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SF PERUSALS

Infinite Black Suitcase

by EM Lewis

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH

FOUNDED 1830

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INFINITE BLACK SUITCASE was first produced by Moving Arts in Los Angeles, CA from August 19 - 28, 2005. The workshop production was overseen by Artistic Director Paul Nicolai Stein, and directed by Michael David, Michael Shutt, Amy Thiel and Melissa Marie Thomas, with sets and lighting by Christopher Singleton, costumes by Ricky Lyle, dramaturgy by Michael David, and fight choreography by Ronnie Clark. The Production Stage Manager was Jackie Moses. The cast was as follows:

STAN KALINSKI . . . . . Dale Duko
"KAL" KALINSKI . . . . . Noah Schuffman
DONNA KALINSKI . . . . . Christel Joy Johnson
DAN HANLON . . . . . Brian Weir
STEPHEN MILLER . . . . . Jeremy Gabriel
JANIE KALINSKI . . . . . Christel Joy Johnson
JOE STRICKLIN . . . . . Ronnie Clark
KATIE LIU . . . . . Laura Buckles
TONY LIU . . . . . Harry Du Young
LIZ MILLER . . . . . Evie Hammer
FRANK HARPER . . . . . Jon Amirkhan
FATHER SEBASTIAN . . . . . Herman Poppe
APRIL MERRIWEATHER . . . . . Molly Levine
JAKE HARRISON . . . . . DG Bannon
ANNE HARRISON . . . . . Mary Borrell
MARY OLIVER . . . . . Daria Balling

INFINITE BLACK SUITCASE was subsequently produced by TheSpyAnts at the Lillian Theatre in Hollywood, CA on April 6, 2007. The performance was directed by Danny Parker-Lopes, with sets by David Fofi, lighting by Kimberly Negrete, costumes by Marina Mouhibian, and sound by Darcy Halsey. The Production Stage Managers were W. Shay Hammond and Madelynn Fattibene. The cast was as follows:

STAN KALINSKI . . . . . Ken Arquelio
"KAL" KALINSKI . . . . . Linc Hand
DONNA KALINSKI . . . . . Darcy Halsey
DAN HANLON . . . . . Eric Bunton
STEPHEN MILLER . . . . . Jerry Pappas
JANIE KALINSKI . . . . . Marina Mouhibian
JOE STRICKLIN . . . . . Ryan Churchill
KATIE LIU . . . . . Darcy Halsey
TONY LIU . . . . . Kim Estes
LIZ MILLER . . . . . Addi Gaash
FRANK HARPER . . . . . Hal Perry
FATHER SEBASTIAN . . . . . Bill J. Stevens
APRIL MERRIWEATHER . . . . . Dawn Merkel
JAKE HARRISON . . . . . Rich Williams
ANNE HARRISON . . . . . Anita Khanzadian
MARY OLIVER . . . . . Tammy Kaitz

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Infinite Black Suitcase takes place over the course of a single day in a single small town in Oregon, and we see events in the order they happen. Its characters can be grouped into the following five storylines:

STORYLINES:

Storyline 1: The Kalinskis

1. Porch Talk
3. Dress Black
7. Fragile
14. Geraniums

Storyline 2: Miller/Hanlon

2. And All the Roses Falling
6. Planting
9. Promises
13. Fourth Watch
14. Geraniums

Storyline 3: Liu/Stricklin

4. The Death of Ex
5. Gin
11. Six Bottles of Heineken After the Silverado
12. The Five Watches of the Night

Freestanding Scenes

8. The Last Four Things My Father Held Against Me
10. American Family

ORDER OF SCENES

1 - Porch Talk 11
2 - And All the Roses Falling 14
3 - Dress Black 20
4 - The Death of Ex 25
5 - Gin 31
6 - Planting 33
7 - Fragile 39
8 - The Last Four Things My Father Held Against Me 43
9 - Promises 50
10 - American Family 54
11 - Six Bottles of Heineken After the Silverado 63
12 - The Five Watches of the Night 70
13 - Fourth Watch 79
14 - Geraniums 83

CHARACTERS

STORYLINE 1

STAN KALINSKI (37) – An electrician. Polish Catholic. The dependable brother, who everybody leans on and calls first, ever since their parents died.

In scenes:

"Porch Talk"

"Dress Black"

"Fragile"

"KAL" KALINSKI (34) – Stan's brother. A truck driver with a local route.

In scenes:

"Porch Talk"

"Fragile"

"The Five Watches of the Night"

JANIE KALINSKI (34) – Stan's sister-in-law. A physical therapist and runner. Her husband has just died.

In scenes:

"Dress Black"

"Fragile"

"Geraniums"

***DONNA KALINSKI** (35) – Stan's wife. Works at home and takes care of their kids. (*Voice only – can be double-cast.)

In scenes:

"Porch Talk"

STORYLINE 2

DAN HANLON (28) An English professor at the local community college. Quiet and bookish. He is dying.

In scenes:

"And All the Roses Falling"

"Gin"

"Promises"

"Fourth Watch"

"Geraniums"

STEPHEN MILLER (32) A landscaper. Hard-working and smart-assed, most of the time. He's been with Dan for seven years.

In scenes:

"And All the Roses Falling"

"Planting"

"The Five Watches of the Night"

"Fourth Watch"

"Geraniums"

LIZ MILLER (29) An interior designer. Dressed with casual quirkiness. Stephen's sister.

In scenes:

"Planting"

"Promises"

STORYLINE 3

JOE STRICKLIN (38) Katie's ex-husband. They have three daughters – 17, 14 and 12 – who are with Katie and Tony during the week and Joe on the weekends. Joe works at Wilco Farmer's Co-Op (which sells everything from chicken feed to John Deere tractors). He likes to drink a couple beers in the evening and fiddle with car engines with old Stones albums playing in the background.

