

BORDERLINE

A Play,

By Murray Mednick

For my sister, Blanche

(1948 - 2010)

CHARACTERS:

CARL: 60, a ceramacist, teaches in the California State College system. Married to **FRANCES**. Father of **MYRA**, an adopted girl from China.

CRAIG: 60. Teacher and writer, also father of a Chinese adopted girl, **VICKI**, and an acquaintance of Carl's. Married to **CINDY**.

CINDY: 55. Craig's wife of many years. Mother of **VICKI**.

FRANCES: 50. Taiwanese- American ophthalmologist married to **CARL**, and mother of **MYRA**.

SPOTZIE: 65. Jewish-American ex-hipster who lives in his car. Friend of Craig's.

MYRA: 15. Chinese, overweight and troubled adopted daughter of **CARL** and **FRANCES**.

VICKI: 14. **CRAIG** and **CINDY'S** adopted Chinese daughter.

GISELLE: 45. **CARL'S** girlfriend during his last months.

The Scene: Minimal. Props or furniture are probably not needed. Simple set with one or two projection screens to be used for several of the monologues, as indicated.

1. (*CARL enters to find CRAIG. Pause.*)

CARL: You may think everything is copasetic, but I am here to tell you, they are not. They are not copasetic. You have got a problem.

CRAIG: What's my problem?

CARL: You know what "borderline" is? You know what a "borderline personality" is?

CRAIG: No.

CARL: Listen. We're sitting at the Chinese restaurant, and the women are all there, all the wives and moms, and they're talking about their men. They forget I'm there. They don't see me. That's how alert they are. Because they are preoccupied with themselves and their problems, and they think I'm a harmless idiot.

CRAIG: What problems?

CARL: Us. You and me. We are the problems.

CRAIG: Oh. My wife Cindy, too? Cindy was involved?

CARL: Cindy, and the rest of them too, all the moms.

CRAIG: I can't believe that.

CARL: I'm telling you, I was there. They are complaining and dishing it out and they have a lot to complain about, and especially my wife, Frances, who is talking to your wife.

CRAIG: Cindy?

CARL: Cindy and Frances. You don't believe me?

CRAIG: She doesn't do that.

CARL: Then she is two different people, my friend. "I've had it with him," Cindy says, meaning you, "I can't stand it anymore," she says, "I've had it, I'm not going to put up with it anymore, he's not a father, he's a drug-addict, and he never makes a dime." She means you, she's talking about you.

CRAIG: Cindy is saying that about me?

CARL: Your wife, Cindy. *(Pause)*

CRAIG: I'm not a drug addict.

CARL: She thinks you are. Because you take painkillers.

CRAIG: Painkillers? You mean for my back?

CARL: Yes. And so on.

CRAIG: And so on?

CARL: And you drink. You and me, we both drink. We're alcoholics. I drink wine at night. I don't know what you drink.

CRAIG: Vodka.

CARL: I drink wine. I drink red wine in my studio. I'm a ceramicist. I have a little wine and I work, with my clay, with my kiln, with my dog. That's why I'm an alcoholic. *(Pause)* According to Frances. And not only that, she thinks I'm too nice. *(Pause)* Too nice to everybody, because I have no substance, I'm too needy, and I'm a drunk who drinks wine. I suck up to people, according to Frances. So, I'm too nice. *(Pause)* I'm too nice. I've been teaching in the University of California system for thirty-five years, and I'm too nice.

CRAIG: Cindy, too? Cindy is talking about me to people?

CARL: Yes. Sorry. Me, I've had showings of my pots and my sculpture all over the country, all over the United States. It means nothing to her.

CRAIG: Why?

CARL: Why what?

CRAIG: Why was Cindy putting me down to the other moms?

CARL: Why?, because you're too shy to be a father. And you wear the wrong clothes. And you're fat. And so on.

CRAIG: I'm fat?

CARL: And you drink and you're a drug addict, mainly.

CRAIG: And I wear the wrong clothes?

CARL: You don't dress right. You don't dress like a Dad.

CRAIG: She said that in front of people?

CARL: I'm just telling you what I heard, Craig. Me, I had small pox when I was a kid, so I have pock marks. It's ugly. The women went on and on, on and on, complaining, and they are trouble, so I am here to tell you. I am here to tell you.

CRAIG: Okay. I hear you.

CARL: I am here to tell you.

CRAIG: Okay.

CARL: So. You know what "borderline" is, you know what a "Borderline personality" is?

CRAIG: No.

CARL: I'll tell you what it is. And I'll give you a book, okay? I'll give you a book and you'll give it back. *(Pause)* I'll give you the book. A "borderline" is somebody who thinks there's something wrong with you because there's something wrong with her. But it's not her, really, it's you. *(Pause)* And she'll turn that screw. Like you never water the lawn and so the lawn is dying. Or you never say good night and your sex life is dying. And you never do the dishes. And you never wash the dog. That's just a few examples. That's three or four examples. *(Pause)* It doesn't matter what it is. It could be anything. Talk about sex. In fact, me and Frances, we never had a sex life. Frances was revolted by the whole sex thing.

She didn't like it at all. So why do you think I was out there drinking wine and playing with my clay and hanging out with my dog, before crawling into a cold bed? This was while we were sleeping together, or pretending to be sleeping together. *(Pause)* Certain women. They can function all right. They seem perfectly normal. Only inside, they're not happy. Things haven't worked out. Something's wrong. The wrong is in the guy. Like I told you. This is called "borderline personality." That's what they call it. *(Pause)*

CRAIG: Okay, Carl, thanks.

CARL: So I'll bring you the book. And maybe we can organize a play-date with the kids. Just you and me and the kids. And I would tread carefully, if I were you. Keep your eyes open. She's got something going on with you, I don't know what. Some kind of big resentment. Keep your ears open. You might hear something.

CRAIG: Oh. I'm a little shaken up at the moment.

CARL: Sure, you're scared.

CRAIG: But I'll try.

CARL: It's not her fault, it's yours. Borderline, it's her own fault, her own problem, but the guy 's the blame, something like that. Usually, it's like one thing, something stupid, like drinking.

CRAIG: I think I get it.

CARL: So I don't know, exactly, but it's like a specific mechanism, where they go after another person, usually a husband, or a wife. I'll give you the book. And I'd get a lawyer if I were you, a good one.

CRAIG: I don't want to get a lawyer.

CARL: Get a lawyer. I'm telling you, Craig. I am – I'm getting the toughest lawyer in town. (*Exits*)

2. (*CINDY enters to join CRAIG*)

CRAIG: Hi, honey.

CINDY: Hi.

CRAIG: How was the class?

CINDY: What class?

CRAIG: I mean the meeting.

CINDY: Which meeting?

CRAIG: About Vicki's dance class.

CINDY: Oh.

CRAIG: So how was it?

CINDY: I don't know how it was. I'll tell you what it was.

CRAIG: Okay.

CINDY: If you want to hear about it.

CRAIG: I do.

CINDY: Isn't the news on?

CRAIG: I guess it is.

CINDY: You don't want to miss that.

CRAIG: No, I could miss it.

CINDY: Really?

CRAIG: Yeah.

CINDY: We talked about the economy and about how the women are supporting the economy.

CRAIG: I see.

CINDY: No, you don't. Go watch the news. Have a drink and watch the news.

CRAIG: How are the women supporting the economy?

CINDY: By working and making the money. And on top of that, raising the kids.

CRAIG: I still have hopes for making some money.

