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Hope for a man named Jimmie

Grand Illusion Joe

RICHARD ALLEN

HOPE for a Man

Named Jimmie

(And)
Grand Illusion Joe

Richard Allen

HOPE for a Man

Named **jimmie**

(And)

Grand Illusion Joe

Richard **allen**

*HOPE FOR A MAN
NAMED JIMMIE*

&

*GRAND
ILLUSION JOE*

OTHER BOOKS BY RICHARD ALLEN

The Way Out At Last & Other Poems

Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1986

To The Ocean & Scheherazade

Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1989

**HOPE FOR A MAN
NAMED JIMMIE**

&

**GRAND
ILLUSION JOE**

(RICHARD JAMES ALLEN)

RICHARD ALLEN

Five Islands Press Associates

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HOPE FOR A MAN NAMED JIMMIE

For Karen

And for my teachers

Zvi Gotheiner and Maggie Black

A Disappointed Bridge was first presented by Writers' Radio on Radio 5UV in Adelaide, SA, Australia, on April 9, 1990. Performed by Richard Allen.

Interviews for the Freedom of Dreams was first presented by Dance North and Tropic Line Theatre Company at the Townsville Civic Theatre in Townsville, QLD, Australia, on May 1, 1992, as part of *If War Were A Dance*, a play by Richard Allen, commissioned by Dance North (Artistic Director, Cheryl Stock). Directed and choreographed by Richard Allen and Karen Pearlman. Set and costume design by Michael Pearce. Lighting design by Norman Kupke. Performed by Debbie Clements, Perry Cummings, Terrie-Ann John, Tim Kay, Yvette Konig, Bradford Lecon, Peter Lucadou-Wells, Brendan O'Connor, Marlene O'Dea, Bernadette Walong, Anthony Weigh, Kerry Williamson, and Lisa Wilson.

Excerpts from *Interviews for the Freedom of Dreams* and *Luck* formed the script of *Hope and Luck*, which was first presented by Sidetrack Theatre Company at Sidetrack Theatre in Sydney, NSW, Australia, on October 16, 1992. Choreographed and performed by Richard Allen and Karen Pearlman.

Luck was first presented by Newport Harbour Art Museum at the Irvine Barclay Theatre in Irvine, CA, USA, on October 30, 1990. Directed by Richard Allen. Choreographed by Karen Pearlman. Performed by Tom Cayler and Karen Pearlman.

Excerpts from *Hope for a man name Jimmie* first appeared in *A Salt Reader*.

A DISAPPOINTED BRIDGE

1 I keep dreaming a dream I'm not having, as if it's too horrible to dream. I dream the moment before it, I dream the moment after it - but the thing itself? I sit there blankly as hell passes, like a tree that doesn't feel or understand the meaning of its leaves' fall. Who is my editor? Who is investigating me? Everyone is so polite, so politic, but each in a different way, as if each has witnessed a different event, or they have not yet pooled their stories.

2 Perhaps this is the last little talk I will have with myself. The psyche wavers and flickers. I have tried to distinguish anxiety from all the pianos it plays on. The descent into madness is a messy and unromantic thing. Good and evil and no survivors. Are we all saints? Who's laughing? The second wind has madness on it. The second wind of laughter. An army of angels watching glorious TV. No time for statisticians and politicians who can't be sewn back together. What happens when someone half good meets someone half bad? I was not a happy child, even if I pretended to be.

3 A moment of doubt, need, inexplicability, created the universe. My own thoughts frighten me, I cannot bear them for too long. Late at night I wander off, forget who I am. My own thoughts frighten me. Am I afraid of this book? What was I writing in my dream? I am feverish and will forget it. I am afraid of my imagination, afraid I might imagine the truth.

4 This is only the tip of my life, where the water breaks on the shore. The secrets of a life will not keep under lock and key. I express my emotions to nobody. They come out late at night like elves, like goblins. I don't know if I can survive these memories. What do we do with the truth? I am the map on which this war is raging. Would one choose to be oneself if one had the choice?

5 Each of us thinks we will be preserved. Everybody has a flag

and a song. I love camouflaging the world. I never wanted to disappoint myself. Huge empty landscapes swelling and collapsing like the Arizona Desert being bulldozed by God. I don't want metaphors, I want the good person that I was to come back. Do I love faith? I have given up all accents, live by hearsay alone, move in circles, go to sleep fully clothed, never know who I'll meet in my dreams.

6 I used to think I was God. It was convenient. Very useful. I enjoyed it. I don't expect you to believe me. I hardly believe it myself. Do you think God likes Himself? Do you think God is proud of Himself? The hardest thing is not to trust yourself. What if you don't like what you find out? Will I be a different person, a better person, one day? You know, you should have listened. I told you people weren't any good. You should have listened. I was talking about myself.

7 My favorite book is my own mind. My favorite reading is writing. Less and less am I actually able to speak. The words come out jumbled, in the wrong order - muffled, confused, maladroit. I am falling sideways - from association to association, mixing and slurring speech, saying the wrong word at the right time. The walls of my brain are paper thin, one of these days I'll put my hand through them.

8 At first we insomniacs don't want to sleep, then we find out we have forgotten how. I am running several different versions of reality in my head now - like several different newsreels side by side. I was going to say one the fantasy, the other the reality. But it's not so simple. There are more than two. And while several, at least, are pure fantasy, pure flights of invention, I cannot be sure that any one is pure reality. How many truths does God know as He watches the illusions of the human race? With every birth another TV set is turned on. And with every death? Well, don't just say another is turned off. I think maybe

the TV sets never go off. That's why there's so much noise in the house of God. That's why it's so noisy in God's head. That's why He's going crazy.

9 This is God's diary. I must speak for God, I dream what He thinks. I taught Him to speak. Dreaming about the four continents, I forged His signature and fell into the triangle of history. I can declare war on history. I must speak for God, I dream when He sleeps. Is sleep the last god?

10 I have a philosopher's dream. I want to make language better than life. The pages are burning, did I set them aflame? Will the flames consume me? I have stolen all the diaries and call this the art of honesty. I am tired of joining the human race. All of us die before our time. I don't want to pretend to be happy any more.

11 Everything I touch I put my hand through. In the third room I saw it happen. The paint peeling off in patches, the patches of my past revealing themselves, red burning through to the delicate blue. The whole room glowing.

12 I am in the blue room. I have gone through a doorway. I think I am in the red room, while actually I am in the blue room. Only I think it's the red room. One day I may lose my colour blindness.

13 It is impossible to prevent your thoughts from being stolen. At last I have become a fictional character. Every night when we sleep our spirits change bodies, hopping from one to another like candles. Truth and paranoia mix like some kind of fuel or cocktail - you can't tell which part overwhelms the other and incinerates.

14 Do I fear sleep? The question repeats itself, like an old door, banging off the latch. My enemies are in the room with me,

picking up arguments they know I will believe.

15 I am having too many thoughts. I am thinking them all at once. Streams of thought speeding, sliding, flashing, reflecting like schools of fish rushing away from me forward towards eternity, streaming back in on me like objects pulled by gravity in onto a star. Every different being on fire. Have I become a dark secret, without the happiness of stars? Is there no happiness in the stars?

16 The truth is I am mad, whatever that means. Madness is the building I have built. Always searching, always protecting, I am like some pilgrim in pursuit of the Holy Grail, who carries his own model precariously with him in a little black box. Hope and despair constantly switching roles like a great forgetful camel.

17 Virtually every idea I have ever had is coming back to haunt me. I am becoming my lines. I am becoming my images. I have become my imagination.

18 The fine and wavering line between realistic assessment and wild projection is beginning to break down - like the holes in the Maginot Line in 1939, like Robert Frost's *Mending Wall*, like a strong marked line that is dwindling away to a long thin snake, that becomes broken up in some places like a dotted line, until even larger gaps have begun to appear, like those holes in the nets of sea pools where the sharks get in, until the whole line of my psyche is falling apart in my hands like an old rope, like a basket a thousand years old that instantly, unexpectedly, on being lifted up, falls away to dust.

19 How you thrilled me. How I chased you. How I saw every warning sign and embraced it. How I adored my destiny. Ah destiny, we were pals, we were chums. How clear it was we were on the same side. The little men tried to warn me. I spat in their faces, I trod on their defeat. I laughed at the whole world. I

ate it, shat it, trampled it down. My laugh was the thunder. The sign was on my hands and on my head. Destiny. Victory. Blasphemy. A glorious burning.

20 I have lost faith and therefore reason. The flow of hope has been replaced by the terror of loss. I see myself growing old - my vigour gone, my cutting edge gone, my thoughtless neoclassicism. I am holding back the walls of the event. I am building a wall of terror around the event. There is no longer greatness in me, only greed and grasping, and fear, above all else fear - I who was once untouchable, the crusader whose ambition was the ugliest form of greed.

21 The sky is in real danger, I'm afraid it will kill. I have no bridge with sleep. I have knocked it down. I spend my whole life fighting on the beach like the English at Dunkirk or the Anzacs at Gallipoli, fighting with my back to the sea - I can't go in for fear of drowning or turning to gold. Implacable sinking witnesses, lagoons upon lagoons, like a history of jungles - one on top of the other - or cities or civilisations built over one another. What a strange, unreal, created world this is, with its columns and pillars, alumni of stone. Men have built their mountains here, and we have dug them over.

22 We little boys and girls are too vulnerable to be left in the hands of the adult God. Don't caress my hair or tell me that I'm beautiful. I am tired to death of the thousand and one lies and the flippancy of hypocrites. The horses are once again in pain. How much is horse and how much is pain? How much pain can a horse contain?

23 An ugly password to carry down the years. I am awakened by sleep, tired of the flippancy of dreams. I will show you scenes from a journey, voyages I have been sent on, the map of this pain. A bloody map. I put a curse on each person who sent me on it. And I may take it back. But just for a moment I want them to

[Add stanza
break.]

know where I've been.

24 It was dangerous to bring me to the words. The author's true progeny is death. Beyond the fourth wall of fiction. I want another kind of education before I die. I want a strange election before I die.

25 This book has a life of its own. A field of terrible, awful imperfection. A peculiar version of my brain. I cannot be held entirely responsible for everything I write. I cannot hold it all in my brain. A mind isn't conscious of all of its memories, experiences, knowledge or thought at any one time. Like an army or a government organisation with corruption rife in certain departments that the central offices don't know about or choose to ignore. There are certain preoccupations and the rest is submerged. This book is a mind.

26 The drugs of the world are on my eyelids, lips, tongue, nostrils, ears and I cannot speak because folly has my uncle's figure, my father's voice, my cousin's nose, my nephew's eyes, my sister's tongue. Mine is the choreography. The authorship of folly. In praise of a waterfall. The triptych of the dolls. The checkbones of amnesia. The wings of anaemia. Albino mistakes, miscalculations. The sideburns of the dove. With these switchblades I did speak, I swear it. A clarion mistake. The outreach of dissension. The subcommittee on humiliation. The Jesus Christ of sambos. We began with the middle of the year and started in bursts. Paratroopers and propellers of the perpendicular. Landings in June like hot sunsets. The halfway hut, the pickaxe and the blockade give me a stockade of good thoughts. Happy dreams before sunfall. Sweet asylums of the imagination.