In scenes:

"The Death of Ex"

"Six Bottles of Heineken After the Silverado"

"The Five Watches of the Night"

KATIE LIU (38) Tony's wife, Joe's ex-wife. Not Asian American, but took Tony's name when they married eight years ago. She is dying. She was a cheerleader when she and Joe were in high school together, high-energy and confident, not ditzy. She's paler and thinner, now, and has lost her hair (her head is covered in a bright scarf).

In scenes:

"The Death of Ex"

"Gin"

TONY LIU (52) Katie's husband, Asian American. He's a sales manager at the paper mill. Plays golf, and goes to competitions around the state regularly. Steady and even-tempered (except with Joe, who can light his fuse like nobody he's ever met). His marriage to Katie is his first marriage.

In scenes:

"The Death of Ex"

"The Five Watches of the Night"

MARY OLIVER (42) She was married to her husband, Roger, for thirteen years, but he died eighteen months ago. She hasn't been on a date since she dated him.

In scenes:

"Six Bottles of Heineken After the Silverado"

FREESTANDING SCENES

FRANK HARPER (45) He's worked at the hardware store in town for twenty years. A guy's guy, but personable. Today, he's been drinking.

In scenes:

"The Last Four Things My Father Held Against Me"

"The Five Watches of the Night"

FATHER SEBASTIAN (70) A Catholic priest. He takes his job seriously, but has a sense of humor. Fond of potlucks and college basketball.

In scenes:

"The Last Four Things My Father Held Against Me"

JAKE HARRISON (65) A retired electrician, who preferred working to retirement.

In scenes:

"American Family"

ANNE HARRISON (60) Jake's second wife. Elegant, even in unelegant surroundings.

In scenes:

"American Family"

APRIL MERRIWEATHER (24) Assistant Manager at Belle Passi Cemetery – an old pioneer cemetery out in the country where being assistant manager means you only have to mow lawn every other week. Young and sincere.

In scenes:

"American Family"

SETTING

A small town in rural Oregon.
The set should be simple, with various areas on the stage representing the various locations, giving the sense of a single world in which the whole play takes place. The stage should have multiple entrance and exit points, allowing the characters to pass each other as they come and go. Props should be bright and specific, representational enough that the items listed, by themselves, put us in the place where each scene takes place.

TIME

A single day. Now.
The action of the play should be continuous – one scene shifting directly into the next, with light and sound and props indicating the various locations where the play takes place.

For all of my beloved dead.

Scene 1: PORCH TALK

(Eight o'clock in the morning.)

(Kitchen of the Kalinski house.)

(When the lights rise, **STAN KALINSKI**, *wearing a bathrobe, open over dark trousers and a T-shirt, is sitting on the floor, polishing shoes – his own dress shoes, his wife's black leather pumps, and different sizes of little girls' black patent leather dress shoes. A shoe polishing kit in an old cigar box is on the floor beside him.)*

(Someone pounds on the kitchen door.)

*(***STAN** *looks up, then wipes his hands on a rag.)*

(More pounding. Insistent.)

*(***STAN** *stands up and opens the door to his brother,* **KAL**, *who's wearing jeans and work boots, an old Levi jacket and gloves.)*

*(***STAN** *looks at* **KAL** *for a moment.)*

*(***KAL** *takes his gloves off, runs his hands through his hair.)*

DONNA. *(calling out from offstage, in the house)* Who is it, Stan?

STAN. *(yelling back over his shoulder)* Kal.

DONNA. *(offstage)* Hi, Kal.

KAL. Hey, Donna.

DONNA. *(offstage)* You gonna come with me an' the girls? It's okay.

KAL. No. No, I just gotta talk to Stan.

DONNA. *(offstage)* He's gonna pick up Janie.

(beat)

Megan, what is on your face? What did I tell you?

STAN. *(to* **KAL***)* I gotta get ready.

KAL. Yeah.

(clenches fist)

There's somethin' not right.

STAN. *(wearily)* Fuckin' A, Kal, we've been over this.

KAL. There's somethin' not right! I saw him on Thursday.

*(***STAN** *glances over his shoulder, into the house, then moves out onto the porch.)*

STAN. *(trying to keep his voice down)* You told me.

KAL. I'm fuckin' tellin' you! He came over. On Thursday, that was just...an' he helped me work on my bike.

STAN. An' you had three beers, an' he had two. I gotta get ready. She's been in the bathroom all morning.

KAL. Does that sound right to you? It was normal. It was totally normal. We had beers. We worked just like always.

STAN. Nothing is right.

KAL. That's what I'm saying.

STAN. That doesn't mean–

DONNA. *(offstage)* Stan, where are Chrissy's shoes? Her good shoes?

STAN. *(yelling back)* She wore 'em to school yesterday.

DONNA. *(offstage)* She's not supposed to wear her good shoes to school.

(Offstage, **MEGAN** *throws her socks into the toilet.)*

Megan! Why would you do that? Stan, will you please–

STAN. I gotta go. She's crazy this morning.

KAL. You don't give a shit. Your own brother–

STAN. I'm gonna hit you in the face.

KAL. Will you listen to me?

STAN. Just go, okay? Take a shower. We gotta be there at ten.

KAL. I'm not done.

STAN. We got things here, Kal. You gonna pick up Janie?

No. *(beat; turns to look in the box of shoes)* I gotta find Chrissy's shoes.

*(***KAL** *grabs hold of* **STAN***'s robe.)*

*(***STAN***'s eyes narrow.)*

STAN. What do you want?

