I haven't missed a show in five years hardly. But I cannot believe that whole business with Roberta walking out. So what if you drink a little; jiminy,

your kid died, that's a personal tragedy. My pa drank all his life *and* he beat up on Mama, but she didn't just up and slam the door in his face.

RALPH. (*Re-enters, heading for M-M.*) For me? How thoughtful of you all, (*To M-M.*) What's your name, love?

ADEN. (*Directly behind.*) Ralph, that's enough.

RALPH. (*Deflated.*) Forgive me, dear Julia. We really ought to make love one day. I'm awfully good, you know.

M-M. Would you mind if someone took a picture of us together, Mr. Starkey? No one'll ever believe me without I show 'em evidence.

TOM. Maybe I'll come with you guys, if that's okay. (*To JULIA.*) I'll call after rehearsal. Dinner. Movie.

(*Exit ADEN, RALPH and TOM.*)

M-M. Oh man, that was so great, I went right out of myself for a whole entire minute. How do you know Brad Starkey?

JULIA. Michelle..., may I ask... has something happened with Neil? What are you doing here?

M-M. You're just exactly as beautiful as he said. I thought he was trying to get me all hot and bothered is all. You know him and his stories: on and on about the wild old days, "Before Michelle," he calls it, I call it B.M.; you should see his face, boy, that really gets him.

JULIA. You've been crying, haven't you. Your eyes—

M-M. I could do with a cup of coffee. These pills, see...

JULIA. I'll be right back.

(*JULIA starts out.*)

M-M. Don't leave me alone.

JULIA. Michelle, what is going on?

(MICHELLE-MARIE takes a manilla envelope from her bag, unrolling it.)

M-M. He wouldn't listen. Kept putting it off and putting it off. I told him, I said, "Neil, Baby, just let 'em test you, it in't right, all these dizzy spells." But you know him, stubborn as a mule.

(She has removed a large negative which she holds out to JULIA.)

JULIA. *(Takes it.)* What's this?

M-M. The CAT scan. The lighter part's his skull, and all in there where it's dark, that's the tumor part. It's just about everywhere. That's why they can't operate. Malignant.

JULIA. Neil? Oh Jesus.

M-M. He didn't wait for the results. I really think he ought to know about this, don't you? Please, just give me the number.

(MICHELLE-MARIE talks to us, smoking a joint.)

M-M. When you do a lot of driving like I do... see, where we live everything is pretty far away from everything else *(Tokes.)*... like your house is here... and the mall is over there... school is over here—Timmy starts first grade next year; he's my firstborn, real, real smart *(Tokes.)*... oh, and tennis is like way across the valley, so when you ride the freeways a lot of hours every day you start to realize how much of your life you

spend being not really *at* somewhere but *between* somewhere and somewhere else. These pills, phew (*Tokes.*)... one every four hours, the guy said—one did nothing for this girl, it's three at a time or forget it, see; even at the very best of times I'm not what you'd call heavily into reality. Father Bonelli says it's not a good thing to run away from life and okay, maybe he's got a valid point, but on the other hand, what the heck does a priest know about life (*Tokes.*)... oh, and this woman, she lives next door and wears these like peasant blouses, Heidi in Sun City, it is too entirely bizarre... we have a great house... I think she makes pottery, yeah, that would explain the blouse, but her husband, what an unbelievable asshole—always grabbing my tush and going “Honk-honk, quality control, you pass,” you know the type; but he's our neighbor so what are you gonna do? Calls my husband “Ace”, “Hey, Ace, I sure love to grab your wife's ass.” I mean you don't go ‘round doing things like that when you're a grown-up... I am a mother of three, I am a grown-up for pity's sake (*Tokes.*)... the thing about reality, like how I was saying... sometimes it can be very, very painful, and who needs more pain; so it's Pilltown for me, and smokeville, and Powder City—”The Big Rock Candy Mountain.” My mama used to sing that. (*Beat.*) Mama. (*Beat.*) Without a little help your heart could burst with the pain (*Tokes.*)... and then like I'll just pull up to the place where I was driving to and presto, like magic, suddenly there I am: somewhere! You know what I'm saying?