27 Beware the boxcars of us. Poets chained together like wings. Wings flapping together like a cordon to hold back the demonstrators. The demonstrators flapping together like the Red Sea. Roll back the Red Sea, roll back, roll back. Your children await you. Children of blood and tides.

28 Walk with me awhile. For I am afraid. And fear coils the mind into a Chinese puzzle. Five broken fingers on a writing hand. How can I smile into a blazing microphone? One in five million stays awake. I'm glad you came back, I missed you like dogs miss their masters. Did you think I'd come back? An endless cycle of authors back to back like a firing squad. Songsters of the Before-athon. Swinburne, Solzhenitsyn, and all writers beginning with 'S'. Poetry is a technical desire, rising like a balloon above a Sunday picnic.

29 In the beginning was the word and the word was do it. A grand canyon beyond the first act. A daylight pool in spite of itself. A moratorium on excellence. The beginning of the third. The sequel to backgammon. The fourteenth floor to liquidity. The Dow Jones of anorexia. The scumbag gets it for two million bucks. How many half-priced books is that? How many cans of tuna fish swimming in from the home front? Spin the bottle on the dream. An archipelago of unforgivability, baby carriages of imperfectability, islands of the 'd' for dream. Swing your partner around the ugliest corner. We do not start or finish, only glow in the dark like plastic acorns, christmas leviathons, pyramids of the church with the plug pulled out. This is the way the fun begins. Bless you for this moment and this disregard. We poets have gone out into the night, but others will come. The juke box of insanity. Inflation on mortality. A huge swing in the mind-body index.

30 Give me back my seedtime so I can sow some seeds. The telephones will grow like corn. A thousand red boxes in a field. A thousand and two ears, for you and I are listening. Sleeping answering services on the dream. Thank you for your call. What message do you want to leave for eternity? State your name and number clearly when you hear the beep. We are building a census on eternity. The statistics show great improvement over the last fifty thousand years, and we are hoping to reach the

beginning of the end, that is to say, the end of the beginning, before the middle runs out. In this way we predict a great cutting of costs, which is what we have been taught to achieve, and for which, if we are about to receive it, may the Lord make us truly thankful.

31 Everybody's favourite poet is a dead poet. Now follows the history of my amnesia. The quarterbacks are going on all over Europe, as Frankenstein used to say. Thank you for your belligerence and your bellicosity. I will treasure these gifts to my grave. The mountebanks are montagnards in sheep's clothing. Idiots of flight. Steinbock and Strudelard, singer-songwriters in the great old tradition, believe in polyester above all other. Shakespeare says Simon cannot take over the monopoly without the capitalism. Bingo and the big music. Maybe he's Jerry Lewis. The businessman of human thoughts. Senators of Bethlehem. Sporadius says send all the speculators to hell or the Meadowlands Stadium, whichever is the cheaper cab fare. Summertime the living is flexible, if you like that sort of thing. This could go on forever like a sunset circling all around the globe. Or at least until the divine proprietor decides to paint on over it.

32 Weep on, weep on, you sunbirds, sailors and sultans of old. Weep on, weep on, you Alamos of gold. The Alamo of breakdown is upon us. Laugh at that, but the keys to the boardroom are lit like saints, and we don't know how to answer their calls. The language of shoelaces is untied. This was not reasonable to begin with, so why should it end that way?

33 Backgammon on a serpent's tooth. The stars of David are beside themselves. Twin suspects like gorgons' heads. They are no longer on speaking terms, though they charge high fees for speaking. Their individual crowds have individual souls. A thousand and one stories in a thousand different directions and the cat tells all to no man. Everybody is on their way home now and I have been writing for one hundred and forty-four hours so I

would like to begin reminding myself of something my father once told me when he taught me how to swim.

34 Keep your sanity very carefully, he said. Be picky about it. Keep half of it in a safety deposit box at the bank and the other half with your will at your lawyers. Always keep an extra copy under the house or in the attic with your personal papers. You can never be too careful about such things. Your sanity is one of those particular items you only have one of. You must keep a grip, a handle, and never forget it. It is imperative that you do not give it away, or lend it to anyone, like an old book or coat that you no longer consider useful. Once it's gone, you may never see it again. And then one day you'll be surprised how much you truly need it - urgently, desperately, and at that very moment - how you simply can't do without it, and you will be amazed that you could ever even have considered parting with it for an instant.

35 Then it'll be a long road home. And where you get to may not be where you started, or what you had aimed for. But rather a strange place, more like a bus station or a shelter than anything else, with a number of other people wandering about restlessly in a similar predicament. And unfortunately there will be neither comradely spirit between you, nor any competition. No helping each other and no changing places. No hierarchy, no hills to climb, no wheels to turn, no glories to achieve. No leaders and no scapegoats. Each person will be alone within himself and each person will have to construct their own vehicle or walk.

36 I am in the gray room. The room of all and no sensations. Here there are no colours, tastes, sounds, sensations. The senses realise they are alone. Actors without scripts, without audience, without a theatre. They stare at each other mildly, warily, like a five-cornered hat. The decision is: which way is forward? The decision has already been made. Hell has no bottom, the elevator goes down and down. The different storeys of feeling of the

somnambulist. I must find my way through to the back door of madness. An invitation to my private soul. The keys are cut in experience. I have, within me, proof of something. Happiness keeps changing. Cascading down from the ordinary. Champagne for the nerves.

37 What is the great moment of a life? I wrote myself into history. One of a list of things it's hard to believe. Where did I get this idea that I was one of the great human beings? Who will make the next lucid statement? You have a piece of me with this book. The cheap 'T', the holding action, the cheap trick for holding these pages together. A cheap glue, it won't hold, but will come apart like a paperback.

38 Don't leave me too much time to think. What beyond the name is left when the name is gone into the wilderness of souls? I am nothing, neither good nor bad, nor any other of these fantastical melodramas. A blank slate. Prepare to write. One man's attempt to turn the wheel of the world, but it's too heavy for him.

39 In the early days of truth, I could be counted on to control history. I used to justify the world as though it were the contents of my pocket. Now I carry pain in my pocket. Everything dates too quickly. I have dated too quickly, almost before I have begun. I have lived my life as though it were a biography. The last quartet of illusions. I wanted a perfect history. No blemishes. Each year I discover new flaws in my make-up. Each year new veins of my corruption appear. I have a crack in my psyche and it's widening. We spend the first half of our lives building a flawed machine and the second half trying to fix it.

40 You ask me why I am quiet. Perhaps it is a salutary experience to meet one's Maker. Who creates immortality? Who creates democracy? Would you say I was a happy man, being fiction's best friend? I have woven my deepest illusions into these lightest of words. I never wanted to write my own death.

Will any one of these words help me?

41 The lines were so good, almost as if they'd been written by God. Let me see if I can say something I've never heard before. By the time we reach our dreams we no longer dream them. Like the king who, even after he's received his crown, is still waiting for the coronation. It can never really come. I never really believed I was God. But was rather some petrified, desperate angel, terrified of becoming only a man. Perhaps it was too much to ask of myself to try to be sane. Perhaps it was too much to ask to try to be God.

42 Our hell is time, the consciousness of time. Self-consciousness. There are no answers to the problems of existence. Only temporary shelters. No cities to build, no safes, no stocks, bonds, jewels, photos, biographies, even works of art. There is no escaping the great hole of the self. When we truly visit ourselves we are like those poor soldiers returning to London after the Second World War to find bomb craters where their houses once were. Death is the long journey we spend our whole lives packing for, only to find out at the last minute that nothing we have packed can go with us.

43 We all fall into the pack of man. There is nothing to hang onto. No special secret. No extraordinary deliverance. There is no hope, no future. Nothing. This is the void. All of our dreams are mere flutterings of crepe paper carried on the wind. We and our lives must separate. The streamers of our delusions.

44 How many more years will I be alive and what will those years mean? If I could give up this need to be great. Let the pieces of my personality float downstream. If I could pass into nothingness. The 'I' must pass into nothingness. I must pass into nothingness. The nothingness from whence I came. Can I live and die quietly, in quiet things, in the quiet rhythms of the body, like a monk in his garden, the Buddha of this page?

45 I am forgetting things, tired of memories. I have seen how too many things work. I want a forgetful life. I have tried to forget as much as possible. Where do thoughts go when they've been forgotten? The lines of memory open out into pools, into lagoons. I dip in and out of delusion. A kind of happiness in that, a forgetfulness. The structure of a year is just enough time to forget. Happy New Year! Time to call in the chips of my personality. I wanted a forgetful life, but instead I have seen the construction of my soul, the planks and the scaffolding.

46 The name is Yesterday, my name is Yesterday, said John God. Rise above the crowd, I told my son, but don't rise too far or you'll be singing to the trees. The idea is only a mere framework for madness. You have to take to the trees and haul yourself off through the jungle like a gymnast. Was this something that I wanted? Bouncing away from the truth like a magnet? I don't remember any more.

47 Once I dreamt that you told me that the water was clear and beautiful, and then I came along and made it muddy. You know, I never wanted to diagnose myself, I never wanted to understand myself that well. God in therapy. Good luck, Mr Heaven. Being God was fun but not the truth. I forgive you this dream. Nobody ends up being proud of where they came from.

48 Have I lived to write something in prose? People don't think in so many words. The impenetrability of words, unless you read them. Longevity is a freedom and a curse. Once discovered, however difficult the search, knowledge is cheap. Who is the recipient of these lies, these extravagances? I never wanted a repertory of dreams. I call this my autobiography. An autobiography of the future.

49 I am having history dreams. I am he who demanded the

names of words. I don't know how much arrogance I have left. The last English speaking questions. The sleep of a life. Heaven and hell in a single finger. An evening of lying. I began as a right-hander, then gradually I became a left-hander, and now I cannot write with either hand but only talk, talk, talk. Tell death to wait at the door till the song is over.

50 My bell is struck, I am rung. Who is this bad boy throwing stones in my pool? I need to get out of this century. I need to free myself from the twentieth century. How can I stop the changing? One tiny blow and the chamber is struck, the whole valley reverberates, the rocks and the snow drifts, and all the old men and the young men, the beautiful and ugly men, come cascading down in cartwheels. I could have howled for a white moon like this.

51 I am looking for a country without history. Where the past has been forgotten and the future is unexpected. I am looking for a country without language. Where nobody has learnt to speak. I am looking for a country without hope. Where there will be no need to be disappointed.

52 My powerlessness is called up. At a certain point, I was taught, forced, coerced, reduced into submission. How I have regretted that day! How I have built suits of armour against it, lead armies to prove its non-existence, sought and managed to convince the whole world that I never had such a day! Convinced almost everyone. Except myself. Except my powerlessness. That one part of me, that one broken string in my heroic, my angelic harp. For whatever my mind thinks, it cannot resist the sound, meaning and ugliness - the power - of that word. Like in *Ali Baba and The Forty Thieves*, a single word will turn aside the great stone an army could not budge, a single word will reveal the gaping chasm.

53 Oh Moses, you needn't have struck the rock to draw a river of tears. You should have had more faith in the power of words.

For in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God. How many times has my chasm opened for unsuspecting travellers, inadvertent utterers of the word, who have pressed the button of air in distracted conversation, like campers accidentally coming upon a cave beneath the undergrowth? A word on their lips and I am pried open as with a crowbar.