KAL. I want–

STAN. *(overlapping; almost fiercely)* You know what I want?

*(***KAL** *looks down at his feet.)*

STAN. I want to get through today. Would you just–

KAL. I want to know when you saw him.

*(***STAN** *turns away from* **KAL***, but* **KAL** *keeps hold of* **STAN***'s robe.* **STAN** *turns back to* **KAL***.)*

STAN. I saw him...I saw him Thursday. Same as you. Okay?

KAL. Did he–

STAN. I don't know. Fuck. Jesus Christ, okay? He brought back my scroll saw. One he borrowed for doin' that new wall. That new wall he was gonna do.

KAL. The new wall.

STAN. Yeah. Months ago.

KAL. Yeah. Did he say–

STAN. He didn't say shit.

DONNA. *(offstage)* Stan?

*(***STAN** *looks back inside the house.)*

STAN. I gotta go. Be at the church by ten.

*(***STAN** *swipes his sleeve under his nose, then puts his hand on* **KAL***'s chest and pushes him back a step. Then he steps inside the house and closes the door.)*

(He picks up the box of shoes and exits.)

*(***KAL** *watches the door for a moment, then turns and exits.)*

(Lights.)

Scene 2: AND ALL THE ROSES FALLING

(Eight thirty in the morning.)

(Bethany Community Hospital. Dan's hospital room.)

*(***DAN** *sits in a hospital bed in a faded gown, propped up with pillows.)*

(He is pale. The inside of his arm and the inside of his wrist are bruised from IVs, although he doesn't currently have one in. He is holding a comb, but hasn't actually gotten up the energy to comb his hair yet.)

(As the lights shift, **DAN** *breathes out slowly, then reaches over and presses the call button that's clipped to his pillow. It leads to a red light, which begins to blink.)*

STEPHEN. *(offstage) (singing)* Oh, Danny boy – the pipes, the pipes are calling...

*(***DAN** *looks up as* **STEPHEN** *enters, singing without regard to key, carrying a blooming geranium. He sets it on the nightstand.)*

STEPHEN. I don't think I've ever known the rest of that song. Don't you dare give this one away. It's a rare species of Eupatorium purpureum.

*(***STEPHEN** *sits down on the edge of the bed beside* **DAN***, notices the comb, takes the comb out of* **DAN***'s hand, and combs* **DAN***'s hair.)*

DAN. If you'd seen Mrs. Gelson's face when she came back from her barium enema, you'd have given her flowers, too. And you're lying.

*(***STEPHEN** *pauses in his combing.)*

DAN. Even I recognize geraniums. Is she here yet?

STEPHEN. You said she said nine.

DAN. I look like hell.

STEPHEN. You said she was always exactly on time.

DAN. Like a machine.

STEPHEN. Then we've got–

(checks watch)

–twenty-six minutes before she gets here.

*(***STEPHEN** *leans over and kisses* **DAN**. **DAN** *kisses back, but then sighs and pushes* **STEPHEN** *away.)*

DAN. These gowns hide nothing. I'm not seeing my mother with a giant hard-on.

STEPHEN. *(pause)* You okay?

*(***DAN** *looks up at him.)*

Relatively speaking, I mean.

DAN. I have to shit.

STEPHEN. You want me to get someone?

DAN. I buzzed half an hour ago, but Maria's the only one working today. Julie called in again.

STEPHEN. I could follow Maria up and down the hall, swearing in three languages, until she gives up and comes.

DAN. You don't know three languages.

STEPHEN. Swearing, I do.

DAN. You barely know this language.

STEPHEN. *(tentatively)* I could help you. I've watched how they do it.

*(***DAN** *looks away.)*

DAN. I wish she wasn't coming.

STEPHEN. She wants to come.

DAN. She thinks she ought to come.

STEPHEN. Giving a damn a little bit is better than giving no damn at all.

DAN. I don't actually know if I agree with that.

STEPHEN. What's the worst that could happen?

DAN. Don't ever say that.

*(***DAN** *knocks three times on the nightstand to appease the gods.)*

STEPHEN. She's your mother.

DAN. Not all mothers are like your mother.

(beat)

I could shit this goddamn bed.

STEPHEN. She's your mother. She's seen it before.

DAN. Maybe you should...

STEPHEN. What?

*(***DAN** *lays back on his pillows again and turns his head away from* **STEPHEN**. **STEPHEN** *looks at him for a moment, then stands up and fiddles with the geranium, pulling off a dead leaf.)*

DAN. *(still turned away)* Did I ever tell you about my dog?

STEPHEN. Charlotte?

DAN. Before that. Strider. When we were in Port Townsend.

STEPHEN. He's not the one who chased the pig through Rodecap's fence...

DAN. That was Charlotte. Strider was my first dog.

STEPHEN. I named my first dog Spot, like any normal kid.

DAN. I should leave my books to the school library. You're never going to use them. Literary references go right past you.

STEPHEN. I do so use them. I put a large one under a begonia just this morning.

*(***DAN** *presses his hand to his gut and winces.)*

STEPHEN. Let me help you, goddamnit.

*(***STEPHEN** *reaches for* **DAN**, *but* **DAN** *pushes* **STEPHEN***'s hand away.)*

DAN. One day when I got home from school, Strider wasn't sitting on the front porch. He was always sitting on the front porch, you know? Three o'clock. Waiting for the bus to drop me off. He could tell time before I could.

(beat)

But he wasn't there that day. I walked all over, down Brush Creek Road all the way up to the Adventist Church, calling his name.

STEPHEN. Danny.

