

## MEMORY: THE BOOKS OF JAY

### *A Play*

*Dialogue in italics are meant to be played OUT, toward the Audience.*

*THE SCENE: A dome-like structure with lots of modern technology, including a screen on the back wall.*

### **CHARACTERS:**

*JAY: A handsome, blonde, blue-eyed Jewish man in his 50's, 60's.*

*CHERYL: His wife, a little younger, bright and still beautiful.*

*HARRY: Cheryl's father. Rough, in his late 70's.*

*ROSA: On screen, voice-over, a lovely young lady.*

*ELI, ZACK and BILL: Three political friends of Harry's.*

**THE TIME: The New Year: Hebrew: 5781. A. D. 2020.**

### **Prologue:**

*JAY: (V.O.) I began to feel that something was wrong. Years ago, it started with a feeling of dread. A sense of doom. You could experience the withering of one's inner command, little things, like the mishandling of objects, certain expectations not appearing, disappointments, forgetfulness, the loss of memory for names. Though I was at the top of my game, as they say, there was a haunting slash of non-fulfillment in my heart, and so I began to write, as a means toward some understanding of my darkening situation.*

**1.**

CHERYL: Happy New Year, Jay.

JAY: What year is it, anyway?

CHERYL: 2020, American time.

JAY: That, I know. And the Hebrew?

CHERYL: I'm not sure. I think it's like 5780.

JAY: Five thousand years. Amazing.

CHERYL: You've been quite secretive, lately.

JAY: I've been trying to write about my life. Remember it. Events in childhood. Moments that happened. Ideas. Themes. Things I did to others. Friends and family. Business. Places I've lived in. The way they looked and sounded, and who I thought I was at the time.

CHERYL: It's not all about you, Jay. Everything that's happened to us. It's also about the tribe, in my opinion. The Ancestors.

JAY: For example, *I remember lying in the crib and the way the light shone in, late afternoon, Brooklyn light, dusty light glowing on the red brick. I was afraid when I heard my mother's footsteps coming into the room.*

CHERYL: The History. The Writings.

JAY: Actually, it's like the fucking *Book of Job*. One can lose it all. All of one's work, into oblivion, lost forever. *(Pause)*

CHERYL: Go on, Jay.

JAY: Unless there's another dimension, another world, some light somewhere, some level of existence where things go, lost things and dear things. Like lost photos, lost poems, lovers, stories, plays....Like the Cloud. Like we are all atoms in the Cloud, all of us making up one atmosphere, so nothing is lost, really.

CHERYL: I don't know. I don't know about that.

JAY: The fucking Cloud. Like another atmosphere. Of Data. We're like little neurons. Running around, connecting and dis-connecting. Maybe that's not the way to put it. Maybe it's more like – what's lost can be found. If you take a look, if you don't give up.

JAY: It's about memory, in a way. Isn't it? How one was, what one was thinking, being aware of something real. I wonder about my friends, whether they're alive or dead. The things we went through, the dangers and the mistakes and the little betrayals. It's all there inside us. If only we could make up for all of it. Those little treacheries and lies and self-deceptions, falseness.

CHERYL: Let me tell you something.

JAY: Please. *(Image of a sailboat on Santa Monica Bay.)*

CHERYL: I quit sailing.

JAY: I know.

CHERYL: I never told you why.

JAY: Why?

CHERYL: The Captain, who was teaching me, says "You should believe in the Saviour." He was talking about this jerk-off President of the United States, so I says, "You must be kidding," and then he goes, "You know, of course, these famous Democrats couple, I won't mentiion their names, they kidnap children and rape them and kill them, and then they take the skin off their faces and put the kid's faces on their faces. Why? Because it keeps their faces looking young." So, I says, "they look like shit, Pal," but then he goes on with all kinds of crazy bullshit beliefs and I says, "You know, you sound like a fucking Nazi, and if I hear one more word I will kill you myself, or I'll have you killed, motherfucker," because he was saying things about the Jews, and I think I scared the shit out of him, but I was scared too, Jay, and I'm scared right now.

JAY: So then what happened?

CHERYL: You know, I quit and I got my money back from the owners.

JAY: Didn't they have him arrested, or fired, or something?

CHERYL: Nothing. But that's the plague, Jay. It's not only the virus. It's the beliefs of all these people. Lost souls. A cult. Nothing has changed, Jay. Not in three thousand years. Not in ten thousand. There's just more of us, more and more people. All it takes is fear, a belief, an angry stomach, a mindless yaw for attention or glory, a deluded ego -- it doesn't take much. No. And they're out there, Jay, and they have us pinned.

JAY: For now.

CHERYL: They're going to take it all away from us, everything we've ever worked for, every ideal, every commitment to learning, or justice, or simple decency, everything we stand for, or hoped for.

JAY: I feel like I need to understand my own life, Cheryl.

CHERYL: It's not about you.

JAY: Remembering. And the bloodline.

CHERYL: We have Rosa. She 's out there.

JAY: We're just pieces of matter floating around, Cheryl. We disappear in the end.

CHERYL: We're here now. *(Silence)*

JAY: Like a great man said, "It ain't all it's cracked up to be."

CHERYL: I don't care what he said.

JAY: I'm trying to remember. Remember and forgive. *I was walking with my father down DeKalb Avenue on our way downtown to the Brooklyn Paramount Theatre. A Saturday. Holding his rough, dirty hand. That street-walking, bouncy, hipster stride that he had, a walk that could cut through concrete, as someone said, and which I myself have, to this day.*

CHERYL: That walk.

JAY: Some people like it. Some don't.

CHERYL: I like it.

JAY: Good.

CHERYL: Who was that someone?

JAY: Sam, I think. He watched his dying, you know. With all his attention. The ravaging of his body, his life. He watched it, and recorded it.

CHERYL: And you?

JAY: I'm trying.

CHERYL: You never had a real career.

JAY: I never knew how to handle it. I was never sure.

CHERYL: Nobody is ever sure.

JAY: Something I learned, over the years. Many years. To get out of the neurotic, emotional paralysis I was afflicted with, if that's what it was. Sitting in front of those yellow writing pads, lined pages, the tension there, and what came out on the page was exactly that – abstract, tense language, little bursts, cries from a prisoner of himself. Not meaning much to anyone.

CHERYL: And now?

JAY: Now, now I'm trying to remember. To find the real meaning there, if there is any. It's intense. It's like there was a huge bet. A gamble. God and the Devil. One says **Yes**, the other says **No**.

CHERYL: You can't force that kind of thing, Jay.

JAY: Listen. *In the movie theatre, the newsreels came on. Dead Jewish bodies stacked up. Jewish prisoners, skin and bones, wandering around a wired, fenced, shitty campground, in Poland, or Germany, I can't remember -- dazed. American soldiers walking among them, equally dazed, trying to help. I was five or six years old. I had no idea who these starving people were or what they were thinking or feeling; only that I, I also, was a Jew.*

CHERYL: Movietone news.

JAY: I don't know who told me.

CHERYL: Told you what?

JAY: That I was a Jew. Maybe my mother. She read three newspapers a day. Can you imagine that? Just came to me – The News, The Mirror, and the Post. Every single day. I'd go down to the corner and get her the papers. I was six years old. This was a person who eventually lost her mind.

CHERYL: She was a reader, Jay.

JAY: She was a reader! Book of the Month Club!

CHERYL: She was smart.

JAY: How could I forget that? She would sit at the kitchen table and read all the papers, one by one, whatever it was she was doing, or thinking. First page to the last, every one. And each month, a book would come, one of those kitchy books, romantic novels, *Rebecca* something was one. And she taught me how to read, Cheryl, when I was four. And to make simple English sentences. So when I went to Kindergarten, on Koskiosko Street, a block away, I was far ahead of the other kids.

CHERYL: You owe her, Jay.

JAY: I do. She would take me to the corner light and tell me to cross the street by myself. And I remember the look of the place. Brick building with a concrete plaza, or yard, or whatever you call it, where we played. She had a feeling for me then. After a while, the feeling was lost. The succession of children and the constant poverty knocked it out of her. "I never had a life," she often said. I remember more now. It's because we're talking. Why is that?

CHERYL: Why we're talking?

JAY: No, why talking evokes memory.

CHERYL: The brain, Jay. The human brain. They say we use a small percentage of its power. Why so many of us out there are at an idiot level.

JAY: It's education, Cheryl, or the lack of it.

CHERYL: Well, yeah. But the level is low, kids don't know where Russia is, or the Panama Canal. They don't know what the Holocaust was. Adults vote for egomaniacal retards to lead them into Hell. Why?

JAY: They have a choice.

CHERYL: They have no choice. You call that a choice?

JAY: American Democracy. God-given.

CHERYL: What bullshit! It's like that motherfucking Captain. Out on the Bay – did he choose Evil? No! He's just an evil motherfucker. Period. And there's millions of them out there, Jay.

JAY: Apparently.

CHERYL: It's like the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, what was all that about? I used to fight with Rabbi—what's his fucking name – Wienstein or Wineberg – when I was converting, you remember? Those *trees* -- What did they mean, what did they symbolize? Does anyone know?

JAY: You got past all that.

CHERYL: I love the tradition. I love the ideas. I love the questions. And that one still bothers me, Jay. And so does the idea that all these Americans out there -- loaded up with beliefs about the Jews and the Second Coming -- have a choice, have Reason. I don't think so.

JAY: I don't either.

CHERYL: They're programmed, Jay, like computer artifacts. They do what their friends do, what their phones say. They're on automatic. There's no choice there. So what hope is there? Jay? Just think. There's a monster roaming the Earth. A giant reptile. *I'd pay attention, I'd watch out, I'd listen carefully -- and I'd watch my step when I walk out of here into the light of day. Why? Because there are Lies waiting for you, Fascist fantasies, worse than the movies, waiting to steal what's left of your thinking. And don't get mad at me for saying this, because it's true.* Nothing's

changed. You got these fucking Gentile airheads marching around in the streets with guns and torches chanting slogans against the Jews. It's fucking infuriating.

JAY: I agree.

CHERYL: And I'm a Convert. Even more crazy dangerous.

JAY: In the old times, in Spain, many converts; some recanted, others got their shit together, lined up and left. Others were martyrs.

CHERYL: You know me, Jay.

JAY: I do.

CHERYL: I do the Holidays. I try to keep kosher. That's about it.

JAY: My mother was not kosher. *In truth, she was always nuts, maybe already as a teenager, sent out of school by her insane mother to sew garments in a Brooklyn sweatshop. Her brother had been committed by then, screaming and fighting as they bound him in a straight jacket and loaded him into an ambulance. He spent the rest of his life in a nuthouse.*

CHERYL: Is there an argument with God, Jay? The Old Testament God, who strikes the sinner and makes deals?

JAY: With my mother, sure. Endlessly. Every day. "God hates me," was her mantra.

CHERYL: I'm talking about now.

JAY: There's no Reason in all this – it's random, a throw of the dice. Everything is spinning away, Cheryl, a thousand miles an hour.

CHERYL: To what? Going where?

JAY: I thought, at the time, at the movies, the Paramount, no – I think now, if it is possible to remember a child's thinking, that this murder-camp horror could not be true, could not be a reality, and that there was something about film itself, the imagery on the screen, that represented a special kind of evil, magical power.

CHERYL: I think so, Jay. I think that's right. It's an amplification, an illusion about living. Imagery. Why myths are so dangerous. Memories and dreams. Even the movies. Especially the movies. I wonder where they are inside us. These images. Jay?

JAY: Yes?

CHERYL: I close my eyes and sometimes, when I can't sleep, I can see into another world. It seems alive, as though I'm really there – alive in that other world. Almost like in a movie, with another dimension. A space. Time. There's even weather there. And the Sun, light from the Sun.

JAY: *My mother would come out early in the morning, after the truck left with its deliveries, and take whatever fruit and vegetables were thrown out from the day before. In the back yard of Gerson's Groceries. We lived in a shabby apartment across the street. My mother, the Bag Lady. Screens. In the mind. (Pause) I don't know what a kid does with those things – like my mother salvaging garbage – how does he handle it? How do I handle it now?*

CHERYL: You have other concerns.