54 Oh ugly miracle! I want to think my own thoughts. This is why I live in silence and alone. The only words I read and speak are my own. And so I have become a wordsmith, a word controller. I live between the dance of pure physical actions and the beating, beating, beating of my thoughts.

55 And what is inside the chasm, the cathedral, the castle, the dungeon, the environmental artwork of the self? A cave of pain beneath the mountain of success. Princes and prisoners, the murdered and the beautiful, the silent and the powerful, the wrecks, the wicked, the humiliated, the maligned, the counterfeiters and the humbugs, the arrogant and the tender-hearted. Sixty-four, a thousand and one, selves. One for every day of the week, one for every week of the year, just three altogether. The numbers are mere symbols, conveniences.

56 We are our own judges. Each of us our own justice, jury, prosecutor, defence, reporter, confessor, historian. Each of us our own public opinion. So many crimes and kindnesses. I have spent so much of my life trying to forget, when I am the only one who truly can remember.

57 Old friends return, or shall I call them acquaintances? Fear of sleep and so on. They want to be famous. They want favours, debts they've imagined, paid. The only one I can really remember turned to me like a character from a novel and said: You can't make the world a better place. You can try, I don't mean that, maybe you have to. You can solve this problem, that problem. But people don't change. They can't change. Who we are keeps

coming back. You sound surprised. Why do you always sound surprised? He took off my clothes and forced his cock into my mouth like a fountain pen until the ink flowed out between my teeth with the bitter taste of words.

58 I am a skinny child before this work. Raped at four a.m. every morning when I was too naked and defenseless to resist. I am the lightest sleeper I have ever known. A sound and I lift into the air. Another and I am wafting away. Was this my dream? I have kept quiet about my life for so long. Sleep falls off the bones. Any part of your body can start dreaming. The angels fly between the planets. I am invaded by sleep, and flying again in my dreams. Sleep is a form of thinking quietly. The mind becomes pure music. I forget my thoughts as soon as I think them.

59 Death is life with all the colour drained out of it. Sleep is a contract with death, a kind of down payment or interest, which allows you to keep the mortgage or loan, which is life. This book is a kind of a contract, also, a deal - admit the truth and get a lesser charge or a suspended sentence. This was supposed to be an autobiography of God. But God is my cap on madness. It seems like He and I have been having a nervous breakdown forever.

60 Have I become what I am? I have been dreaming in great detail about someone I have never met but have begun to live with. How can I be so beautiful? My skeleton is growing. I am becoming a girl. How can I say that? I used to be living with a stranger and now I am living with a friend. How dare I leave these words on the page? Just for a moment I have a sweet alliance with myself. Tomorrow it will be gone. I too will be gone. Like a bucket of water thrown into the sea - the waves lapping on waves - mixing, melding, dissolving. The point of dreaming is almost past. I am falling out of the universe.

61 But this is not falling, this is called flying. I will call it flying.

Tango with insanity. Two steps forward, one step back. Oh, take me out onto the terrace!

62 I am staging heaven, more than a cliché of heaven. I will walk along a beach, and each stone I find will be whiter than the one before, until the last is transparent, and I will know it as the stone of God.

63 I came out calling for God last time I was here. I was very excited about it. I went out into the undergrowth. I said it was God's graveyard. I didn't do it this year. Or at least, I said I wasn't going to. I didn't want to talk about it. People thought I was embarrassed. I said it was something they believed in elsewhere. I said I knew how realistic the world was.

64 Did I write or am I dreaming the story of a beautiful girl pissed on by her father to keep her feeling unworthy? And from the long, smutty, golden stream coming out of the tower in all directions we passed out together into the vertical transparent thoughts of rain. And we were naked and beautiful and Scheherazade took my palm and led me out to the end of the pier and said, walk. And I set my bare feet upon the naked water, the firm texture of the green sea, and stepped out across the bouncing, undulating surface of the waves; my path so direct - the sea becoming bluer and bluer, clearer and clearer, I didn't know there could be such a flat, straight road, and the water and sky rising up to meet each other, blending together like two musical styles, and kissing each other on the cheek like two apostles - to heaven.

INTERVIEWS FOR THE FREEDOM OF DREAMS

a beginning that now seems arbitrary, an end that will seem arbitrary. a bill of hope. a bill of tragedy. a bizarre series of countries we keep passing through like mirrors. a carnival of mixed messages. a clearing house for the emotions. a conspiracy of legs. a course in applied moods. a family of books. a flag flapping against the prose. a halo of history. a halo of words. a history of imagination. a history of sewerage. a history of thunderclaps. a hotel in the mouth. a magical connection to unhappiness. a mathematical land where the pieces add up. a memory of ladders. a peach in the road. a prolonged disassociation of the naming capacity. a revised history of paradise. a theory that includes itself. a walk through footage. a symphony of pure minds. a truly lonely book. an alphabet stairway. an encyclopedia of images. an unadorned and unpropitious work. an uncomfortably colourful world. another concept of imagination. another crucifixion in terms. another day in this pretty world of ours. are we sharing the same century? at the end of character, what begins? battles across the marné, the toy soldier game, the uglinesses of his childhood coming back, little blotches of unsatisfied time, pockets of emptiness, an enormous gap to be filled, hours to cross like miles, he was searching for a mission, yes, a cause, and made a kind of cause of himself. bethlehem attachments. beware of angels. bizzare little prophets. casting memories. catapults of language. children vomiting in books out of jealousy because their national hero is not getting published. climbing out of the valley of the ordinary. competing for the thoughts of god. competing for the house of the past. copyright in paradise. courting fallen angels. dancing in the future. dead or a string quartet. do dreams have assets? does jimie have boundaries? does jimie think late night tv staves off death? dream images of a hundred white generals pulling an enormous black leg. dreaming about having sleep as a job. dreams with huge casts of strange, strange characters. each book only the beginning of what it is necessary to say. each step closer to the world, the more it blurs. erase all distinguishing marks. falling

from angels' nests. fast imagination to heaven. fear needs a place to rest. fighting off death with our helmets. find someone else to apologize to. for a fast man he died in slow motion. funeral at the end of the tracks. god and other stories. god asked for everything and he took it. god is good-natured. god turned into a pebble. happiness in the last section. having dreams like babies. he has become a series of scenes in a b-grade movie, he replays himself night after night, reruns of personality. he has the body of a bird, but will he fly? he is becoming part of the patchwork of death. he is not with the mortals. he keeps taking little pieces of his life and leaving them around with the kind of benign forgetfulness with which god probably created the universe. he likes to stay awake all night and never, never sleep - a perfect moment there, in the hours between twelve and six, when he feels like he is flying - straight out, a trajectory at the moon. he looks in the mirror and is talking to another person. he says he thinks more clearly when he's asleep. he says he will buy new characters. he says his face looks like it has been painted by a lot of different artists with a lot of different brush strokes. he says his notes are talking to him. he says history is catching up with him. he says the past seems far more appealing than the future. he wakes up with a personal question mark. he wants a moon for writing. he wants everything as far as the eye can see. he wants more than books to store the climax of god. he will never get what is on that page of his mind. history has given him many fathers and many mothers, and many children - this is his family. home is merely a habit. homes built for phrases. how did jimie get in? how did we all become so evil so quickly? how will jimie leave? hypocrisy is the easiest of sins. if nothing else, he has seen the dam on the navajo desert. illusions are great if they work in your favour. in a country created under attack, it is difficult to make peace. individuals disappearing into individuals. inherited things. insert human happiness. insomniac books. insomniac's nightmares. instalments of disappointment. interviews for the freedom of dreams. is 'is' a false translation? is it too easy? is jimie lying? is jimie real? is life a religious

calling? is sleep a documented life? is this the function of dreams? it is hard to remember things, let alone a whole life. jimie can't find all the pieces of his memory, he is lost in the corridors of his memory. jimie crossed against the light, you can't expect god to love you if you cross against the light. jimie's got two or three weeks bail before summons, how much fantasy can he squeeze into that time? jimie's head is a house, he keeps running from room to room, hearing different stories. jimie's a liar. jimie's dropping out of the reality business. jimie's ok, he just never made it to perfection. jimie's out on bail, says he's only got three weeks to tell his story. jimie's running out of brave faces. jimie's struggling to keep sleep in quotation marks. laughing lessons. lies on a merry-go-round. lies on a tightrope. life is a language. life is too short for so much pain. lost in style. lovemaking is the exchange of limits. lunacy, honey? mad as twins. mercy is a quality of hope. meteorologist of the future. monologue for the crucifixion. murder is passé. naming characters is not like naming children. napoleon's vision. no colour. no transcendence. nobody has so many memories. nostalgia for the safely dead. notebooks like dead cars. notes toward a safety net. nothing is the truth that can be believed. novel for violin and orchestra. obscure riderless text. only one step ahead of the moon. only much later did he understand the things he had been taught. only much later did they ring in his ears with a sense of completeness. people die too easily. pieces of the peace. prophecies completed before they're begun. poetry more in the realm of the gods than of man. pouring ourselves into the world. pulled down the soft corridors of revelation. pulling the strings of the rest of our lives. readings in unnatural laughter. reality says wake up. reality sings the blues. reinvesting death with childish fears. renee promised him everything in sleep. repositories for gleaming white thoughts. research into human pain. rooms safe for language. saved from abstraction by distraction. should we have given up our lives, stopped fighting so hard to be happy? sideways is the true path of art. silence is not a medium. since god may be one such fool,

shall we call him scarecrow? sleep has too many ceremonies, uncertainties. small masterpieces. so many glances back along the mornings and afternoons and evenings of a life.. so much dies with each person. so this is what reality looks like. standing on a wall of acrobats. stealing our imaginations. stepping in and out of our minds like beggars at revolving doors. strange deliveries of words. strange new schools for battlefields. swings more than thinking. talentlessness rising like the sun. tasting the blood of entertainment. techniques for being real. teeming with platitudes and forgetfulnesses. tending to our immortality, with grace notes and with words. thank you god for the rising moon. the architecture of the whole house of this poem. the argument. the baby. the beethoven finisher. the belgium of the crime. the blows of the reader, knocking at the door of this text, wanting to be let in, wanting to know what's inside. the boys are hungry for their masters. the chapters. the children. the circuses of heaven. the closer to the snow of a terrible idea. the dark sleep of indecision. the dead strapped to the wheel of the sky. the diagonal of hope. the diagonal of sex. the diagonal of truth. the dictatorial flow of truth. the different periods of a poem's life. the disappointed talking to the disappointed. the diseases of heaven. the doorman of the imagination. the drowning of man in his chalice. the entrance to light. the flowers of memory are blossoming, making him very tall in his dream. the four cities. the four richards. the great sleep of insignificance. the gospel according to jimmie. the happy house of corners. the happy house of language. the heaven of control. the history of light. the history of the world since the beginning of this poem. the hospitality of politicians. the house of symbols which is under investigation. the human balcony. the ice. the independence of dreams. the immigration of faith to heaven. the individual laughter of heaven. the interjection of the trees. the ladders of loneliness. the ledger of growth and pain. the lives of the saints. the lord brings us meat, but we have no teeth. the mind is a liar. the mistakes of heaven. the moon and the sun in the same sky, the eyes on a single face, the dreams of the guilty man who wants