DAN. A week later, something started to smell. Under the house. Indian summer that year. Port Townsend's usually not that hot in September.

STEPHEN. Why are you telling me this?

*(***DAN** *looks down at his hands.)*

What, you want to go off someplace, under some house someplace, to die alone in the dark like your dog?

DAN. It would be easier than this.

STEPHEN. Fuck you! Fuck that, okay? When you were seven years old and your dog got run over, what did you want?

DAN. Strider just wanted to–

STEPHEN. You. What did you want? That little blond-headed kid, climbing off that big yellow bus?

(no answer)

STEPHEN. Don't you take one minute away from me, asshole. If that dog had been–

DAN. I hear you.

STEPHEN. –a bloody, broken, furry mess out in the fucking road, you still would've–

DAN. Stop it!

(They steam silently for a moment, then **DAN** *picks the comb up off the bedspread and throws it at* **STEPHEN**. **STEPHEN** *turns.)*

DAN. I don't want what you remember of me to be...

STEPHEN. All fucked up?

DAN. Yeah.

STEPHEN. Well...we don't always get what we want. I guess we've both just gotta suck it up.

(Pause. **STEPHEN** *rubs his hands over his face. He picks the comb up off* **DAN***'s bed and combs his hair with it.)*

STEPHEN. *(quieter, now)* Look at me. Your mother's coming and I look like shit.

DAN. You're staying? To meet her, I mean.

STEPHEN. What's the worst that could happen?

DAN. I told you not to say that.

STEPHEN. *(beat)* Do I look like the kind of guy who brings flowers and splits?

DAN. *(beat; finding a smile)* You look fine.

STEPHEN. Do I?

DAN. Like Steve McQueen in one of those movies with fast cars in it.

STEPHEN. That's how you like 'em, isn't it? Smart-mouthed and butch.

DAN. All evidence to the contrary.

STEPHEN. Your mother's going to fucking adore me. She's not going to be able to help herself. I'm going to thump you if you give away that geranium.

DAN. I make no promises. Mrs. Gelson might need her colon checked again.

(pause; takes a deep breath)

All right.

STEPHEN. All right, what?

DAN. If you're staying, make yourself useful.

(pause)

Maria's never going to get here in time and I refuse to shit in front of my mother at this late date.

*(***STEPHEN** *lifts the blanket off* **DAN***'s legs and slides his legs off the bed, gently, so that* **DAN** *is sitting on the edge. He takes a white cloth belt off the nightstand and ties it around* **DAN***'s waist, knotting it in front.)*

DAN. *(shakily)* How's the Schaeffer's yard coming?

*(***STEPHEN** *reaches his arms around* **DAN** *and grasps the belt.* **DAN** *holds onto* **STEPHEN***'s shoulders.* **STEPHEN** *lifts* **DAN** *to a standing position. They hold there for a moment while* **DAN** *gets his legs under him.)*

STEPHEN. They have no taste. All they want is pink azaleas.

DAN. What would you put in?

STEPHEN. Bush rosemary, white tulips. Borders of creeping thyme for the bees to buzz and hum in.

*(***DAN** *rests his head on* **STEPHEN***'s shoulder. After a moment,* **STEPHEN** *rests his cheek against* **DAN***'s hair.)*

DAN. That sounds nice. With the bees and all.

STEPHEN. The brilliant ones they never listen to.

*(***STEPHEN** *backs carefully toward the bathroom [off stage].* **DAN** *moves with him. It is almost like dancing.*

*(***STEPHEN** *begins to hum* Danny Boy *again as they exit.)*

(Lights.)

Scene 3: DRESS BLACK

(Nine o'clock in the morning.)

*(***JANIE KALINSKI***'s house – her bedroom.)*

(There is a bed, with several black dresses laid across it. An open window, a dresser. There is a telephone on the dresser, and a picture of **JANIE** *and her husband, John.)*

*(***JANIE** *sits in a rocking chair, wearing an old pair of sweats. She is drawn and pale and wears no make-up. She rocks back and forth with a rhythmic blankness.)*

(After a moment, someone knocks on the door of the house [off-stage]. Knock again. **JANIE** *does not react at all.)*

(After another moment, **JANIE***'s brother-in-law,* **STAN***, appears at the window. He is wearing a black suit and a white, pressed shirt, which isn't buttoned up all the way. A tie hangs loose around his neck.)*

*(***STAN** *sees* **JANIE***, and taps on the window.* **JANIE** *doesn't seem to hear.)*

*(***STAN** *pushes the window open the rest of the way.)*

STAN. Janie?

*(***JANIE** *continues to rock.)*

*(***STAN** *frowns. Then he looks at the window frame. Then he climbs in the window. He squats down beside* **JANIE***.)*

STAN. We gotta be over at the church at ten, Janie.

(When **JANIE** *doesn't react,* **STAN** *reaches over and takes her hand.)*

STAN. Jeez, you're freezing.

(rubs her hand in his)

You been up all night?

(beat)

STAN. Donna woulda stayed with you, but Chrissy's got a cold. They get sick, all they want is their Ma.

(beat)

You okay, Janie?

*(***STAN** *puts* **JANIE***'s hand back in her lap. She continues to rock.)*

STAN. Dumb question.

(runs hands through hair; glances at clock)

We gotta get goin' if we're gonna get to the church.

(beat)

Donna's bringin' the kids. Marty an' Pepper are meetin' us there.

*(***JANIE** *doesn't react.* **STAN** *moves a little, to ease his knees, then sits on the edge of the bed.)*

STAN. You want Pepper to come over an' help you get dressed?