CINDY: Sure you do, Craig. Hopes and dreams.

CRAIG: And our daughter?

CINDY: What about her?

CRAIG: She's doing her homework?

CINDY: She better be.

CRAIG: I'll go help her.

CINDY: No, thanks. I'll help her. Vicki is working hard. You only confuse her.

CRAIG: No, I don't.

CINDY: You're too lenient.

CRAIG: I try to give her a chance.

CINDY: You're too lazy. Vicki 's doing fine now. She's studying. You go sit down with your drink, Craig, and watch TV.

CRAIG: I'm not too lazy. I just want to help.

CINDY: Never mind. She doesn't need you now. Go watch your news.

3. *(CARL and CRAIG)*

CARL: I'm not going to give her an inch. I promise you. She may think she can kill me, but I won't let her. I love my daughter. Like you, I love my daughter, but I will not be destroyed by this lunatic woman. I'm telling you. I'm telling you now. I'm taking my dog and I'm out of there.

CRAIG: What do you think I should do?

CARL: I mean, you got to make up your own mind. *(Pause)* Okay, I'll tell you: Don't lay down. Fight back.

CRAIG: There's no attack from her yet.

CARL: There is one coming, I'm telling you. It's coming. Cindy is not rational, she is a nutcase. The attack is coming. I'm telling you. Get a lawyer. Get one now.

4. (CRAIG and SPOTZIE)

CRAIG: So then I was scared. I was tip-toeing around. I started feeling self-conscious by my fat gut, my little tire. I had to cover my stomach to have sex, though we didn't have any, really. Sex, I mean. She'd tell me, "Put on a shirt, Craig." So I put on a shirt. Then it was embarrassing, you know, and there was like nothing romantic left to go on. That was a while ago. I think sex was like once a year, if at all. So now I go around thinking, "She's going to leave me, she's going to throw me out, she's going to have me arrested," and so on.

SPOTZIE: Why should she have you arrested?

CRAIG: I don't know.

SPOTZIE: You didn't do anything wrong.

CRAIG: But I felt like I might have.

SPOTZIE: Nothing wrong. Nothing illegal.

CRAIG: I felt like I was wrong. Inherently wrong. And she picked up on that. The more insecure I got, the more powerful she got. I had no business taking drugs for my shoulder, or my back, when there were all these holistic solutions around, according to her. She

stopped talking to me or looking at me, and all I was allowed to do was walk the dog. When we came home, me and the dog, she said hello to the dog and ignored me. One day I threw the dog out the door on his ass. My daughter cried. I started watching for signs. Coming catastrophes. Watching Cindy's face, her eyes. The more I worried about it, the worse it became. *(Pause)* I kept prefiguring the outcome. It's the strangest thing, like walking in emotional glue. And then, of course, it actually happened. "Leave now," she said. I remember lingering in the garage thinking how much I liked having a garage and then hating the thought of being exposed – me and the car, exposed to the hostile city, the nasty L. A. night. Thinking of Carl's warning coming true, like it was a film noir, only he wasn't much for the movies, himself. He liked his pottery and his wine. Chianti was his thing. And he was up for a good fight with his wife, Frances. Frances could be the way she was, a crazy person, but she wasn't getting off scott free, as far as he was concerned. She would pay. He wasn't going to go anywhere until she got a court order to make him go. He said to me, tell Cindy to go. "Tell her to fuck off," he said. "You don't go. Don't leave your home. That gives them an edge." So Cindy and the kid, they moved to a hotel. But I wasn't going to leave my daughter there. They'd been in a hotel for weeks. You go or I go, she said, referring to the house. I didn't realize I had rights. And there I was, days later, in the garage loading up the car, heartbroken, leaving my family and my home. *(Silence)*

SPOTZIE: This used to be a civil community.

CRAIG: Since when?

SPOTZIE: Before proposition thirteen, when we said fuck you to education. So now we live among thieves and killers and ignorant barbarians.

5. (CARL and CRAIG. FRANCES OFF.)

CARL: So, I'm trying to have a so-called evening at home. Myra is with me. It's one of my days with her. Myra is watching TV and munching on popcorn. And then there's this voice coming at us from the trees above the roof. It's Frances:

FRANCES: (OFF) YOU PRICK. YOU THINK YOU CAN DEFEAT ME? YOU ARE NOTHING! YOU ARE LESS THAN NOTHING! YOU HEAR ME, ASSHOLE?

CARL: So the trees are shaking and my wife is up in the tree, because I have walled off the household in Culver City. The only approach is from above. So she's up there in the tree. I don't know what kind of fucking tree it is, but I realize I am in deep trouble because it's not just legal, it's not just routine, it's a real problem with a real hysteric. You've heard of that?

CRAIG: Come on, Carl, I know what a hysteric is.

CARL: So Frances is up in the tree, shouting down at us. I quietly go into the living room, to quiet Myra, to reassure her of my commitment and my protection, but it was no use. Frances just kept on yelling down at me from up in the trees.

CRAIG: So what did you do?

CARL: I called the police, finally.

6. (CINDY on screen.)

CINDY: I'm tired of talking about this all the time, Craig, but you are a drug addict and you can't keep a job. It's not acceptable. There are homeopathic cures for every ailment. You don't need these western drugs. I've been telling you for years now and I'm sick of it. I never use that horrible medical stuff. You don't see me ever using that crap and our daughter will never use it, either. You need to see a chiropractor for your shoulder and a psychiatrist for your mind, or you might try talking to a minister. And AA is an option, too. If you go to AA, Craig, I promise you, I'll go to Alinon. How would you like that? I think that's fair. I think that's totally fair. I'll take some responsibility. I'll go to Alinon. But you have to do it, Craig. Go to AA. There has to be some real effort on your part, Craig, REAL EFFORT.

7. (CARL and CRAIG)

CARL: Then we go to court. I've got the masterpiece of all lawyers, a woman who will not lose. She was tougher than me and she hooked me up with a shrink who was even tougher than her. I said I got no DUI'S. I got no problems with the school. I never once stepped out of line. Naturally, the custody problem comes up. I said, this woman is crazy, she doesn't have normal feelings for men or women or children.

CRAIG: Okay.

CARL: Don't say okay. I'm telling you and I'm warning you. Get off your spoiled little soft ass – it's you or her.

CRAIG: *(To Aud.)* I thought to myself, "get tough, Craig, get tough. You can do it. You're not a softie. You're not a creampuff. Say, No. Just say, No. Hang in there, Craig." 'Course, nothing worked out that way.

8. (CRAIG and SPOTZIE)

CRAIG: Then she pulled the kid to a hotel and kicked me out of the house and took me to court and ruined my reputation and so on. I tried in every way to save my marriage, my family. None of it worked. And I never read the book.

SPOTZIE: What book?

CRAIG: "Borderline."

SPOTZIE: It had begun long ago, probably, long ago in her own life, maybe before she even knew you.

CRAIG: True. But I might have understood better, and held my ground better, if I had had some idea of what was going on. And I made sure I stayed tight with my daughter, no matter what. I stayed in touch. And I kept my job. Substituting the sixth grade. I don't know how I did that.

SPOTZIE: If people don't feel strong inside, they try to act superior. They have no other way. What that's got to do with marriage is beyond me, but It makes it very difficult, because one is always right and one is always wrong. Or unacceptable, or unworthy of the other, or fucked up in some way.

CRAIG: Is that "borderline?"