JAY: And then?

CHERYL: You liked to play ball, run around with your friends.

JAY: Yeah. It was exhilarating. And I went to the store for her, and did what she said I had to do. I had some good teachers, thank God, or I don't know what might have happened. Bad things happened anyway. I fucked it up anyway.

CHERYL: We all do.

JAY: I have fears inside, they seem permanent, which have made me virtually a hidden man, a hiding man, a man with a secret wish for -- revenge – a wish unexpressed and obscured by – I don't know what – my cover, my mask -- but both are in me, the fear and the wish for vengeance. *But I have done nothing but keep my place and accrue safety, in the forms of secrecy and a search for the sublime.*

CHERYL: Jay?

JAY: Yes?

CHERYL: It's the Anti-Christ.

JAY: Don't talk like that.

CHERYL: Armageddon.

JAY: That's a myth, a fantasy.

CHERYL: It's another war against the Jews.

JAY: That's enough, Cheryl.



CHERYL: You don't want to hear?

JAY: No.

CHERYL: I'll stop.

JAY: Stop. *(Pause)* I have this flat spot on the back of my head. She left me alone in the crib most of the time. I would hear her footsteps coming into the room and freeze. Outside, there was an empty lot with an old mattress lying among the weeds and other junk. It was just before the war. My parents didn't know what was going on in the world. Rationing. Mass murder. I didn't learn myself until I was five or six years old.

CHERYL: The question is this, Jay. This is the real question: Do we pack it in, like the martyrs, and get away from all this insane terror?

JAY: No. We are not martyrs.

CHERYL: Look around you, Jay. Some people, they're trying to do the right thing. Maybe. Brings tears to our eyes. But you look at the country, the hatreds, the stupidity -- what do you see? Murder and mayhem and lies. Powerful, unconscious pigs -- spitting out lies. Delusions. Conspiracies.

JAY: We will see this dirty episode through to the end. Win or lose.

CHERYL: There's no win, Jay. There's only lose.

JAY: I'll get a word in. I'll write.

CHERYL: Good luck. People don't read anymore. They send little yellow faces around.

JAY: Hopefully, it'll stand like the books of old, the ones In Hebrew and Aramaic. In Greek. Yiddish and English. Ladino. They're a consolation, all of them.

CHERYL: Sentimental, Jay.

JAY: From whatever you call *God*. The Universe, the Burning Bush, the Cloud.

CHERYL: Fuck the Cloud.

JAY: I agree with that. The *Logos*, then. The Word.

CHERYL: It's the lies, Jay. People believe the lies. And they'll arm themselves and march righteously down the road. And kill for their beliefs. And we'll be the first in line, Jay.

JAY: Where can we go? Remember The Inquisition? 1492? Carriages were lined up. Horses and cattle, sheep and goats, dogs, servants and clowns, crazed musicians, doctors, mystics, imbeciles, dwarves -- hordes of Jews marching in a line from Gibraltar to Greece, or to Egypt, or Palestine. Weeping and wailing, flutes and drums, shouting, arguments, and prayers -- a mad cacaphony as they walked away from Spain. ***(Image – a period woodcut - from the the 1492 Spanish expulsion of the Jews.)***

CHERYL: The country loves these idiots, Jay. These modern inquisitionists. There's no let up. There's no normality anymore. You've got to bury yourself in the mud. Like a worm. Like a bug. Or kill yourself. Like I said. I'm telling you. Mark my words. It's a fucking shame what's going on. You got people over here, they make videos of murdering people. What can you do with people like that? They're not even people. They're some kind of reptile.

JAY: Where is that video? Did you make it up?

CHERYL: No. It's online. You can check it out.

JAY: No.

CHERYL: Never mind. *(Pause)*

JAY: I went up to Mahwah, New Jersey, when I was a young man, to see my father in prison. *Hard to remember now. He almost didn't realize that he was a prisoner there, for something he had really done. That's how good he was at deceiving himself. He hadn't done anything, as far as he was concerned, and he wasn't really where he was at, so it was hard to communicate.*

CHERYL: Rosa, Jay. She's starting to get calls from Malaysia and Indonesia and God knows where else. ***"I know all about you,"*** the guy says, on the phone, ***"I know more about you than you do. I know all your games and all your tricks. You have to be trained. I'll train you."*** Scared the shit out of her. ***"There'll be a knock on the door."*** The guy says. *(SOUND of knocking)* So Rosa wants to split and head for an Indian Rez. *"They don't have books, as a people. They don't have phones. They observe nature. They watch the light, the movement of living things, the air and the water, land and sky -- Those are their books, those are their ideas, and the Sun is their God...."* ***(Image of a Hopi Kachina doll)*** It's enough to make you cry.

JAY: Don't cry.

CHERYL: What are you thinking?

JAY: I'm thinking of the scrubby life of American poverty, like she will be seeing on the Rez. Sickness and starvation. Stealing and running and hoarding and lying. The young women bring raped and murdered.

CHERYL: By drunken white marauders.

JAY: She has to be careful.

CHERYL: She knows.

JAY: *I played ball -- It was a way of staying out of the way. Invisible almost, even to myself. Though at times I had moments in the city, such as how the sky met the rooftops at twilight. Then, for moments, I would feel the presence of myself and the world as real, instead of imagined.*

CHERYL: She'll be all right. Rosa. God willing. Suicides. Teenagers, Jay, on the Rez and around the country, killing themselves. You can see why – there'll be no world for them, no environment, no jobs, no future. And we had our Sol Berkowitz, a grown man. I can't believe it --Sol burns his papers and hangs himself in his office! Shitting and pissing all over the place. He had **FUCK YOU** painted on his ceiling in bright red letters.

JAY: Sol was tired. He wanted to die. He lay down one time, years ago, in the woods up in the Catskills, and tried to will himself to death. Three days later, he stumbled out of there, lost and bewildered.

CHERYL: Something was playing him. Whispering in his ear. Like the Devil. *(Pause)*

JAY: The awful poverty scam in America. Staying out of the way. Ashamed. *But there was a grace in playing. I'd play all day if I could. And I loved the twilight. Like the meeting of two worlds. And and a feeling about Time, that Time would save me, after all.*

CHERYL: And did it?

JAY: In a way, yes. It did. In a way.

CHERYL: What happens now, Jay?

JAY: We have to wait it out.

CHERYL: Like Godot.

JAY: Very like.

CHERYL: And Rosa?

JAY: She should come back here and be with us.

CHERYL: She likes her independence, like you.

JAY: What would you do, Cheryl?

CHERYL: When?

JAY: If they come, like the S.S., and broke in?

CHERYL: I'd fight. I think I'd fight. I don't know. No one knows what they'll do when the time comes. I'll tell you once more – there's a movement, among the Gentiles, for a Second Coming. They're doing all kinds of things, rich men who think there's too many of us, too many Jews, too many people, preachers who are deluded, crazed, out of their minds. *(Pause)* Did you hear me? Are you listening?

JAY: Yes.

CHERYL: I didn't tell you the rest of Rosa's message – she also got a text today from Chile.

JAY: Chile?

CHERYL: It shows a guy cutting up nice ballet shoes with a scissors. Look. *(Show the image.)* Snip/snip. Somehow they knew she'd done ballet.

JAY: What the fuck is wrong with these people?

CHERYL: It's everywhere, Jay. Social media. The data. Rosa's world. They'll blame the Jews, Jay. Mark my words.

JAY: Who is "they?"

CHERYL: It's the crazy Gentiles -- rich and poor alike. Young and old. The Preachers, the Senate, the Gentiles with money and power. Like my father. I know them, Jay. Now I see them walking around, armed, in the street, their heads bulging with righteous beliefs. They could be me.

JAY: Not you, Cheryl.

CHERYL: Yes, like me. Other circumstances. They could be me.

JAY: I don't think so.

CHERYL: Look up, Jay. You'll see Nazi banners in the sky.

JAY: Not you.

CHERYL: No. We fell in love and I converted. It felt right.

JAT: Regrets?

CHERYL: No regrets.

JAY: I've seen the banners. They're down now.

CHERYL: Finally.

JAY: I remember, when I was a kid, the sky, the horizon, the Brooklyn rooftops, I saw an endless promise, a kind of reassuring answer to what it meant to be alive.

CHERYL: Now it's full of junk up there. A million satellites in the sky and they're all chiming in. Ads. Commercials. Soliloquies. The Sun will eat all that crap up one day. Did you hear what I said about the armed men? The Dudes, the Proud Boys, you know, heads stuffed with anti-Semitic bullshit?

JAY: Yes, I heard you.

CHERYL: You go around like us, not locked up, not quite free, it's an accident. So far, so good. But maybe there's a chip in my head by now, that I'm not aware of? The sky is looking down. They're watching us with cameras. And we don't know who they are.

JAY: Data are not people.

CHERYL: People behind the data. It's about the Jews, the eternal war against the Jews. That's what's out there, Jay – plus the war against the Good, the war against the Just, against the Righteous, but especially against the Jews. I know it, Jay. It's in the blood, in the air, in the soil. All that smoke that came out of the chimneys, Jay, where did it go? Where do you think it went?

JAY: Into the sky.

CHERYL: Right. Into the air, the rain, the soil. The breath.

JAY: I had a room in the attic. Across from the local synagogue. It was freezing in the Winter. I would go over there from time to time, on a Saturday, to get warm.

CHERYL: Appropos of what, Jay?

JAY: The old men's bad breath. I remember that. And it wasn't that warm. And the ancient smells from the books. *When I was still a school boy, I lived across the street from a small Shul mainly for old men, old refugees from Eastern Europe, men with long white beards and sad, watery eyes, who bowed and chanted and walked round and*

*round the synagogue. I remember the smell of the mold, the dust on the books. After a while, they found it hard to make a minyan and so sometimes they knocked on my door and sometimes I attended, but it was a tradition far from me, in a language I did not understand. A strange foreign ritual, in another language, right here in America.*

CHERYL: I was a Gentile, then. I had to learn what was in some of those books.

JAY: I haven't forgotten.

CHERYL: Not easy, Jay. They make it hard. You, you were born into it. It's in your blood. You don't even need to know the words.

JAY: I should, though.

CHERYL: Yes, you should.

JAY: But I don't.

CHERYL: They're trying to clean it up, Jay. America for the white man, the Christian white. You're not invited.

JAY: No, but I can still live with you and our Rosa. The sun rises. The sun sets. Life goes on.

CHERYL: We're frozen in place, like Lot. *(Pause)*

JAY: Go to your father. He called again.

CHERYL: It's too late now. There's no point.

JAY: Go.

CHERYL: No. Too late to go to him now.

JAY: Why?

CHERYL: I don't know why.

JAY: He'll try to give you money.

CHERYL: I won't take it.

JAY: Fuck him, then.

CHERYL: Leave it, Jay. *(Pause)*

JAY: I used to slip out the window into an alley. Into the cold. Sometimes I'd run into my mother.

CHERYL: *His mother used to stand on the street, in the Catskills, in the freezing cold, staring at her feet, for hours. A neighbor would have to show up and prod her along. The boy Jay watched her as she trudged home, wearing an old kerchief tied around her face, head down, mumbling to herself, cursing God...He felt alone, and ashamed, and inferior.*

2.

JAY: Listen, Michael. My Daughter got beat up the other day.

MICHAEL: Rosa?

JAY: I only have one Daughter.

MICHAEL: What happened?

JAY: She said *No* to sex. First date. He beat the shit out of her. A Russian. Right here in New York City.

MICHAEL: Why didn't you tell me before?

JAY: I just told you.

MICHAEL: Where is she now?

JAY: She's in the Hospital. You see what happens? You see the way it is?

MICHAEL: Yes. We'll find the kid who beat up Rosa.

JAY: He's forty-five years old. A Russian big shot. Runs a hedge fund. Lives on a boat. His name is Russikoff. Phony name. Bodyguards.

MICHAEL: We'll get him, Jay.

JAY: Rosa has a right to live. My wife has a right to live. She can't go out now. She used to play *mah jong*, go to shows, play bridge, you know... Now, she stays home. She watches television, she texts her father, a right-winger who hates me. She has her theories, her bad thoughts.