*(***JANIE** *doesn't answer.* **STAN** *looks around and sees the phone, which is off the hook. He grabs it, presses the button a few times to get a dial tone, then dials. He listens to it ring…and ring…He hangs up.)*

STAN. Okay, so maybe they left already. I woulda been here earlier, but I–

*(***STAN** *closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. He takes a handkerchief out of his pocket and swipes it across his nose, then stands. He looks at the clock. He looks at the dresses on the bed.)*

STAN. Donna says she's sorry she didn't stay with you last night. She said for me to tell you. She said she's thinkin' about you. Everybody is. We got a hundred phone calls yesterday an' a dozen casseroles. Grand Central yesterday.

*(***STAN** *picks up a dark blue dress from the bed, then puts it back. He rifles through the clothes. He picks up a black dress, looks at it, then takes it off the hanger and shows it to* **JANIE***.)*

STAN. How 'bout this one? This okay?

*(***JANIE** *continues to rock.)*

STAN. Janie.

(beat)

Janie!

*(***JANIE** *continues to rock.)*

STAN. You gonna put this on or what?

(No answer.)

STAN. You gotta help me out here, okay?

(pause)

Shit.

*(***STAN** *throws the dress on the bed and goes back to the phone. He dials another number.)*

STAN. It's me.

(pause)

Yeah, I know where I'm s'posed to be. She's not dressed.

(pause)

Yeah, we're still at the house! I'm tellin' you, she's not dressed. I get here an' she's–

(pause)

I know.

(pause)

Yeah, I know! But she's–

(pause; sigh)

All right. I'll figure somethin'. Kiss the kids, okay?

(pause)

Me too you.

*(***STAN** *hangs up. He turns and looks at* **JANIE***, then gets the black dress off the bed. He puts his hands on the arms of the rocking chair to still its movement.)*

STAN. So maybe you need some help today, right? When I busted my back that time, Johnny…

*(***STAN** *pauses and looks down. Then he reaches in tentatively and pulls up on* **JANIE***'s sweatshirt. He pulls it over her head.)*

STAN. We're gonna get you there, okay? I'm just gonna help you get dressed a little. I help the kids when Donna's late for work sometimes.

*(***STAN** *unbuttons the dress, then slips it awkwardly over* **JANIE***'s head. He threads her arms through the arm holes.)*

STAN. You okay?

(beat)

I don't know what the fuck to say. I don't know.

(beat)

Okay. It's okay. Lift up, hon, all right?

*(***STAN** *eases the sweatpants off* **JANIE***.)*

(He goes over to the dresser and opens up a drawer. It isn't **JANIE***'s drawer.)*

(He puts his hand in the drawer for a moment, on his brother's clothes, then closes the drawer.)

(He opens a drawer on the other side of the dresser and takes out a pair of nylons, but throws them back after a moment. He finds a pair of black pumps under the dresser.)

STAN. We don't gotta dress up anyway, right? Who's gives a fuck how we look? I don't know why I got this fuckin' suit on. Donna laid it out for me an' ironed up the shirt this morning.

*(***STAN** *eases the black pumps onto* **JANIE***'s feet, looks at her a moment, then takes a little black comb out of his pocket and combs her hair back from her face with it.)*

(He looks at the clock.)

(He puts his hands under **JANIE***'s arms and lifts her to her feet. She sways a little, but stands.)*

STAN. Nobody's gonna start without us, right? So it's okay.

(beat)

It's okay.

*(***STAN** *swipes at his nose with the back of his hand, then turns his back to* **JANIE**. *He takes out his handkerchief and rubs it over his face.)*

*(***JANIE** *lifts her head a little. After a moment, she lifts her hand and puts it on* **STAN***'s shoulder.)*

*(***STAN** *turns toward her.)*

*(***JANIE***'s fingers walk, braille-like, to* **STAN***'s throat. Slowly, she buttons his shirt, then begins to tie his tie for him.)*

(Lights.)

Scene 4: THE DEATH OF EX

(Ten thirty in the morning.)

(Bethany Community Hospital. **KATIE***'s hospital room.)*

*(***KATIE** *has fallen asleep in her wheelchair.)*

*(***JOE** *peeks into the room, then comes in. He looks at* **KATIE** *for a bit from over by the door, like he's trying to memorize her, then goes over to her. He reaches out toward the back of her chair.* **TONY** *enters behind him.)*

TONY. *(low, harsh voice)* Don't touch that!

*(***JOE** *turns and glares at* **TONY***.)*

JOE. *(low voice)* I'm not hurting anything.

TONY. You're going to wake her up.

JOE. She wanted to talk.

TONY. She needs to rest.

JOE. She wouldn't have called me for nuthin', okay? She said she wanted to talk.

TONY. She hasn't been sleeping very well.

(They watch **KATIE** *sleep.* **TONY** *finally sits down in one of the chairs and, after a moment,* **JOE** *pulls the other a little bit away from* **TONY***'s and sits down too.)*

JOE. How did Amy's game go?

TONY. She said you were coming.

JOE. I couldn't get off! Jesus Christ.

TONY. Five to two.

JOE. They won?

TONY. Against.

JOE. They dumped off a load of feed at three thirty. I was bagging 'til seven.

*(***TONY** *folds his arms over his chest. They sit there for a moment.)*

JOE. *(meaning* **KATIE***)* How is she?

*(***TONY** *closes his eyes.* **KATIE** *opens hers.)*

KATIE. Peachy.

*(***TONY** *and* **JOE** *both get up.* **TONY** *goes to* **KATIE**, *pushes back her hair, then kisses her on the lips. She smiles at him.)*

KATIE. Hey, Joe.

*(***JOE** *goes to the other side of the bed.* **KATIE** *reaches for his hand, then tugs on it. He leans down and kisses her on the cheek.)*

JOE. How you doin' really, Katie?