to be innocent, and the innocent man who realises his guilt. the mysticism of time's own lack of answers. the name is god, james god. the naming ceremony. the national dream. the natural flow of hope. the nightclub of american history. the only copy known to exist is the one sent mistakenly to the wrong address and left there for years at the bottom of a cupboard. the oracle book. the paradise of the server. the processional of truth. the promenade of truth. the proportions of death. the revolt of ambitious texts. the salute's folly. the science of the innocent. the secrets of complexity are not secrets at all. the sequence of perfection. the sleep of a life. the sleeping cure. the soul catcher. the south, the future. the staves are dirty, what kind of music is this? the sun in ruins. the sunset reflects, the perpetual sunset. the task of truth is not to make everything clear. the tides of her thought. the theories are all disbanded. the third book of human frailty. the twins had the same eyes when they died. the wonders of modern science unfortunately do not extend to page a hundred and sixty-three. the white snake with albino eyes. there are a lot of little blue cars around here. there are a lot of colourful people around here, any one is the subject for a story. there are enough reasons to die, a list is unnecessary. there can be no talk of normality. there is some material in jimmie's head that's missing. there is no single title for the human king. these crossroads where a man is hanging. they're not his business, other people's dreams. they built the road while we worked, and when the road was finished, so our work was finished, and as the road was a thoroughfare, so our work was a first door. things unthought of mean there are new things left to think of. thinking about firing god. this house is so wonderful, it's really a rose. this is not a literary crime. this isn't sleep, this is talking about sleep. this is not what jimmie expected to find. this novel is evaporating. this poem in a shambles like an old house. thoughts like lines along a highway - onward and onward - neither beginning or ending. three days ago he was being given the wrong directions, and where is he now? titles in the orchestra. too many people believe too many things. too many titles like moods on a face. torniamo in new york, like a great ugly bird, with our golden hearts. twenty-seven

angels. twins. two beautiful athletes, life and death, are racing one another, soon enough, one will cross the line. two identical girls on either side of the gaol, telling identical dogs to sit down. two is too many errors. unafraid II, III. unfinished book. unkept. unlucky. unspecified. until death, aren't we all just looking out a window at a landscape we cannot see? waiting for the middle ages. wake up at the end with all your emotions and go home happy. was that god or the man in the green suit? we are all bundles of uncertainty moving across uncertainty, and we can never really tell which of us is us and which is the outside world - like two cells, the lines between us dissolving - a frightful osmosis. we are all copies of each other. we are all metaphors for each other. we are all walking libraries. we are the walls of each other's disappointment. we carry our names like jewels. we die on the pirouettes we were born. we don't need protection. we have woken up in the middle of a bad plot. we need a home. we want to see the original of which we are a copy. we have won the battle to pass this year of our lives. we speak for no one but ourselves, but sometimes the words trickle through. what is an ending? what language do babies cry in? what sex is a book? what would it be like to be mortal? when was democracy popular? who can touch you in sleep? who gets through to the promised land? who is guilty if a character is written guilty? who is the real culprit? who is the steward of these lines? who is using our god? why do we always need something good to happen, or at least something to happen, but when it happens, we feel nothing? will jimie be quick-witted when he dies? will jimie get out of this text alive? with cartoon-like serenity. words don't need a leader. wrapped in the language of sleep. writing the geography of dreams. writing this book is more like encircling a large battlefield than crossing it, ten thousand soldiers moving in toward the centre, closing the circle, until they can shake the whites of each others' eyes and have conquered the field. you might refuse to go to bed with no head. your questions would be a lighthouse. zipcode corrected nightmare.

LUCK

she has this image of a planet shooting out of orbit, each year
going out further beyond the rings of its mother star, and this is
her journey, each year progressively further out, each year mixing
less of the past with more of the future

she has woken up in the back seat of a car in a vast parking lot,
and the moment she opens the door all the cars drop into junk,
and whether she's in dead car heaven or hell, nobody's going no
place

the lines are gathering at dawn like soldiers in the central square,
the lines are gathering like young men wanting to join up, the
lines are gathering, and whatever the reason, it comes to the same
thing, sorrow at dusk

she is saddened by the passing of all things, she is saddened by
the passing of her own contributions, each one ultimately
blending in, forming an almost forgettable step in an endless
stairway

she likes to think there is something so nice about history, to
think it is her friend, so quiet and companionable, until it swells
up and washes over her like a wave

all these little bridges out into the mist, she builds them out across
the waves, hoping that one day one will not be disappointed

she is counting all the good books in the library, counting them
off against all the innocents slaughtered by acts of terrorism and
violence

she is constantly writing her autobiography, leaving little
fragments around for people to pick up and see themselves in
like mirrors

did you expect to find her behind this text, the embodiment of
this sermon, the all-knowing great sinner?

don't question her all the time, it only reminds her how much she

must question herself
what would the world be like, what would she be like, without
this need for certainty?

in her opinion there's more continuity in hamburgers than in
people, and she's a vegetarian

she loves hotels and motels, she can drive, settle down,
everything is perfect for one night

everything is so much easier the second time around because fear
has been replaced by gatorade

what happens to the unsorted fragments of a life, what can be
kept, and for whom?

she is searching desperately for a community and finds it, in
books, a community of ghosts

this is the first day she didn't wake up with nightmares and
uneasy dreams

she says she wasn't looking for anybody, she says she had her
eyes closed

she remembers so many of her thoughts, she thinks them now,
good and bad

good morning is her middle name, good night what she signs on
her contracts

every action has consequences, why did she think she could act
without them?

she has spent a long time denouncing things which she ended up
doing

she broke her name in two, she can't blame that on anyone else

she wakes up, it is the beginning of another long and selfish day

she is writing a play about a woman with a thousand plastic bags
who began just like everyone else, but that wasn't how it ended
she wishes she could have worked in a more permanent medium
than reality

she couldn't wait till she had a room to write this book

she always wrote on cards and then dropped them on the ground

she feels like the veteran of a number of different poetic
campaigns

she likes enlarging words in order to see the halo around them

she wants more from human beings than seagulls in the head

at thirty she is the most popular woman in the world

she can never leave enough behind her, orgies of self-
preservation

she doesn't have enough room for her ideas on life

she has solved the origins problem, the universe is on wheels

in the face of her book, a thousand words are smiling

words don't mean a thing, but they are legally binding

like everybody, she is afraid of short lines, like short lives

and now it is time for some bad writing, she wrote

sleep is an enlightened thinker, she is an enlightened sleeper

she has been sleeping a long time, practising for death

perhaps she wasn't that happy anywhere in the world
strange and dangerous dreams, she finds difficult to answer now
the pit of illness into which she is constantly redescending
she had sex with the man in the green suit
nothing left of the human race in the apartment downstairs
she fellatiates words because she likes to watch them come
sex is the mirror each person corrects their features in
how to recapture the past or even to remember it
she says she created god in order to be forgiven
she has wandered off into the grand canyons of cliché
she walks a peculiar tightrope between heaven and necessity
she doesn't want the pains of ordinary women
don't expect her to live beyond this poem
she can't contain it, the damage is spreading
the poem is killing her, it's replacing her
she thought she could teach her biographers to read
but now, being dead, she's much more malleable
and so her life is tidied up into books
a magical peaceful world that doesn't belong anywhere
the change is not as good as a holiday
what strange truths does she carry in her head?

is dying the great relief they make out?
the point is not to die too quickly
she doesn't even own her own death
white out her name and who is she?
she doesn't trust anyone, let alone herself
she has had enough whiteness for one lifetime
her books will outlive her enemies and herself
she has woken up from the longest prayer
she has a book instead of a house
she has looked too long at the horizon
she says she likes the one about freedom
she built herself to the point of extinction
she is tired of intersecting with her time
all she wants for christmas is some information
she thinks she has discovered god's private thoughts
she is looking forward to going to heaven
she has a god instead of a house
this is her mass, her private wake, enter
an experiment in being poisoned by the world
collapse is becoming her constant companion, her shadow

she could go to her grave feeling nothing
is this the last question of human existence?
she is riding the page like a wave
she entered light on the brink of television
every step of the way is not predictable
she won't be back this way again
don't laugh if she begins with words
she uses her imagination more than is necessary
she doesn't want anything she can lose
this poem has given her back her history
she will surprise you with her broken heart
accidental broken hearts like highways across the country
she is the conflict between form and disaster
film about four thousand angels in an oven
life is up to its old tricks
things were simpler before she got ambitious
killing people was easier than impressing them
title for a book on fallen angels
she has seen too many painful things
she put her eyes out with poetry

the blue book inside the sad person
they're her lies, her wild lies
paying for it with her blue eyes
she doesn't want to be forgotten
she'd rather have faith than theory
she adores god whose metronome is sleep
she doesn't want to be forgiven
she has forgotten how to be happy
she wants more to life than hope
she has remembered how to be happy
she doesn't want to be remembered
that line fell out of her pocket
she wishes wishes weren't so valuable
there are no horses in her memory
there are no hearses in her nursery
sometimes it's refreshing to be wrong
each poem an education for the next
no one ever thanked her for anything
she is god like everybody else
she is running out of luck

the intellect tires before the emotions
don't sell off the imagination
good luck with your mind, baby
little languages hanging from the ceiling
the body of mathematics is dead
the word god is an asterism
this is not a literary crime
poetry is mainly a discarded continent
the universe is on her shoulders
she is practising believing in herself
she is losing interest in reality
she has wandered off into history
she is writing her own obituary
she is trying to remember everything
she hasn't covered her tracks
who would build civilisations in boats?
why build walls on the sea?
mortality is not just an idea
a victory in the right direction
a record of having been here

working with the themes of heaven
sleep is a backdrop to life
she can fall off that bridge and fall
stopping at the heartless cafe
at the close of the future
how to be human without dying
there are different kinds of hope
she likes her reality to go
she doesn't care to care
she didn't make the world
did she ever feel less confused?
light-headed and she lacks hope
history is catching up with her
she screws people for their secrets
sex gives way to certainty
she knows why rimbaud stopped
more gracefully than the world
words come out before beliefs
creatures of the divine habitat
on the steps of revelation

the void left by paradise
meditations in time of time
assault with a deadly library
she trained in kamikaze writing
called her bestseller war talk
called her bestseller pay back
called it party's over
at least facts can sleep
sleep is the happiest time
solutions in a nervous universe
a reason for her requiems
the raid is for ideas
too many theories and instincts
she wrote that line already
can she speak without lying?
her record will survive her
so revealing, untrue, a statement
she can't find sleep
history is the successful patient
there are no good reasons

the nervous nature of value
the nervous nature of god
the empty problem of value
the empty problem of god
the empty face of god
the smiling face of god
sleep won't let go
for the sake of happiness
end each day with dignity
fondly falling from the rooftops
facts do not make art
she is influenced by herself
that bowl, who painted it?
who will autograph the sky?
titles circling around the event
the wings are for show
hot and cold running sunsets
works for the permanent edition
words for the permanent collection
neurosis is the only dog

cinderella waiting for a promotion
tread carefully into her nightmares
 unkept drafts for a story
 a character in the gods
multiple choice for the living
 special answers for the dead
knocking up against her limitations
 are these dark secrets art?
history goes through many hands
history goes through many mouths
 to the steps of heaven
 did she get this far?
 as skinny as a rainbow
she can't answer mortality
she can't remember sleep
 she can't answer sleep
she can't remember death
 she tastes so happy
 her name is lucky
falling into her lifetime

falling into the future
 she fucked the time
is mortality never learnt?
god and his consequences
god and other consequences
 the passings of angels
 the passages of angels
protecting life with life
she married into history
 without fear of words
without fear of thoughts
 without fear of sleep
the beginnings of luck
 a heaven of hopes
the beginnings of hope
 a trumpeter of words
the perfection of hope
 a triangle of thoughts
the responsibility for perfection
 small gestures only, please

hands off, hands off
we are all god
she fears for everybody
the irregularities of childhood
another message from god
life takes too long
pay death the rent
there's blood everywhere
the fall of colour
the habitat of disorder
in the perfect dark
the rebirth of order
monsieur and madame oblivion
angels and gentle abstractions
fond and careful mathematicians
the actors of sleep
she needs reality now
the decline of ascension
full stop of abstraction
fond of their mistakes

signatures across an eye
a trail of corrections
sadly furnished texts
the fourth symphony
the third symphony
the author's armada
the language armada
the language flagship
beautifuls of misreading
a dangerous colourlessness
skillful at amnesia
she fucked god
a nice madness
duck, penguin, pig
no man's land
no woman's land
is fantasy safer?
retell for oblivion
is she happy?
deep in immortality
nursing inadequate explanations
a romantic universe

her last objects
the imaginary audience
tired of lists
technology is passing
can she sleep?
does she exist?
is she lucky?
poems for forgiveness
another messiah
negotiating kindnesses
god's index
numbers backwards
god's question
another death
her death
no forgiveness
good luck
soliloquies
lullabies
arias