MICHAEL: Nobody 's watching the store, Jay. Not with the Evangelical Christians, who have had a Messiah already and another one coming. Not with the Jewish People, who don't want to call attention to themselves.

JAY: That's exactly what Cheryl says.

MICHAEL: She 's right. I'd be careful. It's all *traif* out there. It's getting hard to sleep at night and difficult to get up in the morning. It's hard to shop. The plague, for one thing, has hit the city hard. Lines of people around the block to buy shit.

JAY: What should we do?

MICHAEL: Don't do anything. Wait.

JAY: Can we afford to wait, Michael? Is that an option?

MICHAEL: You don't do anything, anyway. You don't go out. You couldn't stay more than one night in the hospital.

JAY: Forget that. There was nothing seriously wrong with me. *I was in there for my arthritis. There was nothing to be done. Morphine and anti-biotics. Cheryl stayed with me one night. The next night I felt the terror absorbing my body and my feeling. I felt trapped. My mind started to get loud. The next thing I knew I was screaming. Noone came, noone answered the phone.*

MICHAEL: *So he ripped the tubes out that were holding him onto the bed and the hospital cops watched him as he ran half-naked in his gown out of the hospital and into the street.*

JAY: *I hopped and I limped and I found a cab. I got home finally and took four pain killers and collapsed onto the floor, where Cheryl found me, whimpering like a dog.*

MICHAEL: Why?

JAY: *It's all about childhood, and the terror of noise and violence. The ever-present threat of being hit or yelled at.*

MICHAEL: We're getting older.

JAY: I felt trapped. I feel trapped now.

MICHAEL: Stay home, Jay, and take care.

JAY: Is it age?

MICHAEL: Yes. *As we got older, we responded, innerly, to the stately, grave, and demanding declarations in the Bible. The Old Testament. The Five Books of Moses. The advice and the warnings. The poetic invitations. Proverbs and Leviticus. The Book of Job. The Psalms. The Prophets. What happened? They didn't stick. Nothing*



*adhered. It was all about safety and aggrandizement and technology. But perhaps a slight memory, a remnant, remained of those ancient sayings.*

JAY: It's all electricity now, Michael. Electromagnetism. People fucking around with it. That's why we get all this shit in the air. Too many machines in the sky, dropping all that crap on us. Too many sick animals in the woods. *(Pause)* One more thing, Michael.

MICHAEL: Yes?

JAY: You hear about a movement out there?

MICHAEL: What kind of movement?

JAY: A Christian movement. Evangelical. Apocalyptic.

MICHAEL: Something like that. There is a certain look – you know – like something was coming down, something was going to happen. A wild-eyed look, like fear mixed with anticipation. A suicidal look, I'd say.

JAY: What will you do?

MICHAEL: I'll talk to Rosa. I'll find the Russian guy and get back to you.

JAY: Good. Thank you.

### 3.

*MICHAEL: He thinks the ersatz Law will protect him, vaguely, but it doesn't. And it won't. There is no Law. His partner was destroyed, his business is being dismantled, his wife and his daughter: they have no life. His wife has threatened suicide. It's an impossible situation. Jay prides himself on how straight he is, how honest in his dealings, on his willingness to play his part. But he doesn't get it. He misses things, forgets appointments. His ability is to stay quiet, out of sight, alone with his wife. He wants to stay hidden. Berkowitz? Berkowitz wasn't killed. He was bullied to death. He killed himself. People assume things. Everything is going one way, life is cozy, and then a storm comes up, everybody's scared and complaining. A mentally ill person is in charge of the nation. Me, I stay calm. We are resigned. This world will be destroyed and a new one will inevitably be created. So, why strive? Me? I'm a numbers guy. I figure things out. I add and subtract. I put the numbers in the right boxes. Jay? Jay is a target for some reason hard to understand.*

### 4.

MICHAEL: They found a Russian in the river.

JAY: Was it Russikov?

MICHAEL: Yes. Turns out.

JAY: What happened to him?

MICHAEL: Maybe he slipped.

JAY: Hit his head?

MICHAEL: Apparently.

JAY: Listen.

MICHAEL: I'm listening.

JAY: Cheryl, she doesn't talk. She murmurs. She asks stupid questions.

MICHAEL: Like what?

JAY: Like what are you doing? What are you thinking? What are you planning? Do you know what's going on?

MICHAEL: Those are normal questions.

JAY: Like why are armies forming in the East? Why are certain people getting sick? And not others? What's happening with the data?

MICHAEL: Normal.

JAY: And in the city, Michael?

MICHAEL: I go down there. They look at you, they take your temperature. They give you forms to fill out. I fill them out.

JAY: And now, now people are asking me for money. Money they say I owe them. Which I don't. So, I don't go anywhere at all. I used to go to games, once in a while, or to a concert or a play. Now I stay home. I'm not available. Why are those people asking me for money all of a sudden?

MICHAEL: Which people?

JAY: You know who they are.

MICHAEL: I don't, Jay.

JAY: Banks, loan sharks, operators. Insurance companies. Strangers. They're like wasps. I don't owe nobody. I owe nobody no money, so they have no business asking. So I don't pay. Downtown. What I said. You didn't hear? Where I owe no one. But they still ask me to pay, all these crooks, extortionists, and cons -- and I won't. I won't pay!

MICHAEL: Don't pay, then.

JAY: I won't pay.

MICHAEL: There'll be consequences.

JAY: I know.

MICHAEL: I'll ask you a question.

JAY: One, that's it.

MICHAEL: You handled it? So far?

JAY: I had leverage. With my father-in-law. That's all I'll say.

MICHAEL: Fine and good.

JAY: Who took care of the Russian on the boat?

MICHAEL: I lost track of it, Jay.

JAY: There are others involved. I'm sure of it.

MICHAEL: I'm sorry.

JAY: Stay on it, Mike.

MICHAEL: I will. *Actually, he hardly ever went out. He watches sports on television. And the bad news. He's afraid of crowds and enclosed spaces, like hospital rooms.*

## 5.

CHERYL: *He saw his mother's bones and ashes rolling down a chute, like coal, like coal rolling down a chute into a railroad car. There was nothing he could say goodbye to, nothing he could feel. Down the chute she went, into the underworld. Where is she, Jay?*

JAY: My mother? Gone, long ago. I can't remember what happened. Her bones rolled down a pipe, like coal.

CHERYL: I'm talking about Rosa.

JAY: I got people on it.

CHERYL: Who?

JAY: Michael and others. Your father.

CHERYL: "I got people on it."

JAY: Don't mock me. We don't know.

CHERYL: We are frozen in our shoes like stones. People disappear into the night. They vanish and no one sees them again. *(Pause)* Jay?

JAY: *In the first or second grade, when the teacher called on me, I was afraid to say my name. At recess, I ran away into the woods behind the school. There, I was unafraid. I loved the air and the sounds of birds and the cool feel of the trees. I loved the woods. I loved the way I could stay hidden there and be free.* You climb trees?

CHERYL: Yes. I did. It's natural for kids.

JAY: *And then we looked out over the Savannah.* We think all will stay as it is. Nothing will change. But it does. Everything changes. Like it says in the books. *We came down from the trees and followed the elephant paths through the woods.* And then we went everywhere. Like a disease. Like a virus.

CHERYL: A virus, Jay?

JAY: Viruses. They're caused by fucking around with nature, with electricity. I regret that. We're paying for that. Nature doesn't care what we think. It adapts. Our bodies make vibes – contagions --

CHERYL: I'm thinking about Rosa, Jay.

JAY: There are little replicating electrical balls with spikes attacking us, Cheryl. Attacking our lungs.

CHERYL: I know that. And Rosa? She got herself in trouble, you know. Social media. Her peers started saying she needed to work on her "femininity." So she interpreted that to mean she had to get laid.

JAY: Apparently she changed her mind. With the Russian.

CHERYL: So where is she now?

JAY: She liked the Arctic. She liked the cold. Rosa. She could be in Canada now.

CHERYL: "Canada." Say it again.

JAY: Canada.

CHERYL: What a word. "Canada."

JAY: Stop it, Cheryl.

CHERYL: No.

JAY: Canada. Moose. Reindeer. Walrus. Seals. Polar Bears. Whales. Killer whales.

CHERYL: Shut up, Jay.

JAY: All gone by now, or suffering their losses.

CHERYL: Like us.

JAY: Like us.

CHERYL: Rosa was – is -- angry, Jay. All the lies she was told. All the constant lying. This and that. Like the country was good and the Government was good; that Justice was a real quality of American life; that we saved the Indigenous Peoples -- by killing them off. That we did the Blacks a favor by enslaving them from a life in Africa. That we have to defend the money and the power with a huge army of poverty-sticken young men. That we were a "free" people, that someone was watching, that someone or something Judicial was in charge, like the Constitution, that Americans, even the most dumb and ignorant and bigoted, were good people, that we have to buy packaged shit and pay the prices -- and on and on it goes, jay. Lies. On and on. To this day. And then we've got all these damned, hypocritical, evangelical, Southern Christians running the country. The absolute, sickening, shitty junkiness of the culture. And some of them, the young men, white-man militias, with guns, they think the Jews are behind it all, behind everything that's wrong. Rosa couldn't stand it. The Stupidity. The Righteousness. So, she 's gone.

JAY: She was smart to go, Cheryl.

CHERYL: Lies on the radio, rocks through the windows. (*SOUNDS of right-wing radio and glass smashing.*) Rosa 's slipped away. Our life is slipping away. I want to let it go where it's going, right down the shithole, right down the shithole of history.

JAY: Cheryl.

CHERYL: What?

JAY: If I'm afraid that something bad is happening, or going to happen, does my fear then help to bring it about?

CHERYL: I can't answer that.

JAY: Fear. One's confidence is scarred, then. One's worthiness is doubted by it. The sense of goodness is defiled. The idea of a right order is disturbed.

CHERYL: Adjectives, Jay.

JAY: No. Qualities.

CHERYL: Have you thought about my theory? It's not a theory, not hypothetical, it's a certainty, Jay.

JAY: I never lived a Jewish life. You've done better than me in that regard. But I was proud. I didn't flaunt it or broadcast it, so it's not that. It's *me*. I always gave, to all the Causes. Like the tithes of old. I gave and I gave. Twenty per cent, down the line, though it wasn't much.

CHERYL: Somewhere, sometime, someone -- you forgot to give. To God, maybe.

JAY: I must have. Forgotten.

CHERYL: Not to me. You gave it up for me.

JAY: I did.

CHERYL: The rapport between us, right away. There, at that shitty public pool.

JAY: We couldn't stop talking.

CHERYL: I remember.

JAY: I didn't have to go to school in the mornings. My senior year.

CHERYL: You've told me.

JAY: I would read all night, when it was quiet. The classics. Especially the Russians. Faulkner. Steinbeck. Eliot. Pound. Then I wouldn't make it to school until lunch. The Principal said it was okay, just show up at lunch. Ward R. Young.

CHERYL: He understood your situation.

JAY: He'd been a minor league catcher, in the Giants system. Ward Young. He taught me how to play the infield.

CHERYL: *He's so naïve – the mark of marks. Later, he made up for feelings of inferiority by playing ball. There, on the field, he was an equal. He abused no one, he kept to himself, he could not brag. Playing, he felt delighted to be alive in the world, to enjoy his body and his breathing and the sweat.*

JAY: Yeah. *We used to have a play, a basketball play, in high school, a double pick, probably it's illegal now, the Three and the Two would cross, and the One, which was me, the point guard, would pass to the Four cutting in toward the basket behind them. Harvey Findling. His father owned a delicatessen. It was the beginning of the era of the jump shot. The Five was also probably setting a pick, but I forget against whom. Richie Wilson was our Center...*

CHERYL: Stop it, Jay.

JAY: I'll stop.

CHERYL: There has to be a Reason, Jay. a Cause.

JAY: I don't know what it is.

CHERYL: Spinoza, Jay.

JAY: Spinoza?

CHERYL: It's God. He made a pact with the Devil. He's testing you.