SPOTZIE: I don't know. I haven't read the book, either.

CRAIG: "Borderline." Look it up.

SPOTZIE: No.

CRAIG: Look it up.

SPOTZIE: Okay. I'll look it up.

CRAIG: Thanks. *(Pause)*

SPOTZIE: When my sister died, there seemed to be something there, like in the sunlight. The sun was just coming up. She looked. Something looked, in the last breath, and saw something.

CRAIG: What?

SPOTZIE: I don't know. Something in the light. *(Standing)* I've got a date.

CRAIG: A date?

SPOTZIE: You're surprised? *(Pause)* Something around the body. Something in the light. Like a flavor, or an essence.

CRAIG: Around the body?

SPOTZIE: Yes. Anyway, my date is waiting. Maybe I'll run into you soon.

CRAIG: Have a good time.

SPOTZIE: Thanks, Craig. *(Exits)*

9. *(VICKI and CRAIG)*

VICKI: Dad?

CRAIG: Yeah?

VICKI: They're putting oil all over the flowers!

CRAIG: What?

VICKI: Oil is covering the earth.

CRAIG: Oh, you mean in the waters of the Gulf?

VICKI: Yeah. Where is all that stuff coming from?

CRAIG: The Earth is like a layer cake and there's oil in the cake, so they put a fork in there and the oil squirts out and all the frosting on the cake turns to muck.

VICKI: That's what I'm talking about.

CRAIG: I know what you're talking about.

VICKI: Why?

CRAIG: Why?

VICKI: Why?

CRAIG: Because people are people and companies are companies and they have to do what they do to survive, which is to find the oil, so that's what happens.

VICKI: That's why I don't believe in life anymore.

CRAIG: You don't believe in life anymore?

VICKI: No.

CRAIG: That's absurd.

VICKI: Why?

CRAIG: You're only a kid.

VICKI: It's out of control.

CRAIG: As far as we can see.

VICKI: What does that mean?

CRAIG: Maybe there's another vision of life on earth where it's not out of control.

VICKI: Like what?

CRAIG: Like it has to be that way. A splotch of brown appears on the waters of the Gulf, and somewhere else, a goddess sighs.

VICKI: That's crazy, Dad.

CRAIG: Maybe Spotzie's right, maybe something survives, something invisible.

VICKI: Is this true for everyone?

CRAIG: I don't know.

CRAIG: I don't know. Suffering is necessary, maybe. Sorrow. I don't know.

10. (CINDY and CRAIG)

CINDY: I have something to tell you, Craig.

CRAIG: What is it?

CINDY: It's very sad.

CRAIG: What happened?

CINDY: You remember my friend, Frances Wang?

CRAIG: Yes. Of course. Your friend, Frances.

CINDY: She killed herself.

CRAIG: She killed herself?

CINDY: They found her in the street.

CRAIG: In the street?

CINDY: They found her in the street.

CRAIG: In the street?

CINDY: That's what I said, Craig.

CRAIG: Why in the street?

CINDY: I don't know. I think she took some drugs and ran outside into the street and got hit by something or run over by something.

CRAIG: Something?

CINDY: She got hit by something. She had a lousy life. She didn't like her life.

CRAIG: Her husband, Carl?

CINDY: Carl?

CRAIG: Where is he now?

CINDY: I don't know. She left a note.

CRAIG: Did she leave a note?

CINDY: I just said she left a note.

CRAIG: What was in the note?

CINDY: What did you expect? She's been unhappy for years. They had a horrible divorce. You must have known that? It was very hard. Carl was unrelenting. He wouldn't let up, he wouldn't give in. She'd been unhappy for years. And then she'd get a call from Myra, "Daddy's been drinking."

CRAIG: "Daddy's been drinking."

CINDY: Yes.

CRAIG: I don't get it.

CINDY: What?

CRAIG: What business is it of hers?

CINDY: She asked her to tell him.

CRAIG: Who did?

CINDY: Frances. Asked Myra. The kid's a mess.

CRAIG: Of course she's a mess. How could she not be a mess?
"Daddy's been drinking." Frances asked her to spy on her own father.

CINDY: So she took her own life, Frances.

CRAIG: Why do you act like it's Carl's fault?

CINDY: Because it was.

CRAIG: He was protecting himself.

CINDY: What's a person to do, after all?

CRAIG: You weren't listening to me.

CINDY: Do you know?

CRAIG: You're asking me?

CINDY: You act like you know.

CRAIG: I don't know.

CINDY: She's dead, actually.

CRAIG: When did this happen?

CINDY: Maybe a week ago.

CRAIG: Thanks for telling me, Cindy.

CINDY: Yeah, sure.

CRAIG: I appreciate it.

CINDY: Sure.

CRAIG: Where is Carl now?

CINDY: I don't know.

11. (*CRAIG and SPOTZIE*)

CRAIG: Hey, Spotzie.

SPOTZIE: Greetings.

CRAIG: This person we knew, she committed suicide.

SPOTZIE: Who is this?

CRAIG: You remember, when we were breaking up, me and Cindy, there was a woman I told you about, who my wife was friendly with, you remember her?

SPOTZIE: Yes.

CRAIG: Frances Wang? Carl's wife?

SPOTZIE: I think so. The Borderline person?

CRAIG: Yes.

SPOTZIE: I remember talking about her with you.

CRAIG: Yes. She was from Taiwan. She was an optometrist, a very good one, proud of her ability. Made a lot of money. Her name was Frances – and my wife, Cindy, they both had the same complaints. Like they were really unhappy with their situations, their married lives, and so on. They were telling each other, how their husbands were drunks, and took drugs, and lied, and how they, the women, did the best jobs and made all the money, and so on, you remember that?

SPOTZIE: Yes, I think I do. Frances, from Taiwan.

CRAIG: Right. Frances. She was the angry one, Frances, the most bitter, the most fierce. And she and Cindy supported each other in this view of their men, including me. They complained to each other. They'd go to this Chinese restaurant, or a coffee shop, the women, after the kids' dance class, and they'd eat and they'd talk about their husbands and one of them was my wife, Cindy, of course, talking about me. It was after class, a dance class for the kids, and then they'd all talk. And Carl would listen in from a table nearby. I find it strange now. I find it eerie. Because the woman killed herself.

SPOTZIE: Of course.

CRAIG: Remember? How they helped each other with the story. So they could have a story. They helped each other with the story and then she kills herself.

SPOTZIE: And the story was how bad it was with you guys.

CRAIG: Yes. How they'd had it with the men. Because their men were drunks and drug addicts and moochers and they had to get rid of them. And I was one of them. I was one of them. I didn't have a clue. Though they didn't know me or talk to me much and they all looked at me funny. The women did. I thought I was just being shy around them. I thought I was being paranoid. *(Silence)* I didn't think my wife would talk about me like that, in public. How she could be so outraged, how she could be so fed up. And this guy comes over one day, Carl, Frances' Carl, he was one of the fathers, and his kid was a friend of my kid's, and he comes to my office and he's got this look on his face. Like, guess what Pal, we're in this together, we got a couple of troubled wives, and trouble is on its way, trouble is on its way, and you're in for it too, Pal, not just me. I had no idea. I had no clue. He was sitting at one of the tables, listening to them, and I guess they forgot him sitting there, because it all came out at the table. How the two of us are these dysfunctional fuck-ups and something had to be done. Something radical. *(Pause)* They were coming up with these radical solutions. *(Pause)* So Carl comes over to my office, with that look of triumph on his face, "like I told you, motherfucker."