GRAND ILLUSION JOE

For my family and friends

Grand Illusion Joe was first presented by Downtown Art Co. at Downtown Art Co. in New York, NY, USA, on November 7, 1991. Directed by Richard Allen. Lighting Design by Pat Dignan. Assistant Director/Production Manager: Karen Pearlman.

Grand Illusion Joe Tom Cayler

Sebastian Heaven George McGrath

ACT I

SCENE I

Night. In the street. GRAND ILLUSION JOE is alone.

JOE: That's too many. Thirteen is too many. I've seen too many painful things in my life. I've seen too many ugly things. I shouldn't have killed that guy. I can't believe I did that. What did I think I was doing? That was not professional. It wasn't professional. Maybe he's not dead. Ha! Yea. And maybe this uzie is a chicken. Three bullets in the head, buddy.

It changes your life, killing someone. They'll be after me for a long time now. Well, we're all dead now, aren't we? Sammie, Donald - what did he think he knew about anything? What the hell did I think I knew, for Christ's sake? Plenty, right? I always know plenty about everything. Knock down a few old ladies, sell a little crack on the side, a bit of laptop tax fraud, and I'm up there in the ring sparring with Uncle Sam! I'm ready for anything! I try on cities for size like raincoats! No homeland. They should have put me on the good guys' side. I would have been a hero.

(He has arrived outside SEBASTIAN HEAVEN'S house.)

So what's this dump I'm going to? That guy, Mr Unlucky, Mr 13, he said he was some kind of biographer or something. Said he was on his way to visit some famous asshole author or something. Said the old guy was sick. Said he was going to straighten out his papers before he took the big splash. Said he was doing it as a favour to the old guy's old lady more than anything else. Well, I'm pretty good with straight lines and I'm pretty good with ladies. It looks like I just found myself a little job. Mrs Sebastian Heaven? Joe, Grand Illusion Joe, G.I. Joe - if you will - at your service.

(Blackout.)

SCENE II

Inside the house. A room with average, dull furnishings, including a desk and large boxes of papers, books, newspapers, a sofa and lamp stand, a bookcase, and a bed in which SEBASTIAN HEAVEN is outstretched, covered completely by a white sheet. The place is a mess. SEBASTIAN HEAVEN has obviously died quite recently. JOE is standing to one side, talking to the body of MRS SEBASTIAN HEAVEN, lying offstage in the hall.

JOE: So he's dead, huh? Thanks lady. Yea, look, sorry I killed you, ok? You know how it is. We compulsive types. We can't help ourselves. We're like AK47s - let out one bullet and you let out 100. Anyway, I couldn't have that number thirteen hanging around my neck. It was making me nervous. Fourteen I like. Fourteen's ok. It's kind of nice and calm and boring and neutral. I could stay there awhile.

(He walks back towards the centre of the room.)

So what do I do now? Get rid of the bodies? Straighten out the papers? Get some take out? This place is a mess. Like a carnival. You want me to clean up around here, send me down a cheque from heaven, huh dude?

(He walks over to stand by SEBASTIAN HEAVEN'S body in the bed.)

So, you're dead, huh? Mr de Author. Tomorrow she was going to announce it to the world. Yea, as if the world could give a shit! "Heya Tommie, d'ya hear about this Sebastian Heaven guy? Yea, he died last night. Who was he? What d'ya mean, ya don't read, you ignorant pig? No, he wasn't big in the numbers game, he didn't run the girls on the street. He wasn't a crooked cop. The man was a prince - no sex, no drugs - the man was an artiste. What d'ya mean? Yea, well, what do I know? He was probably into cocaine up to his eyebrows."

Shut up, asshole. You talk too much. It'll be the death of you, me, you - whatever the fuck - like your mother said. Well, I ain't dead yet, Ma. Even living out here in the wild west.

So what am I going to do? I'm getting tired. I'll sleep here

tonight, that's for sure. And maybe tomorrow night. Maybe I'll just stay awhile. Maybe there'll be no big announcements. Tomorrow or the next day. Nothing. Quiet as a mouse, a dead mouse in a trap. I'll just play Mr de Author for a little while. Write myself a couple of books, a couple of dirty stories. Live a quiet, productive life. I've tried on too many cities for size like raincoats. No homeland.
(The light fades as JOE settles down on the sofa, centre upstage from SEBASTIAN HEAVEN'S body. Blackout.)

SCENE III

Same place. It is morning, JOE is rifling through SEBASTIAN HEAVEN'S papers.

JOE: So, who was this guy, Sebastian Heaven? What are all these words? Sure is a lot of crap around here. Articles, papers, notes, notes, notes. How much was Mr 13 going to get for cleaning this stuff up? Oh yea, it was a favour, wasn't it? So what's this, then? Looks like a poem. No one fucking reads poetry.

(He reads.)

"TWINS

"two beautiful athletes
life and death
are racing
one another
soon enough
one will cross the line"

Not bad. Maybe. What do I care? They're not my business, other people's dreams. The guy's dead. I specialise in staying alive. I've written the book of life and death on that one. Not everybody gets to stay alive is the central message. That's the bad news. The good news is that some of us do!

(He laughs.)

I'm a born humourist. I'm a physical humourist. I make jokes

with other people's bodies. Some of us are born humourists, others achieve humour, and the rest have humour thrust upon them. I would have been a great writer, if I'd had the chance. Yea, well, maybe I just got lucky.

Here's my first masterpiece. What is it, a poem? Let's see:
(*He reads.*)

"ENVOI

"Go book
and shake down a world
like an apple from a tree

"Run book
and copulate
to make children

"Quickly book
and build a wall that asks to be knocked down
the practise wall of freedom

"Goodbye book
and may God
be with you

"Patience book
for you must last
a very long time"

What the fuck kind of books did this guy write, anyway? And how many of them did he sell, the joker? You gotta keep those pages turning, turning, turning. Hell, even I know that much about literature. What's this one?

(*He reads.*)

"May 7"

A diary? A letter?
(*He reads.*)

"A painful book,
always rubbing up against the words.

"It is as if,
once unsheathed,
the mind is so delicate,
like a stamen
exposed.
So easily damaged.

"Reading is an intimate act,
you hold my words
in your mouth."

Serious and pornographic? Oh, I know, this must be art.
(*He reads.*)

"Writing is also physical.
It comes from the guts.
And it hurts.
It exhausts."

Tell me about it, I'm tired already, just reading this crap. When do we get to the funny papers?
(*He reads.*)

"As a receptacle,
I write what my frame,
my constitution, can take -
and sometimes more.

"A period of quietness now,
because another immediate plunge
could be fatal."

Fatal, huh? Well, you were right about that one, old man. I guess your timing was just a bit off.
(*He reads.*)

"Diving back in

is painful -
a hard, hard current
to swim against.
To immerse oneself in.

"The truth is
I need all the courage I can get
to finish this poem."

Yea, well, that makes two of us.
(*He reads.*)

"The truth is
I am struggling with this poem
like a Minotaur."

Like a Minotaur? What the fuck's a Minotaur?
(*He reads.*)

"The truth is
this poem is killing me,
it's replacing me."

Oh, I see, so that's what happened to you. You turned into a
poem!
(*He reads.*)

"Am I afraid?
I am very much afraid.
Wish me luck."

Yea, well, good luck, buddy. A little late, but better late than
never, wouldn't you say? So what else is new? Tell me some-
thing I don't know.
(*He reads.*)

"May 12

"In artists
the boundaries of self

are sometimes less strong,
like a country with several languages,
or a town split into warring factions.
The fear is
which will open the gates
to the invading enemy?
The fear is
to whom
are the loyalties due?"

The fear is: am I supposed to know what the fuck this guy's
talking about?
(*He reads.*)

"It's almost too scary for me
to begin another book -
the fear of carrying around
something so precious,
so delicate.

"I am so lonely
when each poem
is finished.

"I am so lonely
when each character dies.

"I will be lonely
when you die, Joe."

When Joe dies? When I die? Aw, come on, what the hell is this
about? This is supposed to be fiction. How does he know my
name? Nobody knows my name.
(*He reads.*)

"And yet it's safer here,
once we get in here,
inside these poems,
playing out different characters,

as in a theatre
you may have to play
the disintegration of your personality,"

The disintegration of whose personality - of my personality?
(He reads.)

"yet one part of you will remember
that you are an actor, a dancer,
with another truth,
another agenda."

What the hell's this guy talking about?
(He reads.)

"May 15

"You will tell me,
'Be aware of the lands of your writing
and those you wish to conquer.'"

I will tell you? How can I tell you anything, you dead fuck?
(He reads.)

"And I will tell you,"

And you will tell me?

(He walks over to address the body on the bed.)

Alright then, sit up and do it, sit up and tell me, don't make me
read this garbage, you know I hate reading, I mean, I hate
reading!

(He reads.)

"answers to whatever questions you have
will be found in the text before you,
even though I know you hate reading."

What the fuck? You can't talk to me. You're supposed to be
dead, Sebastian Heaven. You can't be talking to me. It's not like
you wrote me, for Christ's sake. It's not like you're God. Like you
wrote the God damn universe.

(He reads.)

"You will ask me,
what it is I am writing."

I'll ask you?
(He reads.)

"And I will say,
part poem, part play,
a new form, perhaps?
I don't know."

You don't know? What do you mean you don't know? That's
not good enough, pal. I thought you were supposed to know
what you were doing. I thought you were supposed to be a
professional.
(He reads.)

"I am before it,
I have not yet crossed the borders
into its country,
I am still travelling towards it,
from instinct,
with no map,
or, truth to tell,
I am drunk in a tavern,
in a little town,
because the day's journey
seems so thankless,
so futile,
I am wandering in circles,
am lost,
and the mountains
are only in my imagination."

Well, something is only in your imagination, pal, but I sure as hell
don't know what it is.
(He reads.)