(Housefront and patio, Maine—weathered, elegant facade of a gracious home. There is a small patch of sky visible to one side. GINA, topless, spreads lotion of her body. DAN,

across the patio, is trying to read a script. Enter AVRAM, a vigorous, commanding Israeli who is used to being the center of his world. He carries a silver tray with a dome cover.)

AVRAM. Sunshine in Maine and breakfast by the ocean, how fun! (*He sets down the tray.*) It is simply remarkable the energy I find since I stop smoking the cigarettes. I need only four hours of sleep in the night, and I make love for two hours without a rest, yes, Gina?

GINA. You're in great shape, hon.

AVRAM. And who played a very fine game of chess last night? You know, Daniel, in the end game you had me for a moment eating my fingers I was so nervous.

GINA. Nails, Av, fingernails, and it's biting, not eating.

AVRAM. Ach, this English, so many idioms. After six languages is such a confusion.

DAN. You played a pretty decent game yourself, Avram.

GINA. He let you win?

AVRAM. (*Smiles.*) Daniel earned his victory. Even when the situation looked hopeless he fought so hard. Always in this moment you learn the most about a man's character.

GINA. Avram's ranked ninety-fourth in the world, aren't you, pooch.

DAN. Don't I feel silly. I thought I'd won fair and square.

AVRAM. Ginelah, I don't like this without the top. Put it on please. (*GINA obeys simply.*) So, I think we must begin the breakfast without your very original friend. (*Lifting dome.*) What is this thing? (*Furious.*) Impossible! I do not put up with such a nonsense. (*To intercom:*) Sylvestre, are you there? Answer me!

VOICE. (*French accent, over speaker.*) *J'attend, monsieur.*

AVRAM. (*Yells into intercom.*) What did you make in this food? The eggs are scrambled hard like a stone and the toast is from this stupid white kinds of bread—are you trying to destroy on purpose my entire weekend with new friends? Wait in the kitchen. (*To the others:*) I will see to this myself. The man is an idiot. Next time I shoot him.

(*AVRAM starts off with the tray.*)

GINA. Fire him, hon, and take it easy, it's only breakfast.

AVRAM. Yes, and next is the lunch, and then the dinner, and before you can turn your back around, everything is completely going into the bathroom. (*He exits.*)

GINA. Down the toilet! (*To DAN:*) In case you hadn't noticed, food is a major event in Avram's life.

DAN. (*Pleasant.*) We are what we eat.

GINA. Give me a break.

(*GINA applies more lotion. DAN looks towards her, away from her, towards her.*)

DAN. Want a hand with that? Your back?

GINA. Sure. (*Indicating the rules.*) My back. And do it even, okay—I hate blobs. (*DAN applies lotion.*) So what's it like having a nervous breakdown?

DAN. (*Beat.*) Pardon me?

GINA. Sounds so great. Just unplug all the circuits and veg out.

DAN. How'd you know about that?

GINA. Whoops. Avram's not supposed to know, is that it?

DAN. I'm just surprised he knows *anything* about me. The whole week-end he hasn't said a word about film.

GINA. Don't let him fool you with that charming asshole routine. He notices everything, remembers everything, and he always, repeat, always gets what he wants. He's even killed people. It's true. Not like murder, just 'cause Israel, they all do it over there, no big deal: waste an Arab and go to lunch.

DAN. What other skeletons of mine did Avram dig out of the closet?

GINA. Let's see. Eleven films in school. Moved to L.A. with your friend. Some TV work. What else—oh yeah, tried to sell a movie script, you to direct, no luck. Then loony bin, back to New York and nothing since.

DAN. As in five years of teaching equals nothing. Interesting.

GINA. Do my shoulders. Mmmm, that feels great. You've got strong hands.