SPOTZIE: Why triumph?

CRAIG: Yeah, it was like, "Don't forget how I told you about all this, Craig. You didn't believe me, did you? And now the shit has hit the fan, Pal. You have got some trouble coming your way. It's gonna come out of Cindy's mouth, with her lies and her lawyers and all kinds of bullshit. It's on it's way."

SPOTZIE: Frances. The optometrist.

CRAIG: Right, the wife of Carl. Because he was going to fight her, he wasn't going to give an inch, he was going to make her pay, while I was still having trouble believing all this was actually

happening. You know, that you could break up these families out of a kind of madness. I'd be in my office and she'd come over, you know, Frances, and she'd start talking about Carl with Cindy. She was ranting and raving about Carl to Cindy. And then Cindy started ranting about me. And so on. You're in trouble, big trouble, he says. And there's a certain irony there, and a certain satisfaction, and a certain glee. Because he's not alone – he's got me now for companionship. We are both the victims, he says, of these borderline personalities.

SPOTZIE: People mean all kinds of things. Some women have a hatred for men. Cindy may not have known what she was doing. It's not necessarily Borderline.

CRAIG: No, this was Borderline. We talked about it at the time. He tried to warn me, because I didn't seem to believe him. I didn't think Cindy would do some of that shit she said and did. And lie about me like that. But it all turned out to be true, as you know, Frances couldn't control Carl's life and her daughter's life and now she's committed suicide. (*Silence*) I'm sorry. I mean, Frances definitely meant to do harm, and Carl didn't let her get away with it and she ends up taking some pills and running out into the street. I didn't like her much, but I'm sorry for her –

SPOTZIE: Where's Carl now?

CRAIG: – I think she did do it. Cindy. Put me down, after a dance practice with the kids. With all the women there, and the kids, and the whole nine yards. About what a shit I was. And I didn't believe it. Not until she started lecturing and hectoring me about it herself. How I was a drunk and drug addict and it was entirely unacceptable. Frances was mean, like I said, and she had a big influence on what my wife, Cindy, proceeded to do. Carl kept trying to warn me, you know, Carl did, and I wouldn't believe him.

But Cindy started in, eventually. She started laying it on me hard, every single night. Cindy.

12. (*CINDY and CRAIG – In the Past*)

CINDY: It's the culture, Craig. It's a culture of hookers and half-naked girls in advertisements. You can't let girls wear those types of clothes. Those are clothes that prostitutes wear. You should see the glamour pictures our daughter takes. She photographs herself in various poses. It's shows no self-esteem. I'm not blaming you, but I don't want you buying Vicki any more clothes – tight-fitting, revealing clothes. I know you don't look at the clothes, but you should look at the clothes, see what she wants to wear. I won't put up with it. I'm going to throw them away. She picks up the worst of the culture that shows such little self-esteem, trying to get attention by looking attractive to boys. Is that what you want? Well, I won't stand for it. I'm throwing them away, so if I were you, I would look in the bag, look at the clothes. It's your money anyway. You want to spend your money on those cheesy clothes? Go ahead, but I'll throw them away. I'm not saying it's all your fault, but you better start paying more attention.

CRAIG: Carl? Have you seen Carl?

CINDY: No, why?

CRAIG: He wants to have a play-date for Myra with Vicki.

CINDY: No way.

CRAIG: *Why not?*

CINDY: *Why not?* Because of Carl.

CRAIG: Carl?

CINDY: He drinks and I don't trust him.

CRAIG: What do you think he'll do?

CINDY: I've heard things, believe me.

CRAIG: What things?

CINDY: Things. That's all. Just things.

CRAIG: I don't believe them.

CINDY: I wouldn't put it past him, according to Frances.

CRAIG: That's bullshit, Cindy. Carl would never do anything like that, not in a million years.

CINDY: That's not what I heard.

CRAIG: What, are you talking to the dead now? Frances is a dead person. You didn't hear that anywhere but in your own head.

CINDY: Don't you dare talk to me like I'm a crazy person! I don't appreciate it and I won't put up with it! Do you hear me?

13. *(CRAIG is speaking with GISELLE)*

GISELLE: So? Craig? You know Carl, what's his name, very nice guy, German, pockmarked? I heard you knew him.

CRAIG: Carl?

GISELLE: Carl.

CRAIG: Yeah. I do know him.

GISELLE: He died.

CRAIG: He died?

GISELLE: Yeah he had a blood clot in his brain. I think I told you, his wife, you knew her, she died in the street. Frances. She was a suicide.

CRAIG: Frances. Yes.

GISELLE: So a week after the funeral he's not feeling good, he goes to the hospital, his head hurts. Turns out he's got a clot in his brain and he goes right into a coma.

CRAIG: That's terrible.

GISELLE: I thought so.

CRAIG: Thanks for telling me.

GISELLE: Poor guy. He had a hard life, you know.

CRAIG: I did know. He was an orphan in the Midwest somewhere.

GISELLE True, he was an orphan. In Omaha. And then, later on, his daughters disowned him.

CRAIG: He had daughters?

GISELLE: Yeah, he had daughters somewhere. Not the Chinese one, not the new one, Myra, whom he loved. There was one in New England, and one in the Northwest, I think, and they had some problems over the mother's money.

CRAIG: I'm sorry. I didn't know any of that.

GISELLE: He didn't talk much about it. I don't think they got along.

CRAIG: I'm sorry.

GISELLE: So that's it for Carl.

CRAIG: Thanks.

GISELLE: No problem. He's out of it now. Poor kid, though. His kid, Myra. I don't know what's going to happen to her.

CRAIG: Where is she?

GISELLE: I'm not sure. Carl had a girlfriend at the end, you know, who loved him. He had me. He had some happiness before the end, some good times, which I'm very glad of.

CRAIG: Me, too. I'm glad, too. Thank you.

GISELLE: Don't thank me. I'm just glad he had some good times happen to him before the end. He was very fine with ceramics, you know.

CRAIG: Yes, I did know. He was one of the best in the world.

14. (CRAIG, SPOTZIE, CARL and CINDY.)

CRAIG: He died, Carl. He got a blood clot in his head, a week after they found Frances dead in the street, and he died. I saw him once before that, before he started getting those headaches.

SPOTZIE: And?

CRAIG: This is how it went: (*SPOTZIE steps aside and CARL enters to re-enact the scene.*)

CRAIG: So, Carl

CARL: Craig.

CRAIG: How are you?

CARL: I don't feel so good.

CRAIG: Same headaches?

CARL: Yeah. Don't let them put me in a hospital.

CRAIG: I'll try, Carl.

CARL: I hate hospitals. I can't stand them. I don't want to die in a hospital.

CRAIG: I'll try.

CARL: Try.

CRAIG: I said, I'll try.

CARL: Okay. Thanks.

CRAIG: How's your kid?

CARL: Myra? She's fat. Fat as a house.

CRAIG: Some people eat. Some people watch television.

CARL: She eats while she watches.

CRAIG: What do you do?

CARL: What can I do?

CRAIG: You have a girlfriend?

CARL: Yes. I do. It's very nice. Giselle. Someone who actually likes you and enjoys your company. And you?

CRAIG: No. I'm too old and too stressed.

CARL: What does that mean?

CRAIG: Sex is for baby making. I'd be a grandpa. And I get too nervous on dates. I can't go out on a date.

CARL: Too bad. I highly recommend it. Maybe later, when you're really too old.