"Don't let this be

cheap, or easy,
or romantic,
you will say."

That's not all I'll say, I can guarangoddamntee you that!
(He reads.)

"Don't expect leaders or preachers,
I will reply.
Don't expect guides or teachers."

Oh yea, as if I ever had any of those!
(He reads.)

"The paths are limited, grim.
Life, death, survival.
Cramped."

Yea, yea, what is this supposed to be, my *Sentimental Education*?
(He reads.)

"And yet we cram so much
into the little knapsack
of our daily lives."

Oh, that's so nice. So very sweet. Touching, even.
(He reads.)

"And you will teach me again
how to write this book,"

Oh, no. No, no. So now I'm going to teach you how to write
your damn book, am I? Well, I'm sorry, you'll have to do your
own dirty work. I don't like this. And I don't like this place,
either, I'm used to better. I deserve better. There's something
wrong here.
(He reads.)

"a book, books, words, thoughts,
even commas, spaces between thoughts,
as if thoughts or spaces mattered,
as if matter was anything

but smaller and smaller pieces
of dissected imagery.
Scientists dissect us
into tinier and tinier pieces,
tinier than pieces,
than molecules,
than electrons,
than even the latest muons.
We live in these tiny pieces,
tiny pieces."

I don't like this. There is definately something peculiar going on.
It's like this guy wants to cut me up or something. All these
damn words, tiny words.
(He reads.)

"And I will learn again to believe
that words make a difference,
any difference.
What you will call,
"To love words on a dream."

Alright, alright. Jesus Christ! Absolutely not. Phew! You blew
it. You caught yourself out. You've got the wrong guy, buddy.
These words weren't meant for me. And I wasn't meant to come
into this dingy, little dump and read them. You want to know
what was your mistake? Here was your mistake. I would never,
ever, not in a million years, say something as dumb, as mushy, as
stupid as: 'To love words on a dream.' I'll admit it, you had me
going there for a minute, you dumb fuck. But I got my priorities
straight. I know who I love. And it's me. I love only me. And I
am no 'word on a dream'. That much I'm sure of. I know it. I..
(He reads.)

"And you who have spent your life
trying on cities for size like raincoats:"

Trying on cities for size like raincoats?
(He reads.)

"You will learn
that you don't have to be afraid
of your memories.

"That you don't have to take
the long way around
to find your life.

"That you don't have to be afraid of being alive."

But I'm not afraid of being alive! Are you stupid or what? Don't you know anything? I'm afraid of... I'm afraid of - the other thing. I'm afraid of - not being alive. I'm afraid of being dead, God damn it! And I'm afraid that you're going to kill me, Sebastian Heaven. Somehow, I don't know how you'll do it. You'll dangle me by a rope, maybe, and then let go.

How can I have a conversation with a dead man? How can I accuse a dead man of planning to kill me? God, my head hurts. It's like something is swelling in there.

(He reads.)

"A strange thing,
leaving the years and places behind.
I remember
falling asleep thinking
that thought in sleep equals dreams.
No homeland."

No homeland. No homeland.

I can have a conversation with a dead man. Because he wrote me. I know it, somehow he wrote me. When he was still alive he wrote me. And he could do whatever he wanted with me. And he still can. I am his bird, his machine. He threw me into the air. And he has probably shot me down already. Just a little way down the road he's got something in store for me. A little surprise. A wonderful little surprise.

(He reads.)

"May 18

"Did I write this once,
a long time ago?"

I don't know.
(He reads.)

"LULLABY

"i need a lover
to love my poetry
when it comes in
late at night
small and sad
wet and cold
shivering
and beginning to cry
to take it in her arms
to snuggle it to her breast
and rock it to sleep
murmuring 'it's alright
everything's going to be alright'"

"One more word
and I'll ask you for her name,
I'll ask her to forgive me,
I'll ask you her name for forgiveness.

"Was it Marigold?"

That was someone he loved. He loved someone. Maybe he wasn't all bad. Maybe it was his wife. But if it was his wife, he'd better ask her for forgiveness. Why did he make me kill her? Or was that just another one of his games? Was she just another one of his characters?

(He reads.)

"May 20

"Writing out of a mood,
not about the thing,
we refeel our lives.

"I feel a thing by writing it
and the writing becomes a sustained
cloud of feeling,
a prayer to feeling.

"I feel a thing by expressing it -
this is the pathway,
the corridor, the fjord,
the rivulets, the branches.

"So few times
that I get to feel this good,
this pure, this flowing,
there's no word for it
because it is by nature
the flow of words,
the river of words,
that carries along feeling
and feels so good.

"I am a writer
because I feel by writing.

"You can't just ask for something else.
Whatever a person is,
perhaps this is what I am.

"A kind of conduit.

"Ah yes, the true path to oneself,
I hear you laughing,"

I'm laughing alright.

(He reads.)

"to being whole.
The question without answers.'

"This is where the road ends,
you have to go on foot.

"This is cliché territory,
clichés in italics,
clichés in barbed wire,
clichés in sync,
clichés in sensaround,
any kind of cliché so long as it bends,
so long as it doubles
back on itself
like a clown scorpion,
an acrobat
in the circus of contortion.
Apparently, you like laughing.

"Do not search for the solution,
you advise me,
'since that
would surely be
part of the problem.
Or, at the very least, would
create a whole new problem.'"

That's right, I couldn't have said it better myself. A whole new
problem. Like me.

(He reads.)

"Only the travelling
and not the arrival,
I reply.

"Now there's a good one for you.
Only the travelling

- no, not the travelling exactly -
the movement, the motion.
Nothing to be characterised
in newspapers and advertising.
Nothing to be characterised.
Not even if putable into words.
And not putable into words.
Being before, beyond
and including language.
Without the cliché
that you can't spell 'God'.
Neither the expressed,
nor the unexpressed,
nor the inexpressability.
The feeling itself.
The feeling without the 'I',
or the declension of the verb
'to feel',
or its object.
The thing itself.
The action of feeling.
Not the acting of feeling.
The movement of feeling.
The flow of feeling.
The feeling of feeling.
How irony claps, jerks and questions.
Like a horse that thinks it knows its way home
but is being airlifted to another country.
No homeland.
We're going on tonight, little one.
Little who,
who?
Little feeling.
Feeling.
I am pulling out
the scarves of feeling.
Gliding along the staves of feeling.

I can't tell you what's next.
I don't know what the colour
of the next scarf will be.
I don't know what the billow
of the next word will be.
This isn't magic unless
we are all this kind of magician.

"May 29

"I don't know where I am.
Where am I?
I feel like I am in some strange city.
I feel like I am some strange city.

"Poetry like opposite magnets -
the attraction and yet
the obliqueness around oneself.

"How to turn the things of this world
into your visions?
So much wood to cut through
before winter.
Most people are satisfied too easily,
which is not something
I could say for myself.
Bad translations are as impossible as mirages
and quite as beautiful.
The best is to deal
in the nitty-gritty of illusions,
then you have something to hold onto,
a trapeze in the sky,
the hardware of illusion.
I am - that wonderful
and naive word -
free, sometimes.
One has to believe that the god

in man is listening, watching, agreeing.
And this is not a mighty concept,
but a tiny heart of hope,
fluttering.

“Perhaps our best friends
are the ones we never know.
We lift our friendship
back across the ages
and we hope that one day someone
will lean back their eyes towards us,
will stretch their wings back towards us,
will find their thoughts in ours.”

*(As JOE reads the last words, SEBASTIAN HEAVEN sits bolt upright
in the bed, the sheet falling off his face and upper body.)*

Jesus!

(Blackout.)

ACT II

*Inside SEBASTIAN HEAVEN'S house. The same room. Positions are
reversed. JOE is in the bed, half covered by the white sheet as he begins
to sit up. SEBASTIAN is standing beside him.*

JOE: Is this it? Is this life? You woke me for this?

SEBASTIAN: Shhh. I wanted to get a few things down for the
record. I thought you might like to hear them. I thought you
might like to read them. I don't mean any kind of testament or
statement of principles or anything. I've seen enough monu-
ments to know what happens to them. No, I mean something
more by way of a little note, something scratched down on the
back of a scrap of paper, a shopping list maybe, something for
you to carry around in your back pocket, to pull out every now
and again, to help you find your way.

*(SEBASTIAN hands JOE a scrap of paper with several lines scratched
on it. JOE reads in silence, then responds.)*

JOE: My eyes glide along the first sentence like a child blinking at
a paper boat. But the images are old already and the pupils go
crashing on. Your sentences come and go, Mr Heaven, like
empires, like civilisations, competing with and following each
other down the years. They come and they go. I miss them
already. Well, there's my first lie for the day. It doesn't feel so
bad. You're the author, did you write it or did I think it?

SEBASTIAN: Because waking up is one of the most important
tasks, I woke you, Grand Illusion Joe, in the Andes mountains
under a load of snails and fish heads.

JOE: Oh yes, I remember, island delicacies can be traded for gold
up there. People take out the gold in their teeth and put in snails
instead.

SEBASTIAN: Symbiosis is only a temporary arrangement in the
vast religiosity of time. God and the American Express card
flicker with temperate gold.

JOE: Thank you very much, good humour in great ones always
leaves me with my hand in my pants.

SEBASTIAN: We are all trading posts for exchange, Joe. The currency is life and is worth far more than anything you can get for it. The engine of the human soul is run on ancient technology -

JOE: Yes, I know, lies, lies and lies to go, will travel, with excellent references, and return receipt requested. Free delivery if you're registered to vote in my neighbourhood and you'll promise to get out of my neighbourhood. You wrote it, is the whole evening corrupt?

SEBASTIAN: Tragedy begins at home, Joe.

JOE: Stop calling me Joe. What's the point of having a religious relationship with God?

SEBASTIAN: What's the point of having a religious relationship with death? Life is a long scene. The true dialogue is with the self. What strange human beings we are, trying to convince each other of something. Don't rush God.

JOE: Well, excuse me, so now you're the show pony of the human condition?

SEBASTIAN: I can survive even a rainbow. But your life is hardly an exact science.

JOE: You bet it's not. I am a dark patch on your brain that dreams. And don't fool yourself, what's true for me is true for everybody. We are all lonely for our sins. Lonely for our mansions. Lonely for our fame.

SEBASTIAN: Don't concern yourself with me, young man. I can sleep anywhere - in my books.

JOE: Big heaven, buddy.

SEBASTIAN: I'd call it good training in originality. Home is art.

JOE: Oh yes, I remember, you are the person who sends indecipherable messages to himself.

SEBASTIAN: And you? Bring out all your aliases.

JOE: No, later. I've told you not to talk about them, I've got to keep them safe.

SEBASTIAN: What do they matter? As I keep having to remind you, your action is to make sense of what is unfathomable. And that is all, do you understand?

JOE: I understand that art is an emergency. I understand that

you've made of my life, of all of our lives, a comedy of forgetting. Each generation repeating, again and again, the mysteries of existence. The hand, the voice, of one generation being raised in the next. And you just waffle on about the complex pathways of memory (or was it mercy?) and success.

SEBASTIAN: I wish I knew what you were talking about. All I know is that I like dreaming a lot of different levels at once. Like a scientist floating above a large bookcase, or a wall shelving in a laboratory, with different things going on at the same time on different levels. I can float up and down and it is entirely up to me which level I get involved with.