DAN. Thank you.

GINA. Where'd you find those people, they couldn't've been actors.

DAN. What people—(*Realizes.*)—You saw my films?

GINA. Only three. Avram had a screening last week, just him and me.

DAN. And the verdict?

GINA. Kind of weird, I thought. Just people talking at the camera, doing crazy things. At least they were short. Hey, that's not a putdown, only I couldn't figure out why you were so interested in all those losers.

DAN. I was told that's what American was crying out for: short, weird films about losers.

GINA. By the way, I'm not into sarcasm.

DAN. We had a notion back then that everyone's a miracle,

a world complete... and we had to make viewers pay attention to every life...

GINA. Right, like there's a trillion people in the world and I'm supposed to give 'em all equal time? No wonder you landed in the nuthouse.

DAN. *(Beat.)* Yes. *(Smiles.)* No wonder. *(Returns the lotion.)* All done.

GINA. Well, Danny, I wasn't sure at first, but I think I really like you, so here's the deal. Avram's just waiting to see when you'll bring up the film—everything is chess with him, tactics, he loves it. But I'll tell you this: once he's on your side he's unbelievably loyal. But he's also mad crazy jealous, so tell your hotshot friend to cool it with the nighttime fun and games or he'll blow the whole deal here.

DAN. Oh man, did Neil pull something?

GINA. That depends on what you call climbing into my bed naked at one in the morning. If you and Avram hadn't been downstairs playing chess, beaucoup heaviness would've come down, and we're talking probably extreme violence, okay.

(NEIL enters, striking a "nautical" pose, reciting with a lisp...)

NEIL. "I mutht go down to the thees again/to the lonely thee and thky/And all I ask ith a tall tall thip, and a thtar to thteer her by." *(Pause.)* Don't you love Longfellow? What a salty nautical dude he was. I wonder if he liked sailors?

GINA. *(She continues.)* " ... And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,/And a gray mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking.' That's not Longfellow, it's John Masfield, poet laureate of England. *(NEIL double takes. GINA explains flatly.)* I only look this way.

DAN. Neil.

NEIL. Dan.

DAN. Cool it, all right? I didn't come up here to waste a weekend, so just cool it altogether, or I call Julia and head home.

NEIL. I got the doors confused. Went out for a leak, thought I was back in my room, they all look the same in the dark; that's the truth, I swear.

(Enter AVRAM with the same tray as earlier.)

AVRAM. This time I make sure we have no mistakes. And, after breakfast, with such a nice sunshine, we go in my boat. Neil says you are an expert sailor, Daniel, and this is so lucky for me because I buy a new spinnaker sail and will need an extra hand on board to help me shake it up.

GINA. Down, sugar, shake it down means to try it out.

AVRAM. *(Hiding irritation.)* Isn't she simply fabulous!

DAN. How about if we talk about the film. I heard a rumor that's why we were up here.

NEIL. Hey, Danzer, what's the big rush? Chow into some breakfast, cop some rays, hit the high sils, hyzils, boat, go on the boat.

AVRAM. What would you like to know about the film, Daniel?

DAN. Are you for real about putting up the money, or are you just one of those hard-ons who gets off hanging around artists?

NEIL. What Danny means—

AVRAM. Be such a good girl and serve us, Ginelah.
(AVRAM gestures them to the table. GINA serves from side

stand.) You would like to know then if I am serious to give you money for this horrible film, yes?

GINA. (*Serving.*) Horror, Av. It's a horror film.

(*AVRAM claps his hands. GINA falls silent.*)

AVRAM. You know, in the Negev Desert I make thousands of acres to grow with food, but to own so much land, impossible. So I like very much in Maine I can own this estate. Only one thing I like not so much. The taxes. Many thousands every year. What to do, though, always this question. Soon we have here an election for County commissioner. This man then chooses the Board of Tax Assessors. If the Board is, what to say, friendly, my taxes stay where they are. Otherwise, up. So, if I help a man to become County Commissioner, perhaps he helps me in return, you see?