CRAIG: Maybe.

CARL: How's Vicki?

CRAIG: She's doing okay. It's an adjustment. She spends most of her time now with her mother.

CARL: I'd fight that if I were you. You have rights.

CRAIG: I know that, Carl. I'm doing the best I can.

CARL: I'm sure you are. (*Pause*) You know, Frances committed suicide?

CRAIG: Yes, I heard about it. From Cindy.

CARL: I figured, but I wanted to tell you myself. Knocked herself off. You could see it coming.

CRAIG: She was hard to deal with.

CARL: She couldn't stand losing. She couldn't stand not having custody. She couldn't stand that I had a new girlfriend and a new life.

CRAIG: Weird how she did it, though. Running out into the street...

CARL: A madwoman.

CRAIG: You must feel sorry for her?

CARL: I do, but it's hard. She was bad news for me, Craig. Now I have a real life, finally, and I appreciate it. I protected it from being destroyed by that miserable maniac. If it weren't for these stupid headaches, I'd be fine. And you?

CRAIG: I live alone now, as you can see. In lovely Santa Monica.

CARL: I warned you. I tried to warn you.

CRAIG: I know you did. Borderline and drugs and alcohol.

CARL: Exactly.

CRAIG: Are you an alcoholic, Carl?

CARL: Oh, fuck that shit. I drank my glass of wine at night and did no harm. My girlfriend now – Giselle – doesn't even mention it. I did all the court routines and that's that. No DUI'S. Bracelet on my ankle. Answer is no, I'm not an alcoholic, whatever that is. It was all borderline bullshit. Answer to that is bullshit. The answer is no. Fucking bitch. And you?

CRAIG: Me? I'm in therapy at the moment.

CARL: That's another one. A con. A long con. A lifetime con. Frances had a shrink, too. It was like paying an indemnity, a tax. It should be illegal.

CRAIG: I'm afraid of women and I live alone.

CARL: Oh, come on. Who says?

CRAIG: My friend, Spotzie.

CARL: How does he know?

CRAIG: He's smart. He lives in his car.

CARL: He can't be that smart if he lives in his car.

CRAIG: He used to be a Rabbi.

CARL: So what?

CRAIG: Nothing.

CARL: What's so smart about that?

CRAIG: He lives life to a minimum.

CARL: Not me, I want to live it to the max.

CRAIG: He tries his best.

CARL: Good for him.

CRAIG: I'm sorry about Frances.

CARL: She never let up. She was never happy about anything. I'd help out with the dance, with the various buffets, with this and that, I got along, people appreciated it, but she thought I was a wuss, too much of a handyman. She called me "Carl, the handyman." She loathed sex and she loathed me and when she got a lawyer I got the toughest one I could find, the toughest one in the city. She didn't expect that. She thought I'd lay down. But I'm an artist. I'm an artist. I showed my ceramics all over the country. I'm worth something. We fought her on everything. Right along the line, the custody, the house, the money. No D.U.I.'S on my record, no felonies, nothing. I held a regular job in the California university system for thirty-three years and she was not going to bring me down. She did not win, and I can tell you that.

CRAIG: Did you go to the funeral?

CARL: No. There was no funeral, no service. They cremated her and put her in a box. No ceremony, nothing.

CRAIG: Where is the box?

CARL: It's with Myra. Don't you think that's odd?

CRAIG: And Myra?

CARL: She's miserable about the whole thing. I'm hoping she gets over it. We go to counseling. I try to give her a feeling of family. But she eats a lot. She eats and she watches the TV.

CRAIG: School?

CARL: She hardly goes anymore. And Vicki?

CRAIG: She's fine. She seems to have adjusted. She likes to shop. Spends most of her time with Cindy. A couple days a week with me.

CARL: Take the gloves off, Craig. Sue the bitch and take the kid and some money and put an end to it.

CRAIG: My daughter likes it that we all try to get along.

CARL: Yeah, yeah, I'm sure Cindy likes it too.

CRAIG: She does.

CARL: Sure, she's in complete control. You're no threat. Find a woman, Craig. Get laid once in a while.

CRAIG: I've forgotten how to do that.

CARL: Cindy just brainwashed you, Craig. Now you don't think you're worth anything.

CRAIG: I'm too old. I'm out of the game. They don't even see me no more. And I used to be good-looking.

CARL: Not true. Lonely women are all over the place.

CRAIG: Where?

CARL: Are you kidding? They're all over.

CRAIG: I'm not interested in old ladies.

CARL: Forties, Craig, forties and fifties, I'm telling you, you can't go wrong. But you got to be available, you can't be hiding out, and I think Cindy's still got her hooks into you.

CRAIG: No, I can't hardly talk to her anymore.

CARL: But you do, and you have to, because of Vicki.

CRAIG: Right. I do have to do that.

CARL: But you can't live like that. You got to have people to talk to you. Vicki won't talk. She's a teenager. It's companionship, companionship is the thing. Someone to talk to.

CRAIG: No.

CARL: Why?

CRAIG: Like I told you, it's too stressful. I can't go out on dates.

CARL: What's her name 's a teenager.

CRAIG: Vicki.

CARL: Vicki, of course. Teenagers, they don't talk to their parents. They talk to their friends. So who do you talk to?

CRAIG: I watch TV. Movies, mostly.

CARL: Get out, Craig, and meet some people. I'm living my life. I'm the happiest now I've ever been in my life.

CRAIG: Well, good for you, Carl. I'm happy for you. And I appreciate it.

CARL: What?

CRAIG: You taking the time to check up on me.

CARL: You're a friend, for chrissakes. That wasn't nothing. I didn't do nothing. Drink?

CRAIG: No, thanks.

CARL: Abstinent, are you?

CRAIG: Not really.

CARL: You can't be one or the other, that's why I quit the program.

CRAIG: You're correct on that. That's why I quit, too.

CARL: People quit.

CRAIG: There's all kinds, actually. It's one of the better programs in America, AA.

CARL: I agree with you there, though that may surprise you.

CRAIG: It doesn't.

CARL: Whole country should join, like the Peace Corp. Gotta go.

CRAIG: Thanks for coming over.

CARL: Well, if I meet someone I'll let you know.

CRAIG: What?

CARL: You know, fix you up.

CRAIG: Maybe you could wait on that.

CARL: Why?

CRAIG: Can't handle it right now.

CARL: Can't date? Can't conduct a conversation?

CRAIG: No.

CARL: Well, then, whatever.

CRAIG: Thanks, anyway.

CARL: Trouble with this country. Just want to blow up mountaintops for coal and the devil take the hindmost. Frack down and ruin the

water. No community at all. No sense of worth. They have no Christian sense of responsibility, just a bunch of no-accounts want to drive their car over to Denny's, eat a cheap meal. (*Exits. SPOTZIE steps back on stage.*)

SPOTZIE: So that was Carl.

CRAIG: That was Carl. Died a week later. Brain aneurism.

SPOTZIE: You sit with him?

CRAIG: I didn't know about it until this woman told me afterward. I didn't know her, but she seemed to know me.

SPOTZIE: Could have been his new girlfriend.

CRAIG: Yesh, Giselle. He knew her at the college. (*Pause*) Then Cindy told me: (*Enter CINDY, SPOTZIE steps aside.*)

CINDY: He was in a coma. He had a blood clot in his brain. A week after they found Frances, he collapsed.

CRAIG: He's in a coma now?