JAY: Spinoza?

CHERYL: No, God.

JAY: All right – He 's won. I quit. I give up.

CHERYL: They threw him out, Jay. They denounced him. And he was a nice man. A lonely man. It was mean -- to cut him off from the synagogue. To excommunicate him like that. It was mean. *(Sounds off.)*

JAY: Did you hear something?

CHERYL: No.

JAY: I thought I heard something.

CHERYL: No.

JAY: Someone downstairs, at the door?

CHERYL: No. *(Silence)*

5.

CHERYL: Michael.

MICHAEL: Cheryl.

CHERYL: Jay?

JAY: Yeah?

MICHAEL: Rosa. She's on her way North.

CHERYL: We knew that.

MICHAEL: But we lost track.

JAY: Again. You told me. Tell my wife.

CHERYL: I heard him say it, already.

JAY: Tell her the other stuff.

MICHAEL: I'm getting messages.

CHERYL: What kinds of messages?

MICHAEL: You know, Berkowitz kills himself.

CHERYL: Berkowitz had mental problems.

JAY: Why mention Berkowitz?

MICHAEL: He also got messages.

JAY: What are the messages?

MICHAEL: On the phone, the internet, emails, under my door, in my post office box, on my car, at my club, my bar, everywhere.

CHERYL: What are they?



MICHAEL: They're like clippings, ads. Pictures. Videos. Coupons, things like that.

CHERYL: How do you know they're messages?

MICHAEL: What else could they be? They're like signs. Warnings. Reminders. You know, to buy things. I don't know why, but it seems Asian to me.

CHERYL: Asian?

MICHAEL: Yeah. Or Russian.

CHERYL: It's absurd.

MICHAEL: I'm walking around, and I see them everywhere now. I'm starting to see them all over the place: little signs, phrases, epithets, songs, rhymes, babies, cartoons, pretty women, balls, wheels, trucks, cars, trains, airplanes, moons, stars, vapors, clouds, shoes, hats, jars, rooms, houses --

CHERYL: Stop!

MICHAEL: They're like harbingers.

CHERYL: Harbingers of what?

MICHAEL: Doom.

JAY: Of what?

MICHAEL: Doom, Jay.

JAY: Take it easy, Michael. Slow down.

CHERYL: I know how you must be feeling, Michael.

MICHAEL: Thank you.

CHERYL: I don't go out anymore, myself.

JAY: She stays home.

CHERYL: I stay home and watch.

MICHAEL: You mean TV?

CHERYL: No. I just watch.

MICHAEL: I see.

CHERYL: You never know.

MICHAEL: Right.

JAY: You check the books lately, Michael?

MICHAEL: The books?

JAY: Yes.

MICHAEL: They seem the same.

CHERYL: "They seem the same."

JAY: She repeats things.

CHERYL: "They seem the same."

MICHAEL: The same as they were.

JAY: Well, I wouldn't worry, Michael.

MICHAEL: Thank you.

JAY: Don't worry about a thing.

MICHAEL: It's like the comics, you know? Funny. Not to me, though. I keep seeing these blurbs everywhere, these little ads, wherever I look. Pictures. Tits and ass. Smilings. Slogans. Ads. All over the place. Ads. Smiles...Smiles...

**6.**

CHERYL: We have a society where people walk into schools and kill the kids. What could that possibly mean?

JAY: You think, Michael –

CHERYL: You weren't listening.

JAY: I was thinking about guns.

CHERYL: Actually, I don't give a shit what you were thinking.

JAY: Harsh.

CHERYL: Live with it. *(Pause)*

JAY: Is it a permanent problem? Like the hatred of the Jews? I'm beginning to wonder.

CHERYL: I think it is. I think it is. I think that's right, Jay. People want to shoot. Especially to kill. It's hard-wired. Blood flows, they feel power. Power. "I'm just a frightened piece of shit, I don't know if I can live till tomorrow, but now I can blow your brains out." It's so American. My father Harry's pals. Hunters and fishermen. Outdoorsmen. I guess they have a reason. Then there's Citizens who know that they're worthless. Got to have a gun, even the score. "Some evil Black man or hairy Jew might walk into my home and kill me and my family." I suppose that could happen here. But I think it's more like, "I'm nothing, I'm stupid, I care for nothing, I'm entitled to my grievances, so I own a gun. I deserve to have a gun. It's the second amendment, Man, to protect home and family." *(Pause)* I'm considering we might ought to have one, too, Jay.

JAY: No. We have bodyguards.

CHERYL: Oh? Where are they?

JAY: We're safe. There are guards on every floor.

CHERYL: I never see them.

JAY: They are hidden. Russians.

CHERYL: Russians?

JAY: Russians. Your father hired them.

CHERYL: My father?

JAY: Yes.

CHERYL: I'd like to see them.

JAY: Maybe I can arrange something.

CHERYL: What do we have left, Jay, besides the guards?

JAY: Nothing, Cheryl.

CHERYL: I'm talking about American ideals, Jay. Not to be beaten by a fucking Nazi militia. Or to be hiding in our little Dome here, like criminals. The kids, Jay, they don't learn anything. They don't know history. They don't know about the Holocaust. They don't know about slavery. They don't live in the real world. It's some evil shit, Jay.

JAY: A meteor hit the Earth, you know. Not too long ago, either. I'm telling you. Nobody seems to be aware of it. Slammed right into us. In the Yucatan. The dinosaurs died. The plants died. There was a die-off. You've heard of that? A die-off? A meteor. Right out of the sky.

CHERYL: Yes, of course I've heard of it.

JAY: There's a shift. The gravity, or the magnetic center of the Earth. A molten iron ball, rolling to the side. Or a slip somewhere. A shift. What was up is now down.

CHERYL: I don't care. It's all beside the point.

JAY: I had a nightmare, Cheryl. A mass of us, running, crazily, screaming, racing with the defeated President of the United States, his hair on fire, running and screaming into a darkness, almost liquid, a heavy blackness, like extreme gravity, like a Black Hole. Running into it. Wildly.

CHERYL: I'm sorry, Jay. But that's what's happening. The President is an evil motherfucker. Pure evil. I'm talking about Donald J. Trump here.

JAY: I'm thinking.

CHERYL: And?

JAY: Call your father. Play cards with your father.

CHERYL: Cards? What for?

JAY: He likes to play gin. The Fascist.

CHERYL: I'm not sure that I get it, Jay.

JAY: Just play cards with him.

CHERYL: I see.

JAY: Can you do that?

CHERYL: My father helped you. Remember?

JAY: Yes.

CHERYL: You never thanked him.

JAY: I'll thank him. That's enough for the day. The day is done. Look. The horizon, the sunset. The sky meeting the earth. Two worlds meeting mysteriously, and then twilight. The sky. How our ancestors must have pondered that, Cheryl.

CHERYL: Yes. Now we're crazily piling crap up there.

JAY: The same idiot fascists in every generation. We have to endure them. They're part of the species. They'll call us names. We endure. They endure. On and on it goes. It's built in. Idiocy. Stupidity. It's part of the game-plan. So, you'll be asking me the question....

CHERYL: Where is the Good?

7.

CHERYL: Gin?

HARRY: Yup.

CHERYL: You always win.

HARRY: The trick is to play fast. You're always too slow.

CHERYL: I have to arrange my cards.

HARRY: Do it quickly.

CHERYL: And you always knock right away.

HARRY: There's no sense waiting. If you have the numbers, knock. Don't wait. People are caught with random high singletons.

CHERYL: And Gin?

HARRY: Luck of the draw.

CHERYL: Do you believe in Fate?

HARRY: No.

CHERYL: What do you believe in?

HARRY: The Ace of Spades.

CHERYL: Thought so. Jay has a question about that.

HARRY: I'm sure he does.

CHERYL: He could use your help.

HARRY: He always does. Money talks.

CHERYL: Will you help him?

HARRY: No.

CHERYL: Why not?

HARRY: I don't like him. And I don't like his politics.

CHERYL: Thanks, Dad.

HARRY: He never said a proper thanks for the help I've given him.

CHERYL: You're our only help right now.

HARRY: What about the solidarity of his tribe?

CHERYL: We'll be hunted down soon, by idiot anti-Semites.

HARRY: You're not a Jew. You're Episcopalian, like me.

CHERYL: I'm a convert. It's not so easy. I'm more of a Jew than most Jews. And Jay is my husband.

HARRY: No.

CHERYL: Think about it. I'm still your daughter.

HARRY: I'll think about it.

CHERYL: Think, Dad. I can feel it. The machinery. The making of the Scapegoat. They want to get rid of the black hats and the funny costumes and the stiff-neck fanatics.

HARRY: There's no evidence of that.

CHERYL: Yes, there is.

HARRY: I'll think about it.

CHERYL: Look at what's happening.

HARRY: Meanwhile, take the check. *(She handles the check – **image of the check on the screen.**)*

CHERYL: Did you hire a bunch of Russian armed guards?

HARRY: I did.

CHERYL: Why?

HARRY: To protect you.

CHERYL: Why them?

HARRY: They're cheap. And they're anti-Semitic.

CHERYL: I don't get it.

HARRY: It'll make them work harder.

CHERYL: I still don't get it.

HARRY: Take the check, Cheryl.

CHERYL: I can't.

HARRY: Why not?

CHERYL: It would be disloyal.

HARRY: But stupid not to. *(Pause)* Take it. *(She does so.)*

CHERYL: Thanks, Dad.

HARRY: You're welcome.

CHERYL: Remember what you said.

HARRY: I'll think about it.

CHERYL: They're trying to make an example of Jay.

HARRY: He *is* an example. And you? What are you?

CHERYL: I'm his wife.

**8.**

JAY: It seems like there is an outside force, sucking it all up. All our successes, all our gains, our family, our friends.

CHERYL: It's the people, Jay. The devils are hiding out in the people, trying to bring you down.

JAY: Stop.

CHERYL: Shitheads all. White, resentful, and guaranteed immortality by their religion. I almost said *immorality*.

JAY: Don't talk like that.

CHERYL: All you have to do is die, and you're in.

JAY: Cheryl.

CHERYL: Fuck 'em. That's how I talk.

JAY: Don't talk.

CHERYL: Fuck you. I want to express my wrath. Like all those high-end show-biz cunts in their fur and phony come-on looks. Scumbags, Jay.

JAY: I'll have you locked up in your room.

CHERYL: Yeah, sure.

JAY: And you can keep your Daddy's check.

CHERYL: I intend to. No problem, Jay.

JAY: I'm sorry, Cheryl.

CHERYL: Right up your alley.

JAY: I didn't mean that.

CHERYL: The human organism in a cage. The human species, men and women, crowded against a wall. Yelling and carrying on. The jails and the cages.



The winners and the losers, both. The Earth will turn upside down and shake them off like maggots.

JAY: "The world, the whole Universe, is an electrical apparatus. Fate is an electrical stall: obsession, hatred, desire, even viruses and bacteria, all are electrical phenomena, as is isolation and revenge."

CHERYL: Who the fuck was that talking?

JAY: Sorry. Something I read.

CHERYL: What about Rosa, eh? Sixteen years old? Heading North? Where'd she slip away at night, to get fucked up by a stranger? What about that, Jay? Where were you?

JAY: Right here.

CHERYL: In your claustrophobic trance.

JAY: And you?

CHERYL: I was doing my thing, Jay. Galavanting in my best clothes. Putting on airs. In front of a mirror. Showing my tits. Pretending I didn't know what was under all those fancy garments. What people really wanted. What they were hiding. What they were proud of. Who was better than whom. All the bodies in all the closets. All the lying by phantoms with weird eyes. Who are they?

JAY: I don't know.

CHERYL: Now what? What's left?

JAY: This.

CHERYL: And Michael?

JAY: He's been institutionalized.

CHERYL: Where'd they put him?

JAY: He couldn't take it anymore.

CHERYL: Where is he?

JAY: He's in a hospital.

CHERYL: Where, Jay?

JAY: Right here in New York City.

CHERYL: I'll go and see him.

JAY: Suit yourself.