DAN. I'm lost. Weren't we just talking about film?

AVRAM. An acquaintance of mine, Mr. Gunther, is now slightly ahead in the polls, but the election will be so close. A short film of his better qualities... thirty seconds long, shall we say? This he can use to expose himself on the television.

DAN. You want us to make a campaign spot for your friend Mr. Gunther in order to keep your taxes down—is that what I'm hearing?

AVRAM. (*Beams.*) Exactly! You see, Ginelah, I never misjudge a man. I pay, of course. But more important, it gives you practice to direct after so many years away. Then we make your... horror film, and everyone shares the success!

DAN. Un-fucking-believable. Toomie, did you know this was the setup?

NEIL. (*Shrugs.*) But why not? Get the old moves back.

DAN. I'll tell you my problem here, Av. This Mr. Gunther friend of your, didn't I read in the local papers that he embezzled three-and-a-half million dollars from a pension fund?

AVRAM. (*Shrugs.*) This I don't know about.

DAN. And isn't he the one who advocates the electric chair for anyone who performs an abortion—which seems, I don't know, a little on the extreme side, don't you think?

AVRAM. In the film, better we don't say these things. More we show the good side. He was I think in the Marines. This is useful. (*Beat.*) Ah, you make a joke to me. Why is such a thing funny?

DAN. It's not Avram. It's not the least bit funny that you don't give a flying fuck what this Gunther character stands for as long as you get your taxes down. Or that someone, anyone, in this case me, might care how their work is used.

AVRAM. (*Puzzled.*) You need from me some help. I ask a small thing in return. This is only business, no?

DAN. Oh yes, very tidy. I need money, so I do a small favor to show I'm a good soldier, and in return I get to make your "horrible" film, and then in some mythical distant future, if you still happen to feel like it, finally I get to make the film I want to make. Well I'm sorry as hell, Avram, but how much shit do you expect a man to walk through before he's allowed to get home?

AVRAM. This depends I think how much he wants to get home. I have other projects we can discuss—

DAN. Save your breath. I've been here before. Yeah, I spent quite a few wonderful years trying to prove myself to people like you. I needed them. I don't anymore. May I call New York?

GINA. There's a phone in the atrium.

(DAN goes. A brief silence.)

AVRAM. Like a child, eh, Ginelah? Fascinating. I think we must make this film without him.

NEIL. No! (Beat.) You can't do that. It's my script.

AVRAM. Then you find the money.

NEIL. He's nervous is all. Been away from the action for a while. Trust me, Avram, when he's cooking, no one touches him. It's crazy he's not working. It's just evil.

AVRAM. Why is this so important to you?

NEIL. A tree in the forest, it falls, and everything's changed. (Beat.) It's important, okay, never mind why. I'll talk to him. (Flash.) Talk—?

AVRAM. It is for friendship, then? This is touching.

NEIL. (Spellbound.) Corn! That's the smell! Fresh baby corn! The breath, a young girl when you first kiss her. I was trying to tell Danny that smell... this is, Jesus, graduate school, first semester... we'd just met; three days and nights we walked, all over the city—Williamsburg, Red Hook up into Harlem... two minds, like that (Snaps fingers.), talking about everything under the sun: cars, music, politics, getting laid... Fresh baby corn! I couldn't find the way to describe her breath... my very first kiss. Anita Larsen. "Poodles," they called her. Lily of the Valley cologne. Tiny perfect little powder blue mohair titties in my hand. Silver crucifix right here. (Points to his sternum.) "Poodles"!

AVRAM. (Beat.) This is a kind of dog, no?

NEIL. (Sudden.) Yeah, me and Danny in the coffee shop, third morning, exhausted, talked out. He said, "Then what happened?" you know, like we were two characters in a story, and I said, without even thinking, "Then they made a movie."