CINDY: No. He's dead. As we speak.

CRAIG: And the kid? Myra?

CINDY: She's with a relative of his. They found her, Frances, on the street, laid out in the street. Three days later, Carl went into a coma. She was wound up like a pretzel, arms and legs in the wrong positions, eyes vacant, mouth hung open on the last gasp. (*Exits. SPOTZIE steps back on.*)

SPOTZIE: So you got a double suicide here and a murder.

CRAIG: What's that?

SPOTZIE: Something wrong with your ears? I say you got a double suicide here and a murder. (*Long silence*) Say something.

CRAIG: Yeah, I see what you mean, she got him in the end.

SPOTZIE: She got him.

CRAIG: Yeah, Frances couldn't kill him any other way. Carl wasn't going to buy into any of it. So she takes some pills one night and goes out into the street.

SPOTZIE: Right.

CRAIG: So how is that a double suicide?

SPOTZIE: They knew each other. They were married.

CRAIG: I don't get it.

SPOTZIE: I don't either. I'm guessing. (*Pause*) You can't know these things. But I'm thinking she knew how to kill him. (*Silence*) He knew how to be killed.

CRAIG: Thanks a lot, Spotz.

SPOTZIE: Sorry. It's my intuition.

CRAIG: Now what do I do?

SPOTZIE: I don't know.

CRAIG: Should I see a therapist?

SPOTZIE: See a therapist.

CRAIG: Carl did. The long con, he calls it. He didn't believe in it, but he did it.

SPOTZIE: He was buying time. His lawyer made him do it. Maybe he learned something, but I doubt it. *(Pause)*

CRAIG: Spotzie.

SPOTZIE: What?

CRAIG: I've come to the end and there's no way out.

SPOTZIE: Did you hear that line on Television, or what?

CRAIG: I'm an old man and I'm alone now most of the time.

SPOTZIE: Me, too.

CRAIG: Why do you doubt the therapy?

SPOTZIE: Buddha, maybe he understood something. Mohammed, maybe. Jesus Christ. The Baal Shem. Therapists, I don't know.

CRAIG: Why not?

SPOTZIE: No verticality. I was committed for a time, if you remember, in my youth. I was a nineteen year old maniacal junkie. Finally, I introduced myself to Bellevue Hospital, in New York. I had suicidal impulses. One of the things I couldn't get over was the

Holocaust. Not that you ever get over it. But I kept asking myself: Would I have gotten on the trains? Would I have fought and killed? Would I? Nobody knows what they'll do until it happens. I don't know to this day what I would have done. So this still bothers me. Would I have walked into the gas chamber and sung the *Shema* with my last breath? "You're one of those little Jews," my second wife – a Gentile by the way – said, "who got on the trains." That one hurt. So I don't blame you, feeling bad about the suicide. Think of all the suffering caused by mental illness and the little anyone can do about it.

CRAIG: What did you mean about the verticality?

SPOTZIE: When I was a kid, in the Summer, in the woods. There was a path before you got to the Kanter house. You walked up there through the woods and there was a *Shul* hidden away up there. My uncle used to go there, carrying his *tallis* in his little bag. I never went myself. I thought it was a secret place. There were chicken farms and chicken shit all over the place, I remember that, thinking you can believe in chicken shit and God at the same time. Maybe without chicken shit there is no God. You can't miss the chicken shit. And then the moment comes, the last breath comes. I'm thinking of my sister. We don't know for sure. But she said No. No to chemo. No to therapy. No to morphine. One morning she turned her face to the sun and breathed her last. What all this has to do with verticality, I don't know. Something. Come on, we'll have an honorary *shnapps*. (Pause. *They drink.*) In the old days, you know, someone in your situation, they'd go to a matchmaker.

CRAIG: Carl offered to fix me up. His ex-wife commits suicide and then he gets a new girlfriend and offers to fix me up. Maybe I should call her or email her.

SPOTZIE: Who?

CRAIG: His girlfriend.

SPOTZIE: What for?

CRAIG: I don't know. Pay my respects. (*Pause*)

SPOTZIE: Your daughter?

CRAIG: My daughter?

SPOTZIE: So you buy her things?

CRAIG: Right.

SPOTZIE: You're bribing her for attention?

CRAIG: I don't think so.

SPOTZIE: Think it over.

CRAIG: Why do you live in your car?

SPOTZIE: I can afford it. It's a Volkswagen. I'm a musician. Take a look. It's not so bad. We'll have another *shnapps*. *L'chaim*. To Life. To my sister.

CRAIG: Your sister.

SPOTZIE: And to Lazer, who was the father of her father.

CRAIG: To Lazer.

SPOTZIE: She turned her face to the sunrise and said, "I'm out of here." A good death. It was light. Like the turning of a leaf.

15. (*GISELLE and CRAIG*)

GISELLE: What do you want? We had the memorial already. I invited you. I emailed you.

CRAIG: I never got it. Actually, I got it too late.

GISELLE: Oh. That's strange.

CRAIG: We didn't know each other that well, me and Carl. We only knew each other through our kids.

GISELLE: And your wives.

CRAIG: Right.

GISELLE: I worked with him over at the college. He was a good man, you know. He put up with a lot from that woman, mainly because of his adopted Chinese kid, Myra, he did the best he could with his situation, married to this Asian borderline psychotic. What happened with you?

CRAIG: She left and took the kid.

GISELLE: You have custody?

CRAIG: Part-time.

GISELLE: Too bad. She's Chinese, too, right?

CRAIG: My daughter is, yes. Not my wife. How did you get together with Carl?

GISELLE: Everybody liked Carl, pockmarks and eagerness to please, and all. He'd help out at these adoption functions and she'd say to him in the car, "Why'd you do that, Carl? You don't have to volunteer for everything, you don't have to do so much. Why do you do that?" Like it was an insult to her or something. *(Pause)* Anyway, what did you ask?

CRAIG: How did you and Carl get together?

GISELLE: He saw where the wind was blowing and he didn't waste any time. He got that house in Culver City and we started seeing each other. I'm glad he got some happiness in his life. Myra, when she was over, would just sit there, depressed, looking at the TV. That bothered him, along with the monitor Frances had the judge put on his ankle, about alcohol. But he and Myra, they got along all right.

CRAIG: Where is she now?

GISELLE: I don't know. She's with some foster parents somewhere. I doubt she 's doing real well. What I don't understand is how he quickly got this stroke in his brain and went into a coma and died. Just like that, when he was getting his life together. She was some piece of work, that woman. Okay?

CRAIG: Yes. Thank you.

16. (CRAIG and SPOTZIE on stage together, while FRANCES and CARL speak on the screens.)

FRANCES: (On screen) What is this happiness shit anyway? What is there to be happy about? I'm normal. I'm sane. Without any frippery or trumpery. I live in the real world. Not like Carl, who drinks and dreams. I work hard, I make money, I take care of my kid. I do my best, for her and for me, the best I can, even though I hate this dark house with it's crazy dog and the homeless on the street and Carl in the back playing with his pots and drinking wine while the radio blares out obnoxiously to the neighbors.

CRAIG: He died, Spotzie, he died still in his coma, a week after she killed herself.

SPOTZIE: You told me. *(Pause)* Mental illness. Dirt bags on the street and people in prisons and their minds are not right. There's little sympathy for those. I'm right on the edge myself, in my car. Seems like life is thin as an illusion, blown about by invisible currents. Raise a family, and so on. Everything looks okay. Only it's not for us. There is hope, but not for us.