CHERYL: Why do they do that, Jay? Something goes wrong in the brain, they ought to take care of the person. Instead -- They're trying to kill them. The odd, the complainers. They want to kill them.

JAY: Okay, Cheryl.

CHERYL: You're condescending to me. That's what they do, Jay, they don't think you should live, they knock you off. They put you away. They close the door. They lock the door with a key. They tie your arms and legs. They sit on your head. Fucking gorillas.

JAY: You keep talking about Justice, Cheryl.

CHERYL And I'll keep talking about it.

JAY: Talk. But there is no such thing.

CHERYL: You're next.

JAY: No, I'm not.

CHERYL: Something 's wrong with you, and they've figured it out.

JAY: I don't think so.

CHERYL: You don't think so?

JAY: No.

CHERYL: That's what it is. They've figured it out.

JAY: You're in a movie, Cheryl. Movies lie.

CHERYL: I never go to the movies. I don't need no stinking movies. I got one right here in my head. All I need to do is watch. WATCH.

JAY: It's the History of the world! It's theft. Carbon gets heated and pressured and crushed and morphed into a diamond, which is lusted after by men. Now they're

digging into the earth for gold and oil, Cheryl. All over the fucking place. Pits with chemicals, shovels and axes, and mud. It's a mess.

CHERYL: We had some good times in my movie, Jay.

JAY: There were good times. The look of things. The river. Sunset and sunrise. The quiet of the fishermen...

CHERYL: What fishermen?

JAY: In the Bible.

CHERYL: What bible?

JAY: Never mind. It's everywhere. Like a plague. Like a virus. Data. Mass hypnosis. Confusion. Terror. It's like some kind of living, digital beast, powering its way into the planet with long, electrified arms.

CHERYL: Like *The Alien*.

9.

*JAY: Listen. Whoever you are. Whatever you are. I'm talking to you. You're a non-entity, invisible. I can't get my hands on you. I can't touch you. I don't know you. Everything that's mine is passing away, including my health. What do you know about it? What is the Cause? Is there a Reason? Is there a Curse?*

CHERYL: Jay? I was thinking about sailing. It was great to get out, you know, out of the fucking wilderness of the city and the plague, out on the blue ocean, in the wind. It was tough, you know, there's a lot to learn, more than you'd think, and I never got there, but the wind, Jay, it was interesting to be a part of that, working the wind, feeling its power, its neutrality.

JAY: I'm nothing, Cheryl. An electrical apparatus. I look forward to nothing. I have nothing to lose. A bit of chemistry in the wind.

CHERYL: Self-pity.

*JAY: Sorry. And the movies won't last you know. Celluloid. Digital They'll all fade. And all the archives, and all the libraries, into chemical dust, into the Earth.*

CHERYL: Rosa used to go to Indian reservations. Did you know that? Jay? Jay? *(No answer.)* She had a friend who worked at Mahwah, which is a state prison. Mahwah. I think you know Mahwah. It's where your father was confined. This friend of Rosa's, he was chaplain to the Indians, the indigenous, the Native Americans who were incarcerated there. You know what they did? Jay? They kidnapped the kids

off the reservations. Not so long ago. Social Workers. Social workers would arrive and steal the kids and put them in foster homes. They'd have their little vans and their social worker's suits on and their bags of papers, and they'd take the kids away. That's how they kept the tribes down. She tried to help, Rosa, but there wasn't much she could do.

JAY: Good for her.

CHERYL: You weren't listening. Again.

JAY: That's how they get you. I must have alienated someone.. Usually, it comes down to Money. Ego. Scandal. Maybe they heard me say something bad on my phone. But I don't think so. We were scrupulous, in the right movie.

CHERYL: Kill the Indians.

JAY: No.

CHERYL: Reminds me. All those hunters and fisherman in the West. The ranchers and the miners, and the farmers, the ones who like to kill and ride around and herd cattle – they should be rounded up and put on a boat and shipped to Madagascar. There, they can do what they want, and leave the American Indian alone on the Land.

JAY: Are we talking about the same subject?

CHERYL: No.

JAY: CHERYL!

CHERYL: Don't yell, please.

JAY: All right. I never know what you're talking about anymore. What I'm trying to say is – Rosa could help, Rosa could be a big help. She could find out, who's after us, why is all this happening, what's going on.

CHERYL: Rosa takes care of herself. She does what she has to do, because we've trashed her nest.

JAY: No one 's trashed her nest, Cheryl.

CHERYL: And do we still have the guards, Jay?

JAY: Yes. The Russians. But they don't say anything, they don't do anything. They just stand there.

CHERYL: My God! We're trapped! Get rid of them!

JAY: I will.

CHERYL: Right away!

JAY: I will.

CHERYL: Right away!

JAY: Don't shout! I'll take care of it.

CHERYL: You don't get it, Jay.

JAY: I have to fight, but there's no one to fight.

CHERYL: I'll call my father about the Russians.

JAY: Don't call him.

CHERYL: Why not?

JAY: He hates me. Harry. He hates me. The fucking fascist.

CHERYL: Make your peace with him.

JAY: How?

CHERYL: I don't know how. Make your peace.

*JAY: You'll ask: what about God? What about goodness? A path? A way out? Maybe there is no way, no way out, we do the best we can, and so on, say all, all of the Masters ---*

## **10.**

HARRY: What is it, Big Shot? You in trouble?

JAY: Yes.

HARRY: What's the trouble?

JAY: I'm losing my business. My work. My good reputation. My family. My life. My health. My world is being taken from me, Harry, and I don't know why. I can't explain it. We're trapped.

HARRY: Bad luck.

JAY: Bad luck?

HARRY: Bad times. Let's go down the list. Taxes?

JAY: I paid my taxes.

HARRY: The sickness? The plague?

JAY: We stay home. We seem safe. So far.

HARRY: Enemies?

JAY: None that I know of.

HARRY: Politicians?

JAY: None that I know of. Except you, maybe.

HARRY: Okay, goodbye. *(Starts out)*

JAY: Wait a minute, Harry. Don't run off.

HARRY: Anti-Semites?

JAY: Cheryl thinks so.

HARRY: I'm not an anti-Semite.

JAY: I know you're not. Some of your best friends are Jews.

HARRY: I love my daughter, you know. She has her problems, but I love her. You, you're a piece of shit. You deserve everything you get. There's Justice in this world. Evens things up.

JAY: I don't think so. There is no justice, and things don't even up, and the so-called land of freedom and democracy is fucked.

HARRY: Good.

JAY: Good? How could that be good?

HARRY: I'll tell you why.

JAY: Okay. Why?

HARRY: It's the stupid against the smart. And the stupid outnumber the smart. The unwashed outnumber the washed. The ignorant outnumber the educated. The poor outnumber the rich. Mexicans are taking over Chicago. Is that what you want?

JAY: What do you mean?

HARRY: That's democracy. Majority rules. Is that what you want? (*Image of the Statue of Liberty.*)

JAY: It's a question of education, of citizenship.

HARRY: I don't think so. It doesn't work. And the jerks will vote for the dictator. Because they want to think they're right. And the rich will get richer. And that's how it works.

JAY: Fuck you, Harry.

HARRY: And as far as the Jews go, they're a sidebar, at best a victimhood, waiting on the waters to see which way the winds blow. And then the storm will hit them hard. And I want my daughter to be protected, whoever she thinks she is.

JAY: She is with us.

HARRY: No, she just thinks she is.

JAY: Fuck you, again.

HARRY: So, I'll help you for Cheryl's sake, but only if you're nice. The dismantling of a man's life -- It must be a political thing. It's been done before in this country.

JAY: Who has that kind of staying power, that kind of will?

HARRY: I'll do what I can to find out.

JAY: Thank you.

HARRY: You don't have to thank me.

JAY: Okay.

HARRY: Could be some idiot jerk-off politician who has no idea. But I'll do what I can. I'll send some people. I've given Cheryl some money.

JAY: I know you have. Thank you.

HARRY: And then what?

JAY: I'll deal with it.

HARRY: You don't know what it is yet.

JAY: No.

HARRY: So how do you know you can deal with it?

JAY: I don't know.

HARRY: Sure. Okay. I'll send some people. We'll see what happens from that. Meanwhile, what's going on with Cheryl?

JAY: She's losing her mind.

HARRY: She's not losing her mind, motherfucker.

JAY: Do you have to curse all the time?

HARRY: Motherfucker.

JAY: She's a very sound, intelligent woman.

HARRY: I know she is.

JAY: But things are getting to her.

HARRY: Smarter than you.

JAY: No doubt about that.

HARRY: She 's going to leave your Jewish ass.

JAY: That's what she says.

HARRY: And that's what she means.

JAY: Maybe.

HARRY: I wouldn't be so optimistic.

JAY: I'm not so optimistic.

HARRY: No?



JAY: I don't feel optimistic.

HARRY: All right. I'll do what I say. I'll talk to some friends of mine. It might be a political thing. It might be something else. Electronic mishaps. Vendettas.

JAY: I don't do politics, I don't do drugs.

HARRY: So far.

JAY: I *have* been hacked.

HARRY: Sorry to hear it. Inevitable.

JAY: But something is after me, Harry. Something big. (*Sounds off*) Here comes Cheryl.

HARRY: I'll look into it. No guarantees.

JAY: Of course.

HARRY: I'm going. I don't want to run into my daughter.

JAY: I understand.

HARRY: I saw the Russkies out there, standing around. They are watching.

JAY: Are they watching us, or watching out?

HARRY: Maybe both.

JAY: Cheryl wants you to get rid of them.

HARRY: Bye, bye, asshole.

JAY: Bye. (*HARRY leaves.*) Motherfucker.

## 11.

JAY: Did you see the Russians? Standing around?

CHERYL: Yes. In the corners, the shadows.

JAY: They're not ours.

CHERYL: Whose are they?

JAY: They are just Watchers, apparently. They are watching us.

CHERYL: For what?

JAY: Just so that we feel watched.

CHERYL: Again, for what?

JAY: So that we know we are being watched.

CHERYL: It's intolerable.

JAY: I know.

CHERYL: Get rid of them.

JAY: I'm trying. With your father.

CHERYL: Fuck him. Give it up. Give it up, Jay. We'll get out of this fucking situation.

JAY: Stop cursing so much.

CHERYL: You want to go on with this shitty, maniacal devastation?

JAY: I'll find a way.

CHERYL: I'm done.

JAY: Then go.

CHERYL: It's dark, Jay.

JAY: I'll find light.

CHERYL: I don't mean that kind of light. I mean the future.

JAY: Cheryl, do you remember Virginia? *She was our teacher, our mentor, when we were young. She helped us with the books, the teachings, and when she died, she left us a legacy, a vision, so to speak, of the meaning of Life. Or of Death. She had arranged for us to see her corpse, naked and twisted up on a barren metal table, in the basement of the hospital.*

CHERYL: *Yes, I remember.*

JAY: *She was not that piece of crunched human flesh on a punishing steel table, in a basement room.*

CHERYL: No.

JAY: *We remember her now. As she was alive.*

CHERYL: *Yes. And God bless. (Pause)* They've turned off the electricity.

JAY: We have candles. Lamps.

CHERYL: I don't understand, Jay.

JAY: No, you don't.

CHERYL: You want to sit here alone in the dark? They're all gone. Everybody's gone. You have no friends, no workers, no family, no businesses, no light, nothing. But me. Me. And my father. And the Russians. Watching. Only God knows what they're watching. Is it me?

JAY: No. Not you. It's me they're watching.

CHERYL: Get rid of them!

JAY: I will. Take it easy. Harry said he would help.

CHERYL: He's pulling some strings. In the Congress. It's going to cost him.

JAY: Maybe you should go to him. Your father. Just walk past the Russians, and go.

CHERYL: You want to sit here alone mourning your losses?

JAY: Go to your father.

CHERYL: No.

JAY: Go to your father.

CHERYL: Jay? I'll never give up my faith.

JAY: I know you won't.

CHERYL: Good. But that's what he wants.

JAY: I'll stick it out here.

CHERYL: Eat something.

JAY: I'll fight.

CHERYL: How?

JAY: By staying.