Crazy. Neither of us knew dick about film—he was history, I was moral philosophy—but we took one look at each other and bango, that was it; ran outta there like a couple of lunatics, rented a cheapo camera, took off in my rusted-out VW, and headed west until we ran across Amelia Morgenwasser, living in a trailer park in Pennsylvania—

GINA. Amelia! We saw that one, remember, Av?

AVRAM. This very fat lady, yes.

NEIL. “Three hundred pounds of pink frenzy,” that was her business card.

GINA. And all the kites—unreal!

NEIL. Yeah, she adored kites. That string tied to her waist and trailing down: all her idea. Arms out, pink sequined G-string, huge moon-shaped lady teetering at the edge of the trailer roof pretending she was a kite—

GINA. On the *roof*, that’s how you did it! I swear it looked like she was up in the sky.

NEIL. She wanted to fly, we made her fly! God bless Amelia Mogendas... Monegas... Monga... (*Baffled.*) What the hell was her name?

DAN. (*Re-enters.*) Neil—

NEIL. What was her name, Danny, that first film with Amelia Morgenwasser, that’s it, Morgenwasser!

DAN. I just talked to Julia. Pack your stuff, Neil. We have to go now.

NEIL. (*Beat.*) What’s the matter? Something happen?

DAN. Just pack, Neil. It’s time to go home.

(*NEIL steps forward and talks to us.*)

NEIL. You know the most incredible thing about Jesus? Christ, I mean: that one. Forget the miracles, they don't prove a thing, except maybe he was divine, and who gives a damn about that anymore. After all, if he was Spirit, what's the big deal with all his suffering here on earth, right, 'cause he knows he's got himself a first-class ticket back to Cloud cuckooland when the job's done. But, if he was wholly mortal, and all he knew he had for certain was this little bit of time here below, then everything he did had to be its own reward. And still he chose to live his life as an example... a teacher! Think what he proved by that. Well, two things, really. One: that it's a damn hard thing to do. I mean, half the time they'll just nail your ass to a cross for your efforts... especially if you're careless about the crowd you run with. But the second thing, and this is the truly amazing part: he proved it can be done—to live your life according to some transcendent and eternal values, and with no hope of reward beyond the literal doing. *(Smiles.)* I wonder what my friends would say if they knew I spent so much time thinking about stuff like this. I never tell anyone. You never talk about what really matters.

(DAN and JULIA'S living room—present are DAN, JULIA, NEIL, MICHELLE-MARIE, and RALPH, who holds the CAT scan, then passes it to the others.)

RALPH. According to Dr. Forrestal, it's a rather unusual specimen.

NEIL. How long have I got?

M-M. Neil, don't say that.

RALPH. Days. Weeks. Months, perhaps. It's what they call "deep and inaccessible."

JULIA. Meaning what?

RALPH. Inoperable. It's the darkish flame-shaped area.

NEIL. This is weird. I don't feel a thing. No pain, no pressure.

JULIA. There has to be something we can do. You read all the time about these new techniques.

RALPH. There's the usual: Chemotherapy, radiation, interferon perhaps. It might slow the growth for a time.

JULIA. What about that doctor in Venezuela; we just saw a program about him—

RALPH. Julia, there won't be any miracles. I'm sorry, but you wanted an honest opinion.

NEIL. What am I in for? Is it painful? Tubes and shit? Will they drug me up till I don't even know my own name?

RALPH. I'm not very good at this. They teach you to stress the time left, we're all of us dying, etcetera. Rubbish. We can pretend it'll never come for us, but you can't any more. It's holding your hand. And soon it'll give a little squeeze. Then another. Sorry. Look, if you plan to spend time in the city, I can arrange for you to see Dr. Forrestal. He's remarkably unmercenary for a specialist. Lovely wife.

M-M. We won't be needing that, thanks anyway.

RALPH. Right, then, I'm off. Upstairs awaits a nubile young creature, she's all limbs and giggles. Hopefully of age. If you need me...

(RALPH starts out.)

NEIL. What would you do in my place?

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