CRAIG: You lost me there, Spotz.

SPOTZIE: Sorry. I don't know. Maybe hope is for the strong-minded. I was quoting Kafka. There was no hope for people like Frances. Maybe that's what the Buddha meant. No need to come back. He got sane. He got refined.

FRANCES: (On screen) I did well in school. I worked hard. I went into ophthalmology because the eye is a wondrous thing. Very complicated. You wouldn't think such a complicated mechanism could evolve on the earth. You know, we turn to shit in the end, which is not a bad thing necessarily. What I mean is, you have this complicated mechanism that creates vision, seeing, and then acts

as fertilizer. It's re-cycled, you could say. Imagine, vision is caused on the earth and then returns to the earth. It's just hard to see the point of it all unless the idea is to turn to shit in the end. So things grow on the earth. Maybe it's the earth seeing and sensing itself through us? That's an idea. I mean, I don't usually talk like this, usually I'm more circumspect and careful, but it's the earth, isn't it, sending out feelers and senses like sight and sound so it can have a kind of awareness. The earth's awareness. I think that's an amazing thought, a little far out for me, but if that's what we are, you know, little bits of awareness for the earth's brain, you know, okay, it's okay with me, but I don't give a shit really, I'm not crazy about it, being a little bit of shit for the earth. I am not a good servant, you could say. You could say that. There's no sin in dying intentionally, to get off the map, as it were, quit the job, you know. My friend's ex husband's sister, Craig's sister, no, his friend Spotzie's sister, she denied the chemo because it did nothing but make her sick. She wanted some good days before she died. So I started thinking about it myself, the meaning of it all, and that's all I could come up with, not having any good days, and I won't be missed, this little bit of seeing not much of a light going out. She went to a Chinese restaurant and tried to enjoy the food when she decided. I remember the day. A nice Spring day and she could hardly think straight, but she had that thought. I'm not even worth that much, as much as her, I mean, in terms of awareness. At least she was interested in the subject, while I stuck with the mechanics of eye-balls and lenses. I want to have good days, she said, and I agreed totally with her. And then I thought, well, Jesus, she has good days. Do I? Do I have any good days? And the answer is No, a definitive No. I'm destroyed basically, on the inside. You can say mean and rotten if you want. Good for the flowers. Good for the soil. I remember Montana, a Buddhist friend of ours, asked us to come and see her when she was dead. So Carl and I went over there – we were still together then – she was in the basement of the hospital laid out on a metal table, twisted up like a pretzel

and dead as a door nail. She wanted us to see that, what it all comes to, Buddhist that she was. A twisted corpse, died in agony, looked like to us. I thought, Oh shit this is a fucking drag, and Carl did his emotionally overwrought thing, and I sighed and told him what a shithole it was we were all living in and he said, Don't think like that, Frances, and I said Fuck me I'll think what I want, this place is a shithole and we end up like shit. And he goes on with his pots and I go on fixing eye-balls, like corpses are not falling into morgues, sickened and bewildered by it all as they die. I wasn't going to no hospital to die, and I wasn't buying any of the bullshit that it meant anything but money in somebody's pocket. Keep me out of those places, dear God, wherever you are, death-traps and wires and evil bugs. But death is not so bad, you're not feeling anything then, your worth, or worthlessness, then, to the earth or your family or your country or any other fucking thing. You're fertilizer now, which is at least useful.

CARL: (On Screen) I had made a new life for myself. I wasn't going to let Frances ruin my life. I grew a beard and a moustache to cover my pockmarks and I looked good and felt good. I had a new girlfriend. Giselle. I had my classes and I was making good pots. Myra was settling down. She had her nasty comments and then she dropped them. She had her bullets she had to shoot, especially at her mother, but at me, too. I just took it calmly and went on with my life. Then the bitch took her pills and walked out into the city to die. I wasn't going to let it get to me, but I started getting headaches. I knew she did it for revenge. I knew she was jealous and miserable and had failed. It drove her nuts that I went out and made a new life, a happy life. She had no idea how strong I was, as a teacher and an independent man, and it rankled her to have to live with that. She'd come over and climb up a tree and scream things at me. She'd pound on my door. She'd leave messages on my phone. Finally, she killed herself. I thought I didn't feel anything at all. It was like there was another person in

me doing the feeling, another Carl, while I went on with my daily responsibilities, and that other Carl, the one with the feelings, snuck up into my head, right there in the center at the top of my head. The Indians say there's a hole there where the soul escapes from the body. Finally, I had an MRI and they said it was a clot, a blood clot in my brain. I think it was the hidden stress, the other Carl, under a lot of pressure and trying to get out. I fell asleep, into a coma, and then after a while, he got out, and the rest of me is gone back to the empty space that I always knew was there, the space in the pots, not empty, full of air, air and water and dust and the ghosts of the defeated. She had got to me, and won. (Screens dim out. SPOTZIE and CRAIG remain on stage.)

17.

SPOTZIE: So, Craig, they got on the trains and sang the *Shema* and kept on singing. Their spirits were high until the end. They were the heroes. They never denied their faith. Either they thought life was so full of meaning that it all mattered to the end, or they thought it was so meaningless that it didn't matter at all – either way, both groups turned out to have they same fate. Burnt to ashes.

CRAIG: This woman, Frances, she decided on her own, and then she decided – ashes. Nothing spiritual involved, a voluntary exit.

SPOTZIE: Is that a question?

CRAIG: Yes, Rabbi.

SPOTZIE: I have no answer. The earth is a spinning ball. Maybe only a few organisms get to know anything before they recede back into the planet. The more you look, the more strange it gets. Don't call me Rabbi.

CRAIG: I blame her for trashing me to Cindy and killing Carl off and ruining her daughter's life. On the other hand, why not blame myself for all the passivity and blindness?

SPOTZIE: These people on the trains, some of them, they also volunteered. Passive, blind. They martyred themselves, I suppose.

CRAIG: I would have preferred to fight. Disease and old age come along anyway. I'm sure Frances thought of that.

SPOTZIE: And the following generations?

CRAIG: The same.

SPOTZIE: No. They need to live honorably and have a good time. Breed. Remember.

CRAIG: I don't know if I would've have fought either. I don't know what I would have done.

SPOTZIE: Nobody knows.

CRAIG: Died fighting. Shot or hanged or gassed.

SPOTZIE: You will never know.

CRAIG: What can I do, Spotz?

SPOTZIE: I've been thinking. Maybe go and see her, the daughter. Myra.

CRAIG: Good idea. I think I'll do that.

18. (MYRA and CRAIG)

CRAIG: Hello.

MYRA: Hello.

CRAIG: You remember me?

MYRA: No.

CRAIG: I was Vicki's Dad. I mean, I AM Vicki's dad.

MYRA: You're not sure?

CRAIG: I'm sure. I AM.

MYRA: Her real Dad is in the wild mountains of China.

CRAIG: You don't know anything about it.

MYRA: No.

CRAIG: The wild mountains of China?

MYRA: Wild mountains.

CRAIG: We don't know anything about her birth-parents. (*Silence*)

MYRA: Vicki. Is she all right?

CRAIG: Yes. She's fine. And you?

MYRA: I dream a lot.

CRAIG: Are you going to school?

MYRA: Sometimes. I live with white people and I dream.

CRAIG: What do you dream about?

MYRA: Oh, come on.

CRAIG: What?

MYRA: Fuck off. (*Silence*) China.