CHERYL: I'm going. I need a break. I'm going to prance right by the Russkies and look them in the eye. And say, Fuck you. And Fuck you. And fuck you. And then I'm gone.

JAY: There was a thing about coal, Cheryl. In that house across from the *Shul*. *No heat. Winters, my mother would get me up before dawn. We had a coal patch in the back yard, covered by a tarp. Arctic wind would be coming through. She'd send me out with a pail and shovel, into the freezing cold, while she started a fire in the old kitchen oven. I'd hawl in the coal and then get the wood fire going in the front room.*

CHERYL: How old were you, Jay?

JAY: About nine or ten. I wish I could remember. How it felt. How it looked. The cold. That moment. It's me, far away. Not even an image, just a flash....

## 12.

*(JAY sits by himself on a barren stage. His head is shaven. He is naked except for a shawl over his shoulders.)*

*JAY: There's a hole in my understanding. Forces at play and I'm not in the game. No, I AM the game. Somehow I got appointed. I was going to say, "annointed." I should have watched what was going on. I should have watched what I was doing. I thought I was immune. I'm not immune. Not from the bugs, the parasites, the plague. Not from the facts. The malevolent little machines. Not from history. Not from the weather. First, the numbers went South. I thought I had it completely organized. The numbers could not lie. And then Rosa disappeared. To Canada. I never did a bad thing. I had a communications setup, one of the best in the world, refined, totally private, it hurt nobody. Now I'm an ordinary American, and my luck has changed. Like Harry said. That's the way he sees things. The zeitgeist changed. The climate changed. My life went from fabulous to impoverished. I'd pray, but I don't know how to pray. I never learned. The forces are so big. I eat bread and water now, and feel sorry for the world and its incredible delusions. **(Pause. HARRY enters and listens:)** Electricity. It's the whole deal. It's God himself, everywhere. We are electrical machines. Like toasters or motorcycles or computers. What could they possibly be responsible for? And who is to blame? The forces are great. Electricity. **Gravity.** Cosmic waves from the stars. Viruses, not alive, but replicating. Nuclear violence in the Sun.*

HARRY: Listen up, Jay.

JAY: I'm listening.

HARRY: Put some pants on first. I don't want to talk to some idiot while his dick is hanging out. (*JAY slips on a pair of work-out pants.*) Good, you look almost human now.

JAY: What do you want, Harry?

HARRY: I'm worried about my daughter.

JAY: So am I.

HARRY: You know where she is?

JAY: She walks the streets. She likes to do that. Look at the windows. Look in the stores.

HARRY: Pray to your stars that she comes home soon.

JAY: I don't know how to pray. I don't have the attention.

HARRY: It's what you want that's the problem.

JAY: I want peace. I want my life back.

HARRY: You need to expiate.

JAY: For what sin?

HARRY: Ask forgiveness.

JAY: Forgiveness would be good, but I don't know what I did wrong.

HARRY: You were just sliding down the sliding pond.

JAY: Right.

HARRY: And you tumbled into the deep water.

JAY: Right.

HARRY: And you don't know how to swim.

JAY: Right.

HARRY: A whirlpool, actually.

JAY: I'm licensed and legal in the State of New York.

HARRY: Pay attention, motherfucker. I went to see some friends of mine. Politicians. People. Not nice guys. They couldn't care less. Basically, they wouldn't mind locking you up and throwing away the key.

JAY: I'm locked up already. I never leave the house.

HARRY: They'll come around and reason with you.

JAY: Reason?

HARRY: Reason.

JAY: Who are they?

HARRY: Eli, Bill, and Zack.

JAY: I don't know them.

HARRY: Right. But they know about you.

JAY: And?

HARRY: They're impartial.

JAY: You expect me to believe that?

HARRY: No.

JAY: What happened to Michael in this blackened, shithead world?

HARRY: You sound like my daughter.

JAY: She got it from you.

HARRY: Michael went cuckoo. You knew that. He 's in residence in Bellevue. Life is fragile.

JAY: Rosa?

HARRY: Like I said, she is somewhere in the North. *(JAY starts to cry.)* All right, that's enough. Stop. *(JAY stops.)*

JAY: I'm sorry.

HARRY: Eli, Bill, and Zack. They want to talk sense. Give you a hand with your present situation. They're each different. Reason. They want to reason with you.

JAY: How much did it cost you?

HARRY: Nothing. They owe me.

JAY: How fortunate.

HARRY: You bet your ass.

JAY: And Cheryl?

HARRY: Cheryl what?

JAY: Can she be here, too?

HARRY: If she comes back. If she shows up.

JAY: Thank you. Thank you, very much.

HARRY: Bye, bye. *(Pause)*

JAY: *About the coal. One sunrise, before dawn, I was maybe twelve, we did the coal routine, and she lost it, and she started hitting me with the shovel. You could murder someone with that thing. I grabbed her arm and stopped her. I said, **if you ever do that again, I'll kill you.** From that day on, I was on my own. I came and went as I chose. I left early in the morning and came home, reluctantly and depressed, when it was dark.*

### 13.

CHERYL: *The streets were barren. Paper and dirt, and loose rocks, people who looked like robots, robots who looked like people. Faces in the walls. Garbage cans changing shape. Men with shades and hats. Shady men with prayer shawls. I thought of the Old Testament with all its sayings and warnings and principles and laws. Codes of behaviour. The Old Men, bowing and bowing and mumbling Hebrew prayers. What would they think now? I was looking for a bridge to jump off of, dramatically, and then I thought it was a joke. I laughed out loud. The Russians must have heard me. They think I'm crazy, anyway. So what? The Old Men put in their time and went out with a blessing on their lips. No reason I couldn't do the same. The horror will pass. Not pass, become a distraction while we wait to die. Meanwhile, I'll go back into the tower and be a companion to my husband. *(Joins JAY)**

JAY: Welcome.

CHERYL: How are you?

JAY: I wish I had never been born.

CHERYL: Famous last words.

JAY: I was playing with my digital system, trying to get it to work right, see if I could get an image of myself, some truth about myself. Useless, really. Clouds must have blanketed the sun and shut out the light. All I saw was darkness and ugly faces covered with sores. It was a living nightmare. Though I saw fragments of the past. And then I sat quietly for hours. Lots of long-term memory. Occassions and events and people, and places I haven't thought about for years.

CHERYL: You want to talk about it?

JAY: No. And you?

CHERYL: I've been walking. All over Manhattan. Empty streets. Searching, like you, for the right, the correct image of myself -- in *extremis*, in trouble, in danger, lost, and I came to nothing on the street but visions of the *Torah* and the believing Old Men. I could almost hear them *dahvening*. That sorrowful chant. There's not much else out there, Jay. I tried looking. A glance. A peripheral, sideways look. The fancy store windows with their fancy clothes for their fancy, anxiety-ridden consumers. The shiny lighting.

JAY: Anxiety is a mechanism. It's wired in.

CHERYL: By what?

JAY: Evolution?

CHERYL: Windows lie. Mirrors lie also.

JAY: Now I'm Evil Incarnate, Bad Karma, the voice of the Devil Himself, a bad influence, a liar and a hypocrite.

CHERYL: How'd you get to that, Jay?

JAY: They just popped me into this world. Yelling my head off. And a bright shining light that hurt. And I screamed blue murder, as my mother used to say.

CHERYL: You feel like you want to persecute yourself, Jay? Or be done with it?

JAY: I think I'll persecute myself.



CHERYL: Things go bad, and the roof falls in.

JAY: It almost really did.

CHERYL: What? The roof?

JAY: The roof. Fell in. Almost.

CHERYL: Thank God for small things.

JAY: You thank Him. I haven't been able to reach Him. I've tried and tried. Apparently He doesn't talk to slugs like me. Only your father returns my calls nowadays.

CHERYL: My father did what he could, in his assinine way.

JAY: I grew up watching. Very much like life was a movie. The consequences of life. A pair of eyes, somehow connected to the brain, and functioning, you know, as the athlete, and the A student and then the wise-acre, eyes always watching, eyes always on the results, the consequences. And on my mother. *Here's the thing—we went up there to see her, towards the end, my sister and I. It was a rest home in a little town up in the Catskills – Loch Sheldrake – what a name -- a cornball tourist village above Liberty, New York. And she didn't recognize us, my sister and I, not at all. We watched her, astonished, as she hopped about the joint with her friends, happy as a lark. (Image of a poor folks' rest home for the Elderly.)* And now I don't have to look for them, the results, they're right here. It's as though they've been organized by a stronger power, a conscious force -- lined them up in front of me disguised as ugly faces, some of whom I knew. *(Pause)*

CHERYL: That conscious force, Jay --

JAY: Blake had a line: "See *through* the eyes, not *with* the eyes."

CHERYL: William Blake?

JAY: Yes. He had visions of another world. Swedenborgian.

CHERYL: Meaning?

JAY: A Christian world where the human body and sex were beautiful things. I'm not sure I agree with him anymore.

CHERYL: I heard a senator on the TV the other night. He said the great thing about capitalism is its efficiency. Efficiency is not the only human value. The Nazis were very efficient, too. Social Justice is also a value. Common sense is a value.

Intelligence, empathy, and so on. It all sounds so hollow now. It may be all over, Jay. The fantasy of *America*. And I'm as guilty as the next person. Believing in things.

JAY: I had a thought about God.

CHERYL: Tell.

JAY: The question is whether or not the universe is random.

CHERYL: And the thought?

JAY: That was the thought. (*Noises off*) But, random or not, you maybe have to play to win.

CHERYL: I don't think so. Who are these men who are coming over?

JAY: My guess is that they're three fervent capitalists, Republicans probably, coming to give me a lesson in rugged individualism and dog eat dog economics. And corruption.

CHERYL: Are they coming all at once, or one at a time?

JAY: Good question.

CHERYL: We have enough chairs?

JAY: We have stools and a bench. (*Sounds off*) Here they are.

**14.**

ELI: We brought light. Battery powered light.

BILL: We heard you had no electricity.

ZACK: No way to live, Pal.

JAY: I realize that.

BILL: You have to cook, read a book, see what you're doing. Live a life.

ELI: It's a desperate thing, if you have no juice. Low tech, intermittent, am I right?

JAY: Yes.

ZACK: Who's the lady?

JAY: This is my wife. Cheryl.

ELI: She's welcome to stay, as far as I'm concerned. Bill?

BILL: It's all right with me. Zack?

ZACK: Sure, just don't get too involved, Missus.

JAY: Fuck that. It's not a part of this conversation. If you don't like it, go home. She stays. She converses. She's involved.

ZACK: We just don't want everybody talking at once, that's all.

BILL: No offence. Harry informed us. We're setting parameters here.

CHERYL: Thank you, but I don't know what that means. Who are you to set parameters?

ELI: Pay no attention to him, Missus.

CHERYL: I won't. He 's an idiot.

ZACK: I resent that, Missus. I'm not an idiot.

CHERYL: You *are* an idiot.

ZACK: Okay. All I meant was, she has nothing to do with your particular problems, Jay. She shouldn't suffer like you, she's innocent. (*Aside*) She's not even Jewish.

CHERYL: What was that? Innocent of what?

JAY: What the hell do you think we've been doing?

ELI: Suffering?

CHERYL: Don't shrug like that –

ZACK: Zack.

CHERYL: Zack.

BILL: Now you know what it's like, Mister.

CHERYL: What?

BILL: Down and out and nobody gives a shit. Am I right?

JAY: No.

ZACK: Isolated and despised.

CHERYL: No. That's not completely right.

JAY: No, we had people. Family and friends. And there's her father, whom you know. Harry.

ZACK: Yeah, we know Harry.

BILL: Good old Harry.

ZACK: Harry 's the Man.

CHERYL: What is that supposed to mean?

ZACK: Nothing much.

BILL: No offense.

CHERYL: Well, fuck you then.

ELI: I get it, Missus. Don't fret about it. Don't get mad. Where were we? As I was saying, now you know how it feels.

CHERYL: How what feels?

BILL: The pain of loss.

ZACK: The suffering that comes from nowhere.

BILL: Or from the middle of the Earth. Rock and molten iron. The Devil's lair.

Jay: The what?

