

Live theatre is the last outpost of pure artistic expression. Music, film and the visual arts can be duplicated to the masses but theatre is immediate, human-to-human and when the curtain comes down you've been touched, changed forever. Be diligent in keeping the uniqueness of the stage alive. The distance between the front row and the foot lights grows wider with each generation.

When we no longer recognize our surroundings we are:

'FURTHER THAN WE'VE EVER BEEN'

A new play in two acts

By Jim Reyland

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A BRIEF SYNOPSIS

On the day Jerry's dreams finally came true, he died.

THE CAST

Jerry - Early twenties ages through early fifties with pepper gray hair and a slight tick.

Friend - Part narrator, part advisor; some good and some bad; he has no name; only advice, insight and judgments.

Doctor - Part advisor, part friend; he is good and bad and acts interested but uninterested in Jerry.

The Floating Actors

An ensemble group of three men and two women who range in age from twenty to fifty and play various parts; The Reporter, Joy, The Leader, Mathew, Psychic, Psychic Too, Postal clerk, The Boss, Miss Harris, Interviewer, Woman, The Man, A Girl, Lyle, Sweetie, Barney, Mary, and AA group.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE:

A single spotlight shines on a dark stage.

AT RISING:

FRIEND enters and steps into the spotlight.

FRIEND

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to our journey of discovery. Along the way some of you will laugh, some will cry but all of you will travel further than you've ever been. There will be one fifteen-minute intermission to give you a chance to ponder your universe or to sneak away gracefully. Before we get started I do have one brief announcement; you're all going to die.

The spot goes dark.

Please, who in here didn't already know that?

The spot returns to a random woman.

I'm sorry madam but the rumors are true.

The spot goes back to FRIEND.

Perhaps not today or next week but much sooner than you realize. I know what you're thinking, you've lived a full and wonderful life and you're ready to go? Bullshit, you're not built that way, the go lightly way. There's always one more thing to do, one more place to go. Raise your hands those of you that when the time comes wouldn't try to buy extra minutes with your American Express card? But you will "go gently into that good night." You will succumb to the perpetual bombardment of relentless free radicals that soak into your beings like coffee into donuts, causing you to crumble like so much gravel to the bottom of the well. You will weaken until you can no longer think; no longer make choices and then, choices will be made for you. And after you're gone, some of you will be remembered distantly, some fleetingly, some in passing; others, depending on your press agents will linger in recurring commercials, historical documents and stamps. You'd think they could come up with something that's not so emotional. But I'm afraid death is the best we can do right now. Are there any questions?

FRIEND points to random people who are not even asking questions.

FRIEND

Can you slow down the Grimm Reaper with low fat yogurt? No. Can you run in place and spandex your way to a few extra dances? I don't think so. Do life choices bring you closer to your destiny or keep you from it? Good question! I don't know. Does that free will we hear so much about delay or speed the life to death process? Does it matter how you live or is life one large long crap. The reality is that the Pope could walk out of here tonight and get hit by a bus. There are a million things that could kill you between here and the lobby; let's recap.

A chalkboard descends. FRIENDS' writing appears as if projected.

Number one: we all gotta go.

Number two: nothing we can do about it.

Number three: Bus one, Pope nothing.

My name is . . .

"FRIEND" appears on the chalkboard.

I could be yours. I could be the person's next to you. I could be yours and not his; I could be hers and not yours. I could be your best friend or your worst nightmare. Friends are funny that way.

A young JERRY appears through a now transparent chalkboard.

Take Jerry, I could be his friend if he weren't such a putz. All his life he'll insists on moving past familiar markers, comfort zones, further and further away from his center; into the warm deep, dark forest; with bolder and grander steps; persisting, experiencing life's exhilarating rush; earthy passions mounting around him like a massive tide. Look at him, two liter's of potential; talents, so much talent, promise, so much promise, Jerry my boy.

The chalkboard ascends; JERRY is up on his toes over a crowd as FRIEND enters.

What's all the fuss?

JERRY

I'm waiting to find out.

FRIEND

Think it's worth it?

JERRY

If you could find out today what's going to happen tomorrow, wouldn't you wait for that?

FRIEND

Information is power.

JERRY

Damn right, that's why I'm waiting to see a Psychic.

The crowd opens to reveal a Psychic.

FRIEND

There's no such thing.

JERRY

There better be, she charges twenty bucks.

JERRY turns back to FRIEND.

Are you sure?

FRIEND

Nothing is sure.

JERRY turns back to the Psychic.

JERRY

Can you see my future?