CRAIG: You want to go back?

MYRA: Not really. I don't know a word of Chinese. There are too many people there and a lot of mental illness.

CRAIG: Mental illness?

MYRA: Yeah, you know, guys with hammers and knives and shit, and floods of people, drowning.

CRAIG: I see.

MYRA: Are you pretending that you understand me?

CRAIG: No, I don't think so.

MYRA: People do that. They act like they know what I'm talking about.

CRAIG: Do you?

MYRA: Of course, but I don't think you do. I'm a writer, like you. I write down my dreams. You want to hear one?

CRAIG: Sure.

MYRA: "And so it began, in the Winter of 1945, a procession of burning women in the carriages of the Innocents, women in white, all dead, on fire, driven from Moscow and St. Petersburg, carriages without drivers, carriages on fire, by the thousands, the hundreds of thousands, driven out of the cities, women on fire, carriages, on fire, driven from the cities to the sounds of bells and whistles, beautiful blondes, teenagers, their dresses on fire, in carriages on fire, burning, the horses of the carriages burning, as they were driven from the cities, sparks and flames shooting from the carriages, cannons, drums, whistles from hell, as the beautiful young women arrived on fire to the wilderness." (*a Silence*)

CRAIG: Very good, Myra.

MYRA: Thanks.

CRAIG: That was Russia, at the end of World War Two.

MYRA: I know that.

CRAIG: What else was there?

MYRA: Where?

CRAIG: In the Wilderness?

MYRA: It was China, I think. There were dragons and drums and firecrackers, acrobats and musicians.

CRAIG: In the Wilderness?

MYRA: Yes. And there was all manner of luscious foods. Real Chinese food, dim sum, cakes and whole pigs roasted in the ground. No Chicken Chow Mein. My real father was there. He sat like a large, pudgy, smiling Buddha, a brass statue with glittering black eyes. You could hear laughter coming from the forest, or an underground cave.

CRAIG: I knew your father. Carl.

MYRA: I know you did. We had play dates with Vicki. He wasn't my real father, of course. He was my stepfather and he was white, with marks on his face. He died, you know, from a mix-up in his brain. Blood was supposed to go someplace and instead it made a lake in his head. He never said a word after that. My real father was a fat Chinaman, in China.

CRAIG: And the women in white?

MYRA: They became dolls, you know. You can buy them in Chinatown. They're quite nice. They have real hair.

CRAIG: You remember your mother?

MYRA: What's that got to do with anything?

CRAIG: Nothing. Sorry.

MYRA: She wasn't my real mother, either. She was Taiwanese American. She adopted me.

CRAIG: Where is your real mother now?

MYRA: She's in China, living a nice life, in an apartment.

CRAIG: How do you know?

MYRA: I saw it on TV. It's what I do. I watch. And you?

CRAIG: What?

MYRA: What are you doing?

CRAIG: Good question. I'm getting old, basically.

MYRA: That's just an excuse. I think you're a spy of some kind. Yeah, I used to spy on Carl. I'd tell my mother if he was drinking wine. He had a secret stash in the cupboard above the fridge. At Five O Clock. Five O Clock he'd go in there and gulp down a glass. He'd just ignore the thing on his ankle. I'd stay in the living room watching the TV. He'd come in, pretending he was normal and all, but his eyes were soft. I said, "Hi, Dad." Then I told my mother. She'd come around outside and climb a tree and scream at him, because he wouldn't let her into the house. Finally she killed herself. He was so worried about it that his blood stopped working. So.

19. (SPOTZIE and CRAIG)

SPOTZIE: You talked to the daughter?

CRAIG: I did. When I left her place – it was this tiny New England town, with a church and a village green, and plane and maple trees – it all seemed odd, so I sat down on a bench and I decided I

wasn't going to worry about getting home to Southern California, but sit there in the sun and be glad I was alive.

SPOTZIE: So you stopped worrying?

CRAIG: Yeah, for a minute. The sun was warm and absurd. People dying all over and a fat, crazy, over-intelligent Chinese teenager watching this little old man - me - through the curtains of the living room on the ground floor of a white clapboard house across from the green. I thought this was awfully mature because of these weird ideas I have about the Chinese, you know, that they're all smart and well-adjusted. She was awfully smart and not adjusted and trusted no one.

SPOTZIE: Can you blame her?

CRAIG: No. And she was definitely nuts. And nasty.

SPOTZIE: What's an old guy like you doing, prowling around New England and getting lost, looking for a Chinese girl who can do very well without him?

CRAIG: Exactly.

SPOTZIE: It's because we had someone to blame for our failures, Frances the Borderline. Otherwise, all would be well. But you were living in a trance. I knew the life, too. In the old days. Smoke a joint in the morning, and so on. Then I realized there was a living God.

CRAIG: Oh for crying out loud, Spotzie.

SPOTZIE: Yeah, I'm high, high as a kite. All I have to do is breathe these days, and I'm high.

CRAIG: She's a terrific writer, Spotz, this kid.

20. (On screen.)

FRANCES: For what are people, really? Worms with teeth and hair and pretension? I can hardly speak about it. Beneath contempt. Easily coerced. Dying within minutes, hours, days, years. Dying, like worms, like I say, so inevitably, they have no chance but to dream, dream that they are lions and titans and so on, whatever. Money talks, the worm talks. You have to make such an effort to be positive, or at least neutral. Not to take a negative stance, put yourself down, put the race down, put the earth down and its whole trip of flying through space like a marble. I knew people who tried, they tried as best they could, to have a good attitude and a good approach, and deny themselves, and efface their faces, and they, too, paid the exorbitant price of living. Which is pain and suffering. No point to it at all. And I am one of them, wandering in and out of the bathroom, talking to myself, hoping for the best, wishing for love from my child that will never come. And what do I mean by love? Just love, like something in the air, like electricity or light, or wind, something coming through that gives a person reason to live. As an organism or something in the ocean, but fuck all that, I don't believe any of it, and I am not some crustacean wandering on the bottom, I am a woman, black-haired and Asian, come to the end of her fantasy. I feel like an animated crumb jumping to life like an electronic toy, like, like, like, so here I am, a twisted corpse on your fucking street, fuck you. Bye. Put on your glasses. (Dim out screen.)

21. (Live)

CRAIG: So here I am. I live alone. I'm an aging little fat man who lives alone in a building full of old people. Women don't look at

me, or they look at me and then look away, and they expect me to forget things and make stupid mistakes. Like buying a first-class ticket to Paris and then forgetting to get on the plane. I have trouble coming home from the store because there is a little rise before my building and my hips hurt when I climb it. I thought it was my back, but it's my hips. Slowly I am falling out of the whole biological system of life on earth. It's strange, like an owl watching life pass by from an invisible tree – a pair of eyes, otherwise invisible, mute. But you still have to buy things and go to the bathroom. Maintain. Frances must have seen that, and got tired of it all, plus the disappointment with Carl and the lack of love anywhere. You see excitement and vitality but no love in the young. Frances was no longer young but she wasn't an old coot either, like me, declining out of the system. I do what I have to, I pay my bills, I maintain, I go to a meeting once and a while. I don't have to work. Frances worked but she was getting no satisfaction because her asshole of a husband aggravated her weakness, which was pride, I guess. It's strange. Herschel Spotzie is right. Spotzie's got the right idea. He's got his bathrooms in certain malls, his bed in the back seat of his car, his disability, and he tries with all his might to do no harm.

THE END