TONY. How do you think?

KATIE. I was dreaming about going on a ferris wheel in the fog.

JOE. That sounds nice.

KATIE. I couldn't see where we were going. But I had a huge, fluffy, pink cone of cotton candy.

(beat)

What are you two arguing about now?

TONY. Nothing. Don't worry.

*(***KATIE** *reaches over and takes* **TONY***'s hand – she is holding both of their hands, now.)*

KATIE. I am worried.

TONY. *(trying to be reassuring)* It's going to be–

KATIE. *(sharply)* No, it isn't.

*(***TONY** *looks down at the floor.)*

JOE. You want me to wait outside, Katie?

KATIE. I want to talk about the girls.

*(***TONY** *looks up abruptly.)*

KATIE. *(to* **TONY***)* He's their father.

TONY. I've been–

KATIE. I know! And they love you to pieces, Tony, but we have to figure this out.

JOE. What are you talkin' about?

KATIE. The girls.

(pause)

Give me a glass of water.

*(***JOE** *starts to move, but* **TONY** *grabs the glass off the nightstand and exits into the bathroom.)*

*(***KATIE** *tugs on* **JOE***'s hand again, and he squats down beside her. He butts his hand against her chair.)*

JOE. Bars everywhere in this place. Looks like you're in jail, or something.

KATIE. Better that than rolling out on my ass in front of God and everybody.

JOE. You got a nice ass. Always did.

KATIE. Shut up. Tony's going to belt you one if you don't quit being an asshole.

JOE. Me being an asshole!

KATIE. Work going all right?

JOE. It's all right.

KATIE. *(pause)* You know we have to talk about the girls.

JOE. You're gonna be–

KATIE. No, I'm not. I'm not, Joe. All right?

JOE. *(pause)* They're my girls.

*(***TONY** *hears that as he comes back in. He hands the cup of water to* **KATIE***.)*

TONY. He wants to take them, doesn't he?

JOE. *(standing)* They're my girls!

TONY. Who's taken them to soccer practice for the last eight years?

JOE. I've been to every one of Amy's games this season except this one, and all of a sudden you're–

TONY. *(louder)* You don't have any idea what it's like to be a full-time father. You're weekends only, and it's not the same.

JOE. I've been here this whole time, not Siberia!

TONY. Who sits with Sarah every night and helps her with her algebra?

JOE. *(almost shouting)* You think you're the shit, don't ya?

TONY. I think I can provide–

JOE. Now we're back to the fuckin' money! Just because I don't ass-kiss my way up the food chain like some–

TONY. You can't even make your–

JOE. When's the last time I missed? Eight years and he's still got it right here.

(jabs at his temple)

What kind of–

TONY. You can't provide for them like I–

JOE. I'll take fourteen jobs before I let you have them, you yellow fucking bastard! You already took everything else.

*(***JOE** *glances down at* **KATIE***, then at the floor, then glares back up at* **TONY***.)*

(The two men stare at each other, still breathing hard from their shouting match.)

(After a moment, **TONY** *turns and goes to the window.)*

TONY. I talked to Kate Hall last week about it.

(pause)

Dave recommended her. She's a lawyer.

JOE. I could find a lawyer.

TONY. You don't have to.

JOE. What do you...What do you mean?

TONY. You have all the rights, Joe.

JOE. I...do...?

*(***JOE** *stares at* **TONY***'s back for another moment, then turns to* **KATIE***.)*

JOE. Sorry about the yelling.

KATIE. It's easier to take your yelling with morphine.

(beat)

It makes a whooshing sound in my veins when I press the little button they gave me.

JOE. You wanna sleep some more?

KATIE. We're not finished.

JOE. What, you want us to fight about some more stuff?

KATIE. You're all right with this?

TONY. *(turning; bitterly)* Of course he's all right with this.

KATIE. I'm talking to Joe. *(to* **JOE***)* You're going to take the girls full time?

JOE. I wish you weren't goin' anywhere, Katie.

KATIE. Wishes and horses, Joey. Is that what you want to do?

JOE. I don't know! Yeah. I don't know...

KATIE. Amy gets home at three.

JOE. Three.

KATIE. Someone should be there.

JOE. You know I don't get off 'til...Maybe...Melanie could–

TONY. She has cheerleading practice after school.

JOE. She looks just like her mom. I wanted to stuff her in the closet when I saw her in that little skirt and sweater they wear.

KATIE. What are we going to do about–

JOE. You tell me, Katie! Jesus Christ.

TONY. Don't talk to her that way!

JOE. *(to* **KATIE***)* You got a plan, right? You always got a plan, so just spit it out.

KATIE. I want you to split custody.

TONY. What?

KATIE. Just like we have been.

JOE. With you gone?

KATIE. Yes.

JOE. Why should I?

KATIE. Because it's what's best for Melanie, Sarah, and Amy. And if you don't want that, you don't deserve to have them.

*(***JOE** *clenches his fists, then turns and exits.)*

*(***TONY** *follows Joe to the doorway and leans his hand against it.)*

KATIE. Tony?

*(***TONY** *exits, without looking back.)*

*(***KATIE** *unlocks the wheels of her chair.)*

(Lights.)

Scene 5: GIN

(Eleven thirty in the morning.)

(Bethany Community Hospital. **DAN***'s hospital room.)*

*(***KATIE** *wheels herself into* **DAN***'s hospital room. She pulls a deck of cards out of a little hand-sewn pouch that's hooked to the arm of her chair.)*

*(***DAN** *is lying flat on his back, staring at the ceiling.)*

KATIE. How did it go with your mother?