PSYCHIC ONE

Absolutely, and I see fame, riches and a beautiful woman in your future. You'll be very successful, the best, guaranteed.

JERRY

Did you hear that? It's guaranteed.

PSYCHIC ONE

Don't worry about a thing.

(Pause)

Wait, I see something else, something very unpleasant. Oh this is bad.

JERRY

Shit! I knew it. What is it?

PSYCHIC ONE

I'm sorry; it's really bad.

JERRY

Well if a train is going to run me over I'll just stay away from trains.

PSYCHIC ONE

No, it's worse than that. I better not tell you. It may not happen and I don't want you to worry. Sorry.

The PSYCHIC fades behind the crowd.

FRIEND

Bitch!

JERRY

What does she think I'm going to do now? Now I'm going to worry about everything! Oh that thing that just happened was bad but was it the really bad thing? I don't know, she wouldn't tell me!

FRIEND

That's fucked up man!

JERRY

Now I've got all these terrible possibilities rolling around in my head.

FRIEND

And if you discount the good, you could throw out the bad.

JERRY

But!

FRIEND

If you choose to believe that good things will happen to you, then you must believe the shit is coming.

JERRY

The shit is coming! From now on I live in fear of success and pray for failure.

FRIEND

Paralyzed by the inevitable...

JERRY

What should I do?

FRIEND

Nothing, it's already decided.

JERRY

Jesus.

FRIEND

Could be, but I don't think so.

JERRY steps into the crowd and emerges holding a test paper over his head.

JERRY

This, my friends is an A plus. Take a good look; some of you will never see anything like it.

A GUY

How do you get grades like that when you never study?

JERRY

Some of us have it, some of us don't.

A GUY

He's talking about the answers.

JERRY

Yes, I'm talking about opportunity.

JERRY has a package and cash exchange with a passing student.

I never regret an impulse. Someday, that'll make me rich.

The crowd moves revealing a young girl.

JOY

I don't care about your money. I care about you.

JERRY

(Surprised)

You do? I'm not a narcissist but I may be a God.

Group exits JERRY and JOY are alone.

JOY

I'm Joy but you can call me opportunity, tonight, right here, right now. I'm young and impressionable. You're older and wiser and obviously I'm taken with you. It wouldn't take much to bed me if that's that you want.

JERRY

I never regret an impulse.

JERRY reaches for JOY.

JOY

What if I'm your one true and everlasting love? Will you step lightly or will your dick decide?

JERRY

I turned nineteen yesterday, what do you think?

JOY

Then come on and tip me.

JERRY and JOY exit arm in arm.

You should know I have crippling self-esteem issues but I won't cling. Not that you're worried about that right now. Of course you might after I leave sixty messages at your dorm room switchboard. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you dear. Do you use condoms?

JERRY

No. I'm not sure this is worth it?

JOY

Oh don't worry; it's bigger than both of us.

JERRY

You should know I'm shipping out tomorrow.

JOY

To sail the world with all it's wonders?

JERRY

No, I'm going to the Math Olympics in Jefferson City.

JOY

I'll miss you.

JOY disappears as FRIEND steps in.

JERRY

Wait, when will I see you again? Yeah, like I care.

FRIEND

She's a pretty girl.

JERRY

I could do her; you heard what she said.

FRIEND

Life is relatively short; you should do as much as you can.

JOY pops up in spotlight.

JERRY

I like her; her eyes are the right distance apart, her nose in proportion to her face. Her breasts are the same size.

FRIEND

All her parts are the right size and in the right place.

JERRY

Where else would they be?

FRIEND

Symmetrical equals fertile; it's your biological mandate to mate and procreate.

JERRY gets revved up and FRIEND holds JERRY back by his shirt collar.

JERRY

What I really want is see her naked.

JOY disappears again.

FRIEND

Easy killer; there's more going on here than your appreciation of fine design; soon you'll be fearful only of what you might not experience and be completely duped by what could happen to you.

JERRY

Push or be pushed.

FRIEND

Manage or be managed.

JERRY kisses and struggles with **JOY**,
FRIEND, embarrassed exits.

JERRY

Come on baby, why do you think they call this a love seat?

JOY

Oh then you do love me?

JERRY

Well not in the traditional sense.

JOY

Really, in what sense then?

JERRY

I love your smell and you look good; I want to touch you!

JOY

Oh me too, that's why I'm pregnant with your baby.

JERRY

Jerry.

JOY

I'm pregnant with your baby, Jerry. Isn't that great?

JERRY

No. Hey wait a minute!