CHERYL: You put your heads down -- America put hundreds of children in cages and starved them to death. Or put the plague on them.

JAY: Nothing was done.

ELI: I kept my head down, too.

JAY: I complained to the Government.

CHERYL: From your cave.

ELI: I was *in* the Government.

BILL: Some of them got the plague and died.

JAY: I'm sorry now that I kept my head down.

CHERYL: He 's claustrophobic. But he complained bitterly.

BILL: But of course he did.

CHERYL: Insane conspiracies abounding.

JAY: I kept my head down, because people were throwing rocks, people were marching, people were throwing lies around.

CHERYL: Fear. Fear rules. Nameless fear. You can't walk the streets.

BILL: Sure thing. We hired a town car.

CHERYL: We feel watched, sir. By strange Russians.

BILL: Harry said something about the Russkies.

ZACK: He did.

JAY: So?

ELI: We'll take care of it.

JAY: I wish I could believe that.

ELI: Your call, Pal. (***Image of a statuesque Russian soldier.***)

JAY: (*Aside*) What did he mean by that?

CHERYL: Our daughter, Rosa, is gone somewhere.

BILL: She's up North, in Canada.

CHERYL: We knew that already.

BILL: And now?

CHERYL: Now what?

JAY: Now, I curse the day I was born.

ELI: Why, Jay?

JAY: We are being attacked, asshole, by Plagues and political enemies, lies and conspiracies. Anonymous creditors.

BILL We justify and we justify. Don't we, Eli?

ELI: We do, Bill.

ZACK: Wait till you really get old and sick and on your death bed. Then you can curse your fucking head off, Jay.

CHERYL: Fuck you.

JAY: I'm not an idiot. I wouldn't lock kids up in cages. I wouldn't steal anyone's money or covet my neighbor's wife.

CHERYL: You might, Jay.

JAY: I don't think so.

CHERYL: Or destroy the illegitimate Government.

BILL: Is that right?.

JAY: Right.

ELI: What about God?

CHERYL: What about him?

JAY: I searched for God, but I couldn't find Him.

ELI: Where'd you look?

JAY: I prayed. I banged my head against the wall. I walked through a glass door.

CHERYL: A glass door?

JAY: We had a glass door to the pool, remember? I took off my clothes and walked into the door. I was preoccupied. I was thinking about the word, "God." I thought I would swim in the pool or something, and feel the water.

CHERYL: Jay!

JAY: That's when I shaved my head.

BILL: The man 's a lunatic!

ZACK: He 's looking in a swimming pool? For God? He's looking into a swimming pool for God?

CHERYL: He was going for a swim and he walked into the door.

ELI: No, he was imagining things. That's what he does. He imagines.

ZACK: Why are you saying that, Bill?

BILL: Imagination! Imagination! You get that? You wouldn't understand, Zack.

ZACK: Take it easy, Bill.

BILL: I am taking it easy. I'm talking about imagination, looking into yourself. Dreaming things. It's too much. You don't get that?

ELI: Do you look inside yourself, Jay?

JAY: What does that mean? "Inside yourself." There's nothing there. There's nothing left. I don't know if anything was ever there. A vibe, maybe. An electrical murmur.

ZACK: Ain't that the truth?

CHERYL: No!

ELI: What do you know about the poor suckers who don't – or used to – own diamond mines and casinos, eh? Diamond mines in Canada! Diamond mines in Botswana! Gems the size of softballs!

BILL: They had a good nose!

ZACK: Tall and good-looking, with golden fingers!

JAY: That wasn't me.

ELI: And a nose for diamonds the size of footballs!

CHERYL: You got the wrong guy, fellas.

JAY: No more. Nothing's left. All gone. Nothing in the ground but dirt.

CHERYL: He always tried to help, in his Ego-ridden way, help the gamblers and the cons. People like you.

ELI: But you didn't want to know their pain, did you, Jay? You didn't want to know the details, the ins and outs, the put-downs, the provocations.

BILL: He'll die a punk, like all the other punks.

CHERYL: You are useless old men. You have forgotten your roots. What does my father expect from you?

BILL: I'll try, fellas. Stay quiet a minute, Miss. You need to find your own proper roots, Missus.

CHERYL: Try five thousand years of civilized thought, asshole, and then we'll talk about roots.

ZACK: What about your roots, honey?

CHERYL: Don't call me, "honey."

BILL: And lets avoid the TV show.

ZACK: You mean Celebrities firing people, or Roots?

BILL: Roots.

JAY: What's behind all this?

BILL: Because you didn't do something right, Jay, because you think you're something else, because you believed, you believed in the money flow and the politics and the social good of the rich.

ELI: That's good, Bill.

JAY: That 's bullshit, Bill.

BILL: And Data circling the Earth like underwear.

ZACK: We are here to tell you that it ain't necessarily so, Jay.

ELI: Right. It's a question of attitude.



ZACK: They are burning your houses down and knocking out your juice, and punishing your power, and shutting down your access, and demolishing your properties. There. The People. The Assassins. How's that, Eli?

ELI: That was good, Zack. Data, data, and more data. We're being swamped as a nation.

ZACK: The Earth itself is clothed in data!

ELI: Good one, Zack! Underwear!

BILL: And soon the purple bruises of sarcoma may come to your body, Jay, to your soft skin, and make your insides cry like a baby.

CHERYL: Why do you say things like that, Bill?

ELI: Not good, Bill.

BILL: I'm sorry. Forget it.

JAY: What data? I don't gather data.

CHERYL: We talk to family and friends and do business. That's it. Call my father, Jay. Call him.

JAY: I called him, Cheryl.

CHERYL: Try again.

JAY: He's not picking up.

ELI: Why'd you butt in, Missus?

CHERYL: Don't you tell me not to butt in! Fuck you and my father who sent you! What was he thinking?

ELI: I knew this was a mistake.

BILL: It was your idea, Eli.

ELI: It was Harry's idea, Bill.

ZACK: He thinks this fella ought to own up and change his attitude, and things 'll go right for him again. And that you, Missus, should come back to your own.

CHERYL: Tell him to go fuck himself.

ELI: So keep a lid on it, Missus.

CHERYL: Fuck you, too.

ELI: We have a lot to offer.

CHERYL: Like what?

BILL: A clean bill.

ZACK: A fresh start.

ELI: A new beginning.

JAY: I think you guys are full of shit, basically.

ELI: We figured. The feeling is mutual.

JAY: I don't know what your father was thinking, Cheryl.

CHERYL: I don't think *he* knew what he was thinking, Jay.

ELI: The idea is to clear the deck, turn things around.

ZACK: Change your negative attitude.

BILL: As was said: First we'll say a few things, and then it'll be your turn. I'll start. I used to be in real estate. Before that I was in the Army. Quartermaster Corps. So you have like access to goods and services. I was in Germany. I was turning over barrels of hash packed up in drums from Turkey. *Dumbecks*. I made a nice little nest egg. So what do you think I did?

JAY: I give up. What did you do?

ZACK: I come back to the city and I see that the manufacturing base is drying up. All these lofts downtown are closing their doors. Empty. Sitting there. I needed a place to live. I'm thinking, "Why not fix up one of these lofts?" Cheap, do-able. Right here in Manhattan. I bought a place on Jefferson Street and then I bought the building. Pretty soon I had twenty, thirty lofts and I was a millionaire. I bought and sold. Some I fixed up, some I sold raw. So what did I do wrong? Don't ask me, I'll tell you. The market saturated. Next thing I know, I lost my girlfriend, who was an artist. Rosalind. Roz. I liked to hang around with artists. At least they have something to live for, occupy their time. I got too friendly with too many people. There were scams going on, some under the table shit, some bad bookkeeping, like you know, the cash dwindled, but I stayed out of jail, I avoided the slammer. This is a capitalist

country and you can make deals, transactions, but you can't get caught with the funny stuff. Am I right? Free to make deals.

BILL: Right, Zack. Free to make deals. But stay away from the cannabis and the coke and all the other junk.

CHERYL: Jay's not like you. He's not a crook, not a dope dealer.

ZACK: Don't you want to hear the moral of the story?

CHERYL: Not particularly.

ZACK: Then Harry comes along with his Evangelical pitch. Now I live in my one loft, the original, on Jefferson street. I keep it nice. And for a living, I do interior decoration. And for my duty, I do an Alderman, though I'm not sure what an Alderman is. I humbled myself.

BILL: He hangs around the place of Worship, and sweeps the floor once in a while. Dusts the benches and the pews.

ZACK: Your turn, Bill.

CHERYL: Oh, no.

ZACK: Shut up.

BILL: I'm a believer. A mark. I believe all kinds of shit. I'd buy the Brooklyn Bridge. **(Show the Brooklyn Bridge.)** Credulous. Gullible. I'd buy the Empire State Building. **(Show the Empire State Building.)** I'm more of a mark than you are, Jay. I'm one of those guys. The mark of all Marks. Who would want to be with one of us? Only Cheryl here.

CHERYL: No way, Mister. Not my cup of tea.

JAY: I'm not a mark. Cheryl? *(No answer)*

BILL: Excuse me. One day I was told I would be saved from myself. An Indian from India who sold incense and little statues. I gave him thousands of dollars so the gods would bend over from the tall sky and come to my aid. Poverty is bad enough, but you couple that with naïve stupidity, and you have a problem.

CHERYL: Bend over?

BILL: You know, come out of the clouds and pay attention to my needs. These little plastic gods shining in the sky. Bending over. I went into shock. Little shiny plastic gods bending over in the sky. Suddenly I saw the light and fell to the ground and

prayed my ass off to the one true God. I make it to Mass every morning and when it's over, I'm the last to leave. Thank you. Eli?

ELI: I'm a drug addict and an alcoholic. I've been to meetings up the kazoo. I been to a thousand meetings. I've been to every kind of meeting known to man. It's the best thing in America. You've all heard the stories. It's uncommon for the Jews. Usually we don't go in for that stuff. We study and work hard and keep an eye out for attacks and watch the money. One day my girlfriend, who was a blonde Gentile, walks in with the works in her pocketbook. "Come on, Eli, give it a try," she says, it'll make you feel good." Next thing you know, I'm buying heroin all over the city. Brooklyn, Harlem, the Lower East Side. Three times I was almost murdered, one of them in broad daylight with crowds of citizens strolling by in a hurry. Puerto Ricans, mainly, on East Fourth Street. One of 'em had a butcher's knife the size of a baseball bat. You'd think I would have learned something by then. Well, I did. I learned to stay off the street, and trust no one. And I bought those political banquet tickets from the Police Benevolent League. You too, Jay, you did that, too. And you stayed in your tower.

JAY: But I trusted my people. My partner, Berkowitz. My main man, Michael. My Daughter, Rosa. My wife. I didn't like to go out. My wife can tell you. She used to go out all the time. But the human race is unreliable. You never know what will happen. And then it all happened. Shunned and battered and the electricity turned off and the water supply and the air conditioning, so we live in one room now. I think I brought it all on myself.

ZACK: Well, that's something.

JAY: By fearing it.

ELI: I didn't finish. May I finish? So I went to rehab, and there I rehabilitated, and gave up the drugs and the booze and the self-abuse I was used to, for the most part, and bowed my head and, I should say, I *dahvened*, after many years, once again I *dahvened*. I found a tiny *shul* in Queens and I *dahvened* every *shabbus* and every holiday.

CHERYL: You didn't, Jay.

JAY: I didn't what? *Dahven*?

CHERYL: No, not that -- you didn't bring this disaster on by fearing it.

BILL: You missed the point, which is about attitude..

CHERYL: How'd you shmucks ever get elected to Congress?

ELI: Ask your father.

CHERYL: I did ask him.

ELI: What'd he say?

CHERYL: Money talks, shit walks.

ZACK: She got that right.

BILL: What's a little dishonor if you want to keep your scene going, pay your protection, get your strokes, keep your job?

ZACK: We let the guy off. The big Kahuna. The Dictator. No big deal.

BILL: Nobody gives a shit.

CHERYL: I do!