JOE: Don't start with me with the truth and reality talk. If you'd wanted me to be interested, you should have written me a philosopher. You throw a party, you invite all these different guests, then you keep them all in different rooms in a draughty old house without ever giving them a chance to meet each other. Half of them you keep literally in the dark.

SEBASTIAN: Why are you all so curious? One way or the other, your circles are no greater, you are within your realm.

JOE: You mean this naked world. All this naked world. A barbarism of fiction. Your fictional lies.

SEBASTIAN: My fictional need.

JOE: I prophesy that all your inhibitions will come true. Better get ready for it. What were those lines?

"In the land where time begins
Black and white girl coming up for air."

What the hell does that mean, anyway?

SEBASTIAN: It means everybody's got big plans.

JOE: Like how to stay alive your whole life.

SEBASTIAN: Joe, dearest, I've told you before, jump out the window of opportunity.

JOE: Life is poor mathematics. And you don't know how to add up the pieces. In any case, I wouldn't trust you to add up my pieces.

SEBASTIAN: Everything perfect is for sale, Joe.

JOE: Keep it honest.

SEBASTIAN: Everything is free and nothing is cheap.

JOE: I wish everything had two sides. Then I could see both of them.

SEBASTIAN: Why is it you think despair wasn't included in our little contract?

JOE: Listen, I don't have a future. Alright, I'll accept that. So you tell me, when am I allowed to die? When are you allowing me to die?

SEBASTIAN: The prophecy was, you could have anything you wanted and anybody you wanted, only not for very long.

JOE: I don't want mumbo jumbo, I want my hope back. God damn it, I want my life back.

SEBASTIAN: Why do you spend so much time thinking about the future?

JOE: Why do you spend so much time thinking about the past?

SEBASTIAN: I don't think about the past. The past thinks about me.

JOE: You are the past. And you talk to yourself too much.

SEBASTIAN: Just practising for talking to you.

JOE: You mean too much to yourself. You believe too much in yourself. You believe yourself too much, is what you do.

SEBASTIAN: Listen Joe, we are both aware that even my enemies think I'm a darling. But you, on the other hand, have bottled the fashion of despair. Fear and a half. The eau de cologne of the future. Thank God at least I can say, hello, my name's Sebastian and I'm civilised. At least I can say, my theme is human nature. Your theme is human despair. Was your brain always this fragile? Did I make you so poorly? How many hours a day are you sane? Do you have a memory? What is it, some kind of half built pyramid spaceship? Another of your edifices to confusion? Good God, if I turned my back you would look for a total turnaround so you could end your life as an undertaker. Only I don't know which of us would be stretched out on the floor. Why don't you forget about where you'll end up, where are you now?

JOE: Why don't you shut up and put my mind back on the hook,

it's ringing like a telephone.

SEBASTIAN: I've told you before, the problem with getting in touch with your feelings is that you don't always feel good.

JOE: Yes, I've read it, I've read it, I've read it!

(He grabs a piece of paper from one of the boxes and reads.)

"We were all born beautiful and wrong. There is nothing but wonderment and danger. We are all the horses of the human condition."

Thanks a lot!

SEBASTIAN: Two schools of the human mind, always and again, two schools of the human mind. If this play ever comes together it will be some kind of great thunderclap.

JOE: Philosophise as you will, but don't tamper with hope.

You're the historian who understands history but not himself.

Your problem is that you don't think in stories.

SEBASTIAN: Stories are one-track dreams. The brain is a wonderful but not a perfect instrument, when it goes wrong, it starts chasing itself, digging at itself, devouring itself, hollowing itself out.

JOE: Have you ever been honest with words?

SEBASTIAN: Why is it you always think I hide behind the incomprehensibility of text?

JOE: Oh that corruption had such eyes! One day your conscience is going to come back and eat you up alive.

SEBASTIAN: Art is the best of people. I am the best of people.

JOE: Yes, you are the hot attack of reason.

SEBASTIAN: The heart attack of reason, did you say? Did I create you so cynically? Let me tell you something. However beautifully we articulate the human condition - dance it, write it, play it, draw it - it remains the same. That is the glory and the hell for artists. We have a purpose, to expatiate on the emptiness, but, if we are honest with ourselves, we know we can never change it. Only temporarily can we populate it with our characters, stories, lyrics, songs, images, colours, movements. We can never fill it with our crowns or our achievements. The stage is

bare. And we are left as naked and cold on the bare and empty plain as the next man.

JOE: Nice speech. You should write it down. Hell, you should have been a writer! I look in my eyes and I see that I am a dangerous person. Did you do that?

SEBASTIAN: Every art work is a little history, a meditation on defeat, a piece of the broken bowl.

JOE: Oh, for Christsake, no more abstract poetics, ok? You're starting to parody yourself, old man.

SEBASTIAN: Every book, every life has to be open to the full range of doubts and hopes, Joe.

JOE: Jesus, why did you ever start with this poetry stuff in the first place? You know I like being in real books. Not poems, not plays, and certainly not poetic plays. In novels. Poetry is a chamber art and mostly I hate chambers. Why couldn't you have built cathedrals or something?

SEBASTIAN: Poetry is the most personal art form, and yet the one most consumed by the fires of impersonality, made quite foreign, other, the stranger. By which I mean I hardly recognise you at all.

JOE: Well, if you want to know what I think, I think you can no longer write for words, and that's why you're done for.

SEBASTIAN: You mean you're done for.

JOE: So language has stopped?

SEBASTIAN: I never said that.

JOE: Has language stopped?

SEBASTIAN: You should be happy for what I did write.

JOE: What's the matter, are you afraid to finish this book, afraid to fall off the edge of its flat world?

Oh God, I should know you'll never answer a direct question like that. Well, perhaps I should be glad, perhaps I should thank God for small blessings, the blessings of tiny minds. Maybe I get to stay alive a little bit longer. A few more words, a few more thoughts, a few more kicks.

SEBASTIAN: Don't count on too much, everybody gets to stay alive a little bit longer.

JOE: Don't you threaten me. How many more pages of this

ridiculous play script have you written? And, for that matter, now that you've woken me, how the hell are you going to find the time to write any more of it? Are you going to finish this play or not, God damn it? How much longer will we speak? I have a right to know.

(Silence.)

Jesus, I don't know why I bother. I don't know why I care. And to think that I was going to say to you that, me aside, this play must communicate. Whether I'm in it or not, this play must communicate. Be art, yes, also. But it must get across no man's land. This bridge must not be disappointed. This bridge must succeed. This bridge must bridge. Even with me gone, and you gone, and we are both going, this bridge must stand. From hell to hell, a rainbow blinking at heaven. As an ideal stands, because falling is against its nature. This bridge of hope must not fall.

SEBASTIAN: Thank you for the advice. You're an amusing sort of fellow, Joey, you should be in an amusement park.

JOE: Don't protect yourself so much. Do you think you can fool me? You can't fool me.

This play must be strong, direct, forward moving. Write it page one to page two to page three to the end. One thing after another. Place it in an order, like a series of steps, paces, stories, a road. Not all over the place all at once. Not osmosis or building from the inside or in sections. You need to create a direct work that packs a punch. Takes the breath away. That communicates on a gut level. Person to person. Gut to gut. Direction, drive. A forward moving life anger. You say you want to get a few things down for the record. So get the motherfuckers down, motherfucker!

SEBASTIAN: A life anger? An angry wind? A personal kind of anger creeping through me like blood, like blood, like blood? Who are you, my agent? What the hell do you know about it? Any of you folks out there, have you ever been torn apart by a pack of dogs? By three dogs, to be exact. This is the fourth and its fangs are at my throat. All words are meant to add up to something like railway tracks are meant to take you west, west and always west. Sex takes place all the time between the lines.

An orgy of heroes and antiheroines coming side by side in one long, rolling penetration from New York to L.A.

I am very glad for my eyes, though I guess it is also possible to touch and feel and smell and hear lies. The difference between sex and a lie is that in one case the truth comes out but in the other it is always hidden. Enveloped. Writing must be like come, it must come out, it must be secreted. The truth is terrifying but not constipated. It's got legs. There is beauty in movement of all kinds, in the movement of all things. We must fly with the anger of life, the calm anger that is co-ordination, that is selfless, that is grace. We must fly with the co-ordination of grace. Keats knew when he talked of truth and beauty. The two are inseparable like gorgeous, hideous twins, twin storms, nightmares back to back.

The page and the mirror are strange cousins. I don't know if I am in their family. I don't know if I am in anybody's family. What is it that joins the families of men and of women? What is it that joins the human families? How will we ever learn to trust each other again? I am glad there are no enormous lies we can scurry into like great religious helmets. I would not want to peek out the eyeholes and have my eyes pierced by a shaft of light like Harold at Hastings.

JOE: They didn't have those kinds of helmets at Hastings.

SEBASTIAN: So, who are you, my proof reader? My lawyer? Why explain everything? God damn it, is there nobody who's not riding the horse of the bottom line?

In the end, poetry is a terribly lonely profession because you dig and dig and craft and craft and talk and talk but you never know if anyone has heard you. In this way it is not like being inside another person at the moment at which they come. If you're lucky, it is more like being inside yourself and somehow all selves at the moment at which you all come.

And so I created you, Joe, you are the character I created, I pretend exists, who will listen to me, who has heard what I have said. Even if you disagree with me.

As for whether I've finished this text, or whether it will be strong and driving and clear. This poem is without end. You don't want it to go on without you? Do I want it to go on without

me? Do either of us have any choice? We are given the load, we carry the load. We speak the speech, we dance the dance, we round the stretch and hope it is not yet time to pass on the baton. Let's just say that for both of our sakes, I hope life lasts a long time, because everything takes a lot longer than one would like.

JOE: That sounds strange, coming from you.

SEBASTIAN: Does it? By dying early, poets make it possible for them to have followers, by dying late, they become their own descendants. Who could be satisfied in the face of mortality? These few poor thoughts and then we are all off to meet our Maker.

JOE: What do you do when you realise that your heroes probably have the same problems you have? We all want our place and we all want our sun. I'm just sorry that you are falling down the elevator shaft of history.

SEBASTIAN: I guess everybody's got something they want to protect against the night air. An epilogue encourages us to think that sleep is inevitable. Perhaps it encourages us, too, that sleep is inevitable. I guess I always knew that one day this poem would come true. Waking the preposterous dream, the violent attack. Call off your hopeful troops, Joe, your happy troops, call off your troops of hopefulness. Let them die sadly in their homes, alone. This face won't promise anything. Break in the pity like a horse.

JOE: So you and I are one? How long will we be able to see each other?

SEBASTIAN: Probably for as long as we keep speaking.

JOE: I like that, it shows a candour and honesty you don't have. Tell me what you think in full sentences.

(They look at each other. Silence. Blackout.)

ACT III

SEBASTIAN *is in the house, in the room, alone.*

SEBASTIAN: Late at night is when my gallery opens, when my visitors may come to haunt me for the times we have passed unsatisfactorily together. Rarely gladly. Not that I don't have happy memories. But late at night seems to be the time for opportunities lost. "Why didn't you take me?" Like the faces of refugees left behind as American boats and helicopters pull out of another sad imperial adventure. "Why didn't you take me?" my memories ask. "Why is it I can only visit you at special times, when I wanted it to be always?" Joe, for example, comes to me and says:

"I imagined we might meet
one day somewhere similar or as you
imagined in a room
full of soft men soft women
the lamps low
and the conversation
a mere hint of breathing

"I never imagined our
silence would be your death"

"My death?" I say. "One day you wrote," he says, "I cannot bear the metaphor of your pain. Now that you are dying, I cannot write the metaphor of your death."