(Silence.)

KATIE. I envy car crash people.

DAN. No, you don't.

KATIE. No. I don't. But I kind of do. Fast terrible is better than slow terrible.

(beat)

Do you want to play gin?

DAN. I want to drink gin.

KATIE. *(beat)* Have you ever gotten an IV from Julie? She see-sawed in and out with the needle for twenty minutes last time she did me. My whole arm was purple.

(beat)

You want to sit up?

DAN. No. *(pause)* I heard yelling.

KATIE. I'm trying to fix things.

(pause)

I should send off to Romania and buy them both wives with my life insurance policy.

(pause)

Do you ever think of your...of your...with someone else?

*(***DAN** *turns on his side, away from* **KATIE***.)*

KATIE. Are you sure you don't want to play gin?

(No answer.)

KATIE. I can't imagine either one of them with anyone but me. Tony likes his socks and underwear folded like they do in the Navy. He was never in the Navy himself, he just likes things a certain way.

(pause)

I've written letters for the girls, but I keep ripping them up. In the last one I wrote how to pick out cantaloupe and the secret to parallel parking and how to fold socks like the Navy. And it wasn't what I wanted to say to them at all.

*(***KATIE** *looks over at* **DAN**.*)*

(He doesn't move.)

(She throws a card at him.)

KATIE. *(frowns)* You're no help.

(pause; sharply)

I'm sick and I'm tired and all my hair has fallen out and it shouldn't be my job to take care of everybody.

(beat)

Goddamn it.

(pause; wistfully)

Car crash people.

(She turns her chair around and exits.)

(Lights.)

Scene 6: PLANTING

(Noon.)

(Belle Passi Cemetery.)

(Bright, crisp yellow sunlight and short shadows.)

*(***LIZ MILLER** *sits cross-legged on the grass, reading a battered paperback copy of* Leaves of Grass. *She glances at her watch, then turns the page and reads some more.)*

*(***STEPHEN** *walks toward her. He stops beside her and scritches her hair, then puts his hands in his pockets and looks around at the place.)*

*(***LIZ** *looks up at him and smiles. She puts the book in her bag.)*

LIZ. I was beginning to wonder about you. How'd it go?

STEPHEN. You never appreciate your parents until you meet other people's parents.

LIZ. That bad?

STEPHEN. Oh, yeah.

LIZ. You okay?

STEPHEN. Yeah.

(pause)

Okay, no.

LIZ. How's Danny?

STEPHEN. They didn't announce that he's going to make a miraculous recovery, so I guess we've still gotta do this.

LIZ. Stephen...

STEPHEN. I could feel his ribs through the hospital gown.

*(***LIZ** *looks down at her hands.)*

STEPHEN. He feels like shit. And I talked him into seeing his mother this morning, who really is like a machine, I can now report.

LIZ. We don't have to do this today.

STEPHEN. Sure we do.

*(***STEPHEN** *takes a bottle of whiskey out of the inside pocket of his jacket, unscrews the top, and takes a swig, then offers it to* **LIZ**.*)*

*(***LIZ** *wrinkles her nose, and doesn't reach for it.)*

STEPHEN. Dutch courage.

LIZ. *(gesturing vaguely)* Don't his parents want to help with the...

STEPHEN. She didn't even want to touch him. I don't think she's gonna care.

*(***STEPHEN** *takes another drink, then goes over to the place under the tree where there aren't any grave markers.)*

LIZ. No wonder he's so weird.

STEPHEN. That's a shitty thing to say.

LIZ. What? Just because he's dying, suddenly I can't talk about him behind his back?

*(***STEPHEN** *doesn't answer. He looks down at the dirt.)*

*(***LIZ** *takes a brochure out of her bag and holds it up.)*

LIZ. *(gently)* Here's the brochure. You want to look at the brochure?

*(***STEPHEN** *shakes his head, without looking back at her.)*

*(***LIZ** *lays the brochure on the ground.)*

LIZ. I love him, too. You know that.

STEPHEN. Yeah. I'm just...

(pause)

...tired. I shouldn't have talked him into seeing his mother.

LIZ. How could you know?

STEPHEN. You mean, besides him telling me?

*(***STEPHEN** *turns around slowly, seeing what the view is like in all directions. Then he lies down on the ground.)*

LIZ. *(frowning)* What are you doing?

STEPHEN. Checking out the view.

(pause)

I can't remember the last time we were here.

(pause; remembering)

Grandpa.

LIZ. Aunt Hazel for me. You were in Missouri.

(beat)

You shouldn't just lie there.

STEPHEN. I'd never been to a burial before. Funerals, but not–

LIZ. Dad tended to want to head straight to the reception.

STEPHEN. It's really quiet here.

(pause)

Where's Grandma and Grandpa?

LIZ. *(looking, then pointing)* Over there. I found them earlier.

(They are quiet for a moment. **LIZ** *shades her eyes and looks out.)*

STEPHEN. How much is it?

LIZ. Right here, you mean?

STEPHEN. How much?

LIZ. Six hundred dollars.

STEPHEN. A hundred dollars a foot.

(pause)

Six hundred dollars for what?

LIZ. Just the place. Everything else is on top.

STEPHEN. Yeah.

*(***STEPHEN** *throws his arm over his eyes to block the sun.)*

LIZ. You can plant things here. The girl said you can plant things in this part. I thought maybe you'd... you'd like that.

STEPHEN. I don't want the flat kind of marker. I don't like the idea of being mowed over.

LIZ. Okay.

(They're quiet again. **LIZ** *scootches closer to* **STEPHEN**. *She tugs on his pantleg.)*

LIZ. You don't have to do this today if you don't want to.