ZACK: Talk to your father. He did the same as us. Protected the motherfucker in power because the Man had twitter material on us all. Of course, his time will come, his shit will hit the fan. Meanwhile, you want the economy to be good, to run like an oiled machine, that's what we all want. Bread on the table, money in the bank. Pensions! 401 K's! Eli?

ELI: That the Plague should disappear into the crevices of the Earth! A nice Jewish funeral when the time comes! People saying good things about you! Fond memories of good 'ol Eli.

CHERYL: Listen -- it's all so stupid and so randomly stupid, you don't know what might happen next. There might not be any more room for a nice little grave, Eli. They're using earth to put out the fires. They're loading plastics into the ocean. They're burning down the forests. Things are going to heat up fast. The seas are rising. The air is poisoned: it's too late now.

ELI: And they're coming after the Jews again.

ZACK: So come on home, Babe.

CHERYL: I am home, asshole.

ELI: And you, Jay?

JAY: I'm done.

ZACK: People bring things on themselves, is my opinion, as was said. They bring disaster on themselves.

CHERYL: Not true. You're a double idiot. You're a triple idiot.

ZACK: I think you should apologize for that.

CHERYL: No.

ELI: Who was it, said you have to look inside to find God?

ZACK: That was you, Eli.

ELI: Right. Nothing good can come from emptiness or ignorance. Good can only come from the fear of God. That's the point of our stories, but apparently nobody got it. *Selah*.

ZACK: Very Jewish, Eli. I'm so impressed.

BILL: I do think it was the Devil, myself. *Satan*.

CHERYL: Oh, fuck off.

ZACK: You see what I'm talking about with that comment?

CHERYL: No. Fuck off again.

ELI: Excuse me. What are we talking about then when we use those words? "God" and the "Devil."

ZACK: The Creator of the Universe, who lives outside Time. And Satan, his Grand Opponent.

CHERYL: I think this meeting is over.

JAY: Take a hike, Gentlemen.

ZACK: I resent that.

ELI: I'm offended, as well. Bill?

BILL: I don't feel good about it.

JAY: Time 's up.

ELI: No, it aint. Never up.

CHERYL: We have no idea why everything was taken from us, none at all. And neither do you. You don't have a clue. You're a crew of gangsters and hypocrites. Scared politicians with lame excuses, love of money, and bad outcomes. So fuck you all. And regards to Harry.

ZACK: Things work the way they work, and that's the way they work, and that's it.

BILL: Brilliant.

ZACK: Bad things happen, Ma'am.

ELI: Your father sent us on a mission, and we obliged.

CHERYL: What do you want now?

ELI: A proper statement from your husband might do it.

ZACK: And a re-conversion from you.

CHERYL: Not happening. I believe in nothing.

ELI: Jay?

JAY: Okay. I'll tell a story.

ELI: Go.

*JAY: When I was a teenager, I worked in the Catskills. It was a bungalow colony. Old people, Jewish. Survivors. All they wanted was to sing and dance and have a good time and fall in love, if they could possibly do it. And they kept to the Jewish ways. The synagogue and the sex jokes and the cards, the dancing and singing. It was very confusing to me, as a fifteen-year-old. They treated me as though I was sunshine itself. A blessing. I was young and unstained by horror. And yet I was saddened by their aging, their arguing, and their uncanny willfulness, and their sorrowful silences. (Pause)*

CHERYL: Say something more, Jay.

*JAY. As a boy, I did everything well. I was loved and admired by all. In school, I shined, though I never studied much. The girls always liked me, young and old. I was the best athlete and played all the sports. I won many athletic awards and got my name on a plaque. I won a championship. Scholarships to colleges and universities. My favorite thing was to go exploring in the woods, alone. There, I felt spirited and whole. Then, when the time came, I moved back to the city. It was time to make my fortune. I lived on the Lower East Side. I lived a solitary, prudent life. The bathtub was in the kitchen. I'm afraid I had an attitude in those days. I'm afraid you could call it misanthropic. I*

*thought the species, especially the American version --- was stupid, biased, and violent. Helpless in the face of natural and unnatural, man-made forces, blind to reality, hell-bent on their selfish ways.*

CHERYL: You forget the claustrophobia, Jay. The terror you feel in isolation. Everything comes from childhood. The violence and the noise. Trapped. Out the window he went, and wandered the streets. What did you do out there, Jay?

JAY: I don't remember.

CHERYL: He walks into glass doors. He forgets what time it is. He 's lost contact with his daughter. *He was intelligent and good-looking as a boy, and so he got a free pass through high school, the American Way. Then, as a man, he braided his path through the obstacles of the world successfully, trying not to leave a trace.* Enough said.

ELI: Is that all we need, Gentlemen?

ZACK: It's enough for me, Eli.

BILL: Not me. Jay? *(Pause)*

JAY: *Certainly forgiveness is an issue. Especially for my mother, though she begged, on the street, without shame. I'm not sure about the shame. There must have been pain there, inside. She fought hard, and lost. Picking through the garbage...American Society peering at her through their saftety-pin eyes.*

ZACK: Bill?

BILL: Done. *(They stand)* Oh, one more thing, Eli

ELI: Go ahead, Bill.

BILL: We understand that you have a bunch of Russians hanging around the joint. I'll say 'hello' if you want.

CHERYL: No, thanks. They're anti-Semites. All of 'em.

JAY: Sonsofbitches.

BILL: I mean -- we'll take care of it, Missus *(They go.)*

CHERYL: Thank you.

15.



CHERYL: It's a black hole, Jay.

JAY: You can leave, Cheryl. Anytime.

CHERYL: We're on the event horizon.

JAY: Go to your father.

CHERYL: God eats everything on the event horizon. Maybe God is a black hole, or a million black holes, eating everything and spewing it out again? Pure energy. Fire. Like the fire in the Sun. What happens before anything happens?

JAY: I don't know.

CHERYL: I thought you spoke well there, with those messengers from Hell.

JAY: Thank you.

CHERYL: Things could be pre-recorded -- **(A pause, then ROSA appears quietly on the back wall screen.)**

*ROSA: I am in the North. Everything is white and blue. There are cracking noises from the ice and the sounds of birds and whales and bears and other creatures. It sounds as though they are weeping. Rather, this Northern part of the planet is weeping through its creatures. There is a constant, mournful, elegaic music, punctuated by the ice fractures and icebergs crashing into each other, or falling into the sea. It is light much of the night. In the day, the light, shining off the blue and white, is almost blinding. The Sun is bearing down on us, almost with anger, like a Father with its children. I live with a small band of indigenous people, an extended family really, but the oldest, those who could not move any longer on their own, are left to die. They sing their death songs and die quietly. I am allowed to travel on with them because I'm young and can pull my weight, and they are fascinated by my white skin, which is now a dark red from the sun and wind. We move from ice floe to ice floe, hunting for food. We sleep standing or sitting up because we're moving constantly on the currents and blown about by the wind. Speaking of the native people I am with, their mood is solemn and mostly silent, resigned. They keep moving and say little. Some murmur once in a while what sounds like prayers. I cannot understand their language. Don't worry about me. This is how I plan to die, away from this corrupted world. You should know that I'm not worried about you, my parents. You are both intelligent and have each other and can rely on each other, much as I rely on those I am traveling with now. Much Love to you both. Rosa. (A pause. The image fades.)*

CHERYL: Then how did she get up North, Jay?

JAY: The Russian.

CHERYL: Everyone is gone now.

JAY: I don't know what to do. I still can't find God. He is nowhere I can feel or touch. And Fate? Is it a wave, a force, like gravity?, or an emanation? A vibe? Electrical? What is it?

CHERYL: Why should the Universe give a shit if a speck of dust like you loses his perogatives? *(Pause)* I don't know what to do, or who to blame. And at the same time, they're eating up the goodness of the Earth. Human Beings. So, we're left with nothing, really. Except maybe the thirty-six, in your tradition, wherever they are, the Thirty-Six Just Men, holding things up. ***(Show a praying Hasid.)*** Maybe they haven't been paid lately, and quit.

JAY: No joke, Cheryl.

CHERYL: Anyway, you've had a full life, Jay.

JAY: I have.

CHERYL: Show some gratitude.

JAY: How?

CHERYL: Help others.

JAY: I have nothing to help them with.

CHERYL: Yourself.

JAY: Are you thinking of leaving me?

CHERYL: You said you wanted to be alone.

JAY: I changed my mind.

CHERYL: What happens when we die?

JAY: You didn't answer me.

CHERYL: The evangelical Christians think we rapture up to heaven.

JAY: What do you think? ***(Image of a young ciouple embracing.)***

CHERYL: I don't think so. And they have this thing about sex. That human sexual yearning, impossible to assuage, is wrong. And then it's taken away and you feel pointless, unless there's an intellectual life, a life of the mind, and some kind of

service, an emotional bond with something. And then you die and who knows what happens then? Probably it's an astrophysical/chemical proposition...Were you listening?

JAY: Yes. Well spoken. I might as well be dead.

CHERYL: No, Jay.

JAY: What do we do? I'm afraid.

CHERYL: Why?

JAY: They hate us for all time, the Gentiles. It's in the air we breathe, in the soil.

CHERYL: Do you believe in the Spirit World?

JAY: I think so.

CHERYL: That's what Rosa was about. The Spirit World is just behind this one, or above it. And God and the Devil are there, playing dice. Who prospers, who fails, who lives, who dies. God and the Devil, betting on one's Fate. In the Spirit World. Now, we have to decide what to do, how we're going to bear this situation. Our luck's run out. God took the Devil's bet, so to speak, and won. And here we are. I've definitely gone too far in the way of adornment.

JAY: Not too far.

CHERYL: Way too far. The whole culture is nuts that way.

JAY: The Devil won't win. God will win.

CHERYL: There you go!

JAY: My heart is pounding.

CHERYL: Mine, too. I've been thinking, Jay.

JAY: I know you have.

CHERYL: That you need to be alone. Whatever happens. I say that because there has to be some point to the absolute stripping you of everything you own and everything you love. Of everything but me. Are you sad?

JAY: Yes, I'm sad.

CHERYL: Still, we have to live.

JAY: I want to say, What for?

CHERYL: All those people who survived the *Shoah*, it was a real question for them: What's the point? Mankind is shit. An insect. Many suicides. And others who said, "Thank God, I'm alive, I'll take it. And I'll be grateful." Like the ones in the Colony in the Catskills where you worked once. Attitude. You go into the synagogue and bow, or you stay home and grieve, but you stay, you go on. You preserve life."

16.

JAY: *Cheryl. She'd given up sailing, of course, long ago. And she's followed her faith, as well. A piece of it. The **lovingkindness** of the Jews. She'll fight. She'll perservere, if she can. Up North. In the Arctic. Looking for Rosa in the swirling snow and melting ice. What we had, Cheryl and I, was very rare. People look for it their whole lives and never find it. An attraction, a compatability, an electricity. Now, I let it go. I have no choice. Here I am, alone. A sentimental feeling of solidarity with my Jewish tribe. One more thing, the Head, it works like the Sattelites in the sky. Random data. Elephants linked trunk to tail. So, I sit. I have plenty of time. Four walls, a dome ceiling, and a floor. There's a picture in the back, behind me, showing an **Italian painting, a landscape**. Very rich. Full of meaning and beauty. Looks like there's only a wall there, but you can see it, if you look hard. Like a window. Yes. Now, listen intently and you can hear the endless and noisy bullshit crowding in from the outside world. The debauchery of the species. You can hear it through the walls. Above us, the air is turning yellow. Above that, machines collide and rain down metallic parts. Dust. Mechanical junk. Into our oceans, which are acidic. But Nature is indifferent. The Earth will grow a new skin, new creatures will appear. Everything is dying, so what part can I play, even if I wanted to go on? People are the same: make a buck, beat your neighbor. Now I choose Solitude. My days will end in Solitude and Repentance. I can't go out into the air and breathe. Soon there won't be enough oxygen. It doesn't take much. One per cent. A half percent. Now I have to go inside myself. Like the three messengers said. I look. There's something there. A pulse. Movement of blood. A vibration on my skin. A heartbeat. Breath.*

**The End**

**Murray Mednick**  
**Draft: 9/25/20**