Sometimes I take the easy way out. I pretend not to understand. I blame it on language. "Language is what is impossible," I say. "The tanks of language, catching rain, destroying villages. So many abandoned languages, completed languages, languages that have finished their cycles. Like a life. But life is a debate. Language is legal. True words do not 'empower' me, but give my freedom away, by which I mean pass it along. Information is democracy. An experiment in happiness. Poetry is like swim-

ming, what you remember is what you dreamt. Writing is my sleep."

"Mumbo jumbo," says Joe. "Always the same, mumbo jumbo." He doesn't know why he bothers, he swears to God.

I change the subject. "Do you have memories?" I ask. "Is anything left when you die? What will be left when I die?"

"Everything is sacred and nothing is safe," says Joe. "Every person's life is a kind of joyful tragedy like a propeller in the wind. It takes off in season. There are long shadows that we never see, unless we look for them. I have wanted, for a very long time, to impart this knowledge to some person, but I never expected it would be you. Well, the hiccup is the true historical calling, especially when it's photographed through a keyhole. Each of us wanted so much more than we got. The homily tells us to appreciate what we have. Clichés are truths branded into the skin like horseshoes. Circles of truths. U-turns of truths. Homily days of our lives. In these cowboy days of our lives, the TV tells us when it's a good day to die. I love my wife and my family in a way that I only sometimes can know. The calendar is at the will of the soup kitchen. Time is in the corner of the room. The diary is the diagram we use to explain our deaths. Time is the lie we use to explain our deaths. Time is the lie we pass on to our children to explain their deaths. It is hard to find an encyclopedia of heavenly matters. If I had an encyclopedia in which to look up heavenly matters I could dispense with all facts, all details, all forests of detail. The breath is indivisible from the birth. The simplest needs bear the simplest fruits. Polonius was run through with the sword of sincerity. If you have to ask advice then you probably haven't listened to yourself.

"This is the house that Jack built, before he changed his name to Grand Illusion Joe. No one can renounce their litany any more than you can pronounce your liturgy. But we can all try not to play the brand new fool. My life goes down to the sea. My living room is a beach. I sleep underwater.

"I have seen too much suffering. Which becomes a ghastly farce, of course, as the ancient comedians display. These charts are broken mirrors on our course. To care about a token indi-

vidual in a sea of small change, to follow their subway ride through hell, is that the ultimate and squanderous beauty? To care for what must die? The tragedy of small things, little people, all of us are so tiny, tiny, tiny.

"A voice that tells a story, a voice in the stars, a voice that tells a story in the stars. You should have given me credit for my dreams.

"Ideals without thoughts, you called them. Ideals that did not correspond to words. Boxes on the ceiling of ideals. Hope floating in the air. It was easier to store it up there, you said. Cynics would say it was out of the way. You said it was out of the way. But, of course, as everybody knew, you trafficked only in human reasons. For you, happiness was a compositional problem. Life was not some great moral adventure. But as far as I was concerned happiness was not one of your compositional problems. One of your traffic jams of human reason. I had always been in tune with melancholy and nostalgia, and I told you, you did neither much justice. You exchanged our hopes for an enormous black wig - that spread over us like a great umbrella, and covered every part of us, even what has been called our private parts, the private parts of our lives.

"I remember the time that I made a big mistake and you told me that all mistakes were the same size. And the time that I was deliriously, leapingly, happy and you congratulated me on making progress with a problem that didn't exist. I was always one of those sort of people who wanted to do those sorts of things. Plenty of time to be subtle when you're dead, I said.

"And perhaps you were right. Maybe I did have a melodramatic soul. But how was it that you, with more skills than rooms to put them in, were always afraid of the other sides of words? How could it be that I always had to say to you, don't lose your battles by fighting them after they've already been won?

"I would still like to believe that I will be able to find a good reason for everything, even if it is an unreasonable one and satisfies only me. The fact that there are no reasons is like a dictionary with only the words or only the explanations, but never a bridge between them. I would still like to believe that if

that was all one had one would find new meanings for words and new words for meanings. But I am tired of cheap philosophy. I would still like to believe that real philosophy is a wholly different currency, perhaps one that can't even be bought or sold, perhaps no currency at all.

"This has been a dialogue of strange twins, strange cousins, chasing each other around too many blocks. Considering the world is a constant series of misunderstandings, it's gratifying to think that we got along at all. However, I do feel it is incumbent upon me to say that I don't think your play is going to be much of a success. Perhaps it wasn't meant to be. Better put the rabbit back in the hat.

"Do you think it's possible that perhaps we both wanted to be dead, which was, after all, an interesting ambition? There is no substitute for being alive. I can say that, being dead. So don't believe everything you think. There are a million distractions, diversions, wrong turnings and wild goose chases. So many ways to think one is following what matters only to find out that it was all folly. So many of those highways and byways and a few country lanes."

Joe has hit some kind of chord and I stop listening. I am thinking back to those afternoons as a kid, angry at the sunshine, wanting to be out of my country, out in the real world. And now, years later, where have I come? How is anything different? I have created, yes. Travelled, yes. Been successful, yes. But what is there left for me, but myself, alone in my lonely little body, as before. Nothing has changed, but the clothes, the attire, of career and contracts. But these things I give away, they are not *for me*. I want no possessions. And am left with none. I am left with happy things - my body (healthy but older), my life, my creativity, my wife. But the externals will always be external.

"This poem is going in diminishing wheels of interest," warns Joe, breaking into my thoughts, "fascination, certitude, intricate detailed tinkering, followed by boredom, lassitude. Eventually only boredom and the finished work will be left. Let go of all those strands with which you tried to propel yourself forward, all those strands with which you held yourself back.

"You killed me and for that you must kill yourself. The tragedian's justice. Fair and entertaining. I know I'll enjoy it. The spectacular of pain. I won't shake hands, Sebastian, but don't worry, there are no honest men in this city. My advice to you is: police your own uncertainty."

Grand Illusion Joe sounds suddenly different, as if he is sinking into the bubbling cauldron of a B-grade movie, and then he is gone.

And perhaps he was right. Maybe it was my fault. Maybe it was me. Maybe I crossed the line between us that I had worked so hard to maintain. The director's line of personality. The cardinal rule of personality. The cardinal of personality. Never question your identity. And certainly not that of your characters. Don't ask. A man can be pope but a man can't be God.

You know, one doesn't really exist. That's the conclusion I am coming to. How is it possible that one didn't exist, then one does exist, then one day one will cease to exist. No. One never existed. It was an illusion, the whole thing.

I am sorry for the ineptitude of the ushers, who have shown you to the wrong seats in the wrong play in the wrong theatre in the wrong season. Better yet - the wrong medium. Get it right next time, will ya, guys?

As for me, I have seen too much of the world. Nobody should have to see that much.

Did you say I'm sick? Well, I am not sure I like the world well enough to want to be well. And that's why, you say, I've been writing and crossing out on these scraps of paper all these years: "Ha! Ha! Ha!"

(SEBASTIAN makes a sign in the air of writing the word "HA" and then crossing it out. He repeats this each time he says the word. Then he goes to the bookcase, takes down a book of his poetry, and reads.)

"A journey of dispossessed images.

A sea of portraits up the stairs.

Eternity is resolved, dissolved,
isolated, observed.

Charity is also resolved.

A heaven of time
underneath the social world.
Something to give to sleep.
Something for sleep.
Something to fight to forget.
Something to forget to fight.
A poem without beginning.
A poem without end.
A poem without sleep."

The sooner you turn out the light, the sooner I can die of old age. Alright, alright, don't bother telling me, I know you think I should be taking faith hormones. I should be taking faith home. I should be taking faith home to bed with me. Apparently, she's got big knockers.

If I never have a funeral, no one will ever know that I died. People will assume that I have an informal relationship with death, that we get together, once in a while, for a chat.

Somewhere down the road I have made a mistake. But the problem is I don't know what it is, otherwise I wouldn't have made it. But, of course, what do I know? Deluding oneself is what I'm best at. I've been a fool, that's clear, but perhaps I have learnt a few things in the process.

(He reads again from his book of poetry.)

"our mortality looks like us
sad and beautiful

"a pathetic sunset

"a bead of clichés
a cliché bead"

Perhaps I have a delicious, delirious right to obscurity. The tiny sweat of obscurity. All men and women have equal rights to obscurity under law.

(He reads again.)

"the evening is popular
the currency is popular

"I am six feet into realism, inner realism. I call it

"air realism
the acrobatics of realism
acrobatic realism"

One day somebody's going to have a wonderful time with Joe's story, until then good luck to him. Jack, Charlie, Reginald, Michael, Jacov, Jimmie, Joe, and all the rest of you bastards, don't blame it on me. I didn't get you going. It was your decision as much as mine.

"I got through, but without my soul," said the falling angel. Not everybody can live two lifetimes. Many happy returns for the birthday before I was born, called death.

I have created so much and felt so little. A few well-oiled words. The medium is transitioning beneath me. Joe was right, I have been afraid of the other sides of words. But I am no longer afraid of the other side of everything I say. I don't have to know, I just have to be there when it happens. To set my eyes upon the needs of the words. To read the first sentence. To catch the first wind. To catch the wind of the ordinary word. Italics from another world. Codes for the origins of angels.

It's been a long, slow life. I am dying out, like some overly delicate species. Expired sentences. A poetic play, a poetic will. I cannot apologise for the future. Don't wear out the welcome of your happiness, one of my characters used to say. I keep planning to die, but the thing itself is less than amusing. I tried to rid myself of my possessions so I could face the danger more openly. But they could not be packed up and shipped away. They had to be lost. Good night, repertory. The zigzag of uncollected hopes. The good things stay with us, become part of us. Take this knowledge and move on to the next freedom. I need someone else to keep hope alive for a little while.

What? Do decisions always have to be made so quickly? I

need more time! I need more light, more light, give me more light! What can these words do? I rewrote the Bible, for Christsake! With words, I called for the good in people. Using words, I proved that anybody could be human. Thanks to words, my greatest hope was not to have to hope. Because of words, I no longer believed that my psyche was for sale. And yet how these same words now form dryly in my mouth, and I spit out: how glorious is man, being nothing! Some kind of small 'g' god. And yet how these same words dive and swim back murmuring: how the potential for mercy is so very great, how the potential for beauty is so very great. Leave a human alone and he or she is not so bad, functions well and in balance, and with more than a little grace. A dancer for words. A dancer and the god of words.

But there is no paper to paper over these cracks. My pages won't protect me. Nothing will. My soul, if I had one, would be the only safety net for this long fall. Yes, I enjoyed rewriting the Good Book, with far more sincerity than was necessary, I might add, I made it bad!

Was Grand Illusion Joe right, is it possible that we both wanted to be dead, which was, after all, the easiest of ambitions? "Don't believe everything you think," he said. Oh, the future, how I love it! Take this knowledge and move on to the next freedom. Children of the world, you can stop rehearsing for death. Everything is perfect and nothing is safe. Everything will have to do.

(Fade to black.)

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