JERRY pushes **JOY** and jumps up.

Not so fast you. What the hello is happening here? I followed the script; I found my dad's Playboys, I caught the older boys jerking off behind the garage, I fended off old man crazy crotch. I had my first hooker when I was eighteen. By the time I'm twenty I'm literally vibrating from sexual overload. What do you want from me? I grew up with cable!

FRIEND

It has certain poetry.

JERRY

What am I going to do with a baby? I'm broke. I'll have to quit school and get some shitty job. My life is ruined.

(To **JOY**)

Aren't you upset?

JOY

It's the most wonderful day of my life.

JOY fades, JERRY stares into a spotlight.

FRIEND

Poor Jerry, he possesses the most fundamental of all glares, the universal stare the pissed-off gaze; it's visible here in the furrowed brow, the dipping chin, the maniacal smirk that says to anyone in range that I will kill you if you notice my pain. It's a hurt that runs so deep so basic to the human male, that it exists purely to feed upon itself, to perpetuate the mystique that men are men and women are purely necessary. Are men born this way, or do they become this way?

The blackboard drops in front of JERRY.

Ladies and gentleman, the top ten reasons men are hurting.

- #10 Daily Wank-a-thons
- #9 Road Rage
- #8 Dismemberment movies
- #7 Premature removal from Mommy's tit
- #6 Golf
- #5 Porno overload
- #4 Too much protein
- #3 Roadrunner cartoons
- #2 A job that sucks
- #1 A wife that doesn't

The blackboard rises, exposing JERRY who seems uncomfortable, squirming.

FRIEND

What is it my son?

JERRY

I have an itch.

FRIEND

Well I think we've established that.

JERRY

I have an itch in the middle of my back.

FRIEND

Sorry, would you like for me to?

JERRY

No way.

FRIEND

I thought we were buddies buddy?

JERRY

That's OK.

FRIEND

So you're alone in a crowd, hundreds of people waiting to cross the street and suddenly it's there, an itch worse than head trauma, you wouldn't ask a total stranger to scratch your back?

JERRY

I have to go; I'm starting my new job today.

FRIEND

You look sharp.

JERRY

They're going to love me.

FRIEND

You didn't answer my question.

JERRY

Oh all right, go ahead.

FRIEND scratches JERRY'S back.

Homo!

Lights come up on THE BOSS and homely MISS HARRIS. THE BOSS scratches MISS HARRIS'S back. JERRY enters watches.

MISS HARRIS

You have such big hands Boss; ooh my, you know what that means? Lower.

THE BOSS

Miss Harris, try and control yourself. I won't allow these kinds of reckless escapades on my watch.

THE BOSS stops and turns to JERRY.

Who are you?

JERRY walks in front of MISS HARRIS.

JERRY

I'm Jerry, the new errand boy.

THE BOSS

You don't look like a boy to me?

MISS HARRIS

Fresh meat...

JERRY

No not anymore sir, I have a wife and a child now.

MISS HARRIS

I like the way he walks. Turn around.

THE BOSS

I run a tight ship Jerry; zero tolerance for hanky panky.

JERRY

You won't be sorry sir.

MISS HARRIS

Is that a rocket in your pocket?

JERRY

I know I'm starting at the bottom but I have ideas and I think you'll see...

MISS HARRIS

Want to go around the world with me?

THE BOSS

"And it is further our intention to prove a plausible link between Miss Harris's explicit behavior and the harm attributed to your actions of October 20th."

MISS HARRIS types what he said. THE BOSS hands JERRY a large volume.

JERRY

I'm not afraid to take on new and provocative challenges...

THE BOSS

Then here, read this.

JERRY

What is it?

THE BOSS

It's company policy on sexual harassment.

MISS HARRIS

Going somewhere?

JERRY

Excuse me.

MISS HARRIS

Because I can see everything you're packing.

JERRY

I enjoy meeting new people and I welcome new experiences.

THE BOSS

This is serious business Jerry. I don't want any Internet stripping, no chat rooms or pedalyte activities of any kind, right Miss Harris?

MISS HARRIS

Sweetmeat...

THE BOSS

And no matter how much you may tingle, I want you to keep your hands off Miss Harris. You're an impressionable young buck and she's a stone cold hammer responsible for taking down more than one promising career.

JERRY

Really; so this is the corporate world?

THE BOSS

This is the real world Bucky. Many a newbie has come in here thinking they could tame the tiger.

MISS HARRIS

Look at that ass, where'd you get that ass?

THE BOSS

"And furthermore, we will contemplate legal action or other additional retribution of