STEPHEN. Yeah. Yeah, I do. I gotta do this now, because I'm getting really tired. And he's gonna...

(beat)

I'm really fucking tired. And after...

(beat)

I just want there not to be anything else I've gotta do, you know? After, I just want to...I want to be able to stop.

LIZ. You can't just stop.

(Silence. **LIZ** *gets up on her knees.)*

LIZ. You can't just *stop* stop.

STEPHEN. Why not?

LIZ. You're still going to be alive.

(Silence.)

LIZ. Stephen?

STEPHEN. You can't blame me for not being thrilled at the prospect.

LIZ. You shouldn't say that!

STEPHEN. I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry.

LIZ. Did you mean it?

STEPHEN. No, I just said it for the hell of it.

LIZ. You're scaring me.

*(***STEPHEN** *sits up. He brushes leaves out of his hair.)*

STEPHEN. I'm sorry.

LIZ. You're just tired, right?

STEPHEN. Yeah.

LIZ. I can... help you with things. That would help, right?

STEPHEN. We take care of our own.

LIZ. What?

*(***STEPHEN** *turns his head away.)*

LIZ. Since when am I left out with the fucking Indians when you circle the wagons, Stephen?

STEPHEN. "Since when am I left out with the fucking Native Americans" would be more politically corr–

LIZ. *(interrupting)* Listen to me! Will you fucking listen to me?

STEPHEN. I hear you! I'm doing the best I can, okay? I don't know what the fuck I'm doing, but I'm doing the best I can!

LIZ. And you have to do it alone why? That's all I'm saying.

STEPHEN. I don't know.

LIZ. You don't have to do it all alone. You're gay, for God's sake. Since when do you gotta be so macho?

STEPHEN. Since always.

LIZ. Fuck.

*(***LIZ** *stares at* **STEPHEN** *for a moment, then bites her lip, and picks the cemetery brochure up off the ground.)*

LIZ. Give me your wallet.

STEPHEN. No.

LIZ. Give it to me.

*(***STEPHEN** *pulls his wallet out of his pocket and hands it to* **LIZ**.*)*

*(***LIZ** *opens it, rifles through the cash, then looks at the cards.)*

LIZ. These are good, right?

STEPHEN. What are you doing?

LIZ. Helping you. Even if you are dumb as a stump. Is this all right?

STEPHEN. What?

LIZ. *(gesturing)* This. This. Is this all right?

*(***STEPHEN** *puts his hands out beside him. He picks up a handful of dirt, looks at it, then lets it spill through his fingers.)*

STEPHEN. I don't want the flat kind of marker.

LIZ. I got it.

STEPHEN. I don't like the idea of being mowed over.

LIZ. No flat markers.

STEPHEN. *(pause)* Don't use the MasterCard. I maxed it out two months ago.

LIZ. No MasterCard.

STEPHEN. Use the American Express.

LIZ. *(finding card)* This one?

STEPHEN. *(laughing a little)* Business expenses.

LIZ. This isn't gardening.

STEPHEN. Planting. It's planting.

(pause)

Leave room on the marker for me, okay? But I don't want it here until...

*(***LIZ** *nods, turns toward the cemetery office, then turns around and comes back. She squats down and puts her arms around* **STEPHEN** *and holds onto him.)*

(Lights.)

Scene 7: FRAGILE

(Two o'clock in the afternoon.)

(The front room of the Kalinski house, which they never use.)

(A small table, covered with a crocheted doily, holds a coffee pot, cups and saucers, and a matching sugar bowl and creamer. Several old-fashioned, straight-back chairs are set around.)

*(***STAN** *leans against the wall, holding a small, delicate cup and saucer carefully in his hands. He is still wearing his dark suit but the tie around his neck has been pulled loose, and the top button of his shirt is undone.)*

*(***JANIE** *sits near him, staring at the floor.)*

*(***KAL** *pushes into the room. He is wearing the same clothes as before. He looks around, looks at* **JANIE***, then goes over by* **STAN***.)*

*(***STAN** *watches him approach.)*

STAN. Where were you?

KAL. I came in.

STAN. We waited half an hour.

KAL. There's somethin' not right about–

STAN. *(glances at* **JANIE***)* Keep your voice down!

KAL. I wanna talk to the police.

*(***STAN** *grabs* **KAL***'s arm and pulls him away from* **JANIE***, almost losing his cup and saucer in the process.)*

STAN. You say that in fronta her.

KAL. I got questions.

STAN. What?

*(***KAL** *stuffs his hands in his pockets. They're quiet for a moment.)*

KAL. When did you see him?

STAN. Thursday night.

KAL. Thursday night?

STAN. I told you. He brought back my scroll saw. He wouldn't come in the house.

KAL. What did he say?

STAN. *(pause; slowly)* He wouldn't come in the house. We were havin' fish sticks, like it's fuckin' Lent, an' I said, "I wouldn't come in for that either."

(They are silent for a moment, not looking at each other.)

STAN. He kissed me.

KAL. What?

STAN. On the cheek. When he went, he just–

KAL. An' you didn't think–

STAN. No!

(Silence.)

KAL. You think it was money? With the job an' all?

STAN. I don't know, Kal. What do I look like?

(pause)

I remember the first one I went to. Uncle Val. You remember? No. You were too little. Me an'...They took me an' Johnny.

(pause)

He looked like a doll. Like they dipped him in plastic, then painted him over.

KAL. I'm not trying to bust your balls, I'm just tryin' to–

STAN. I know.

(Silence.)

Janie called me first.

*(***KAL** *looks up sharply at* **STAN**.*)*

STAN. I went over there and...

(pause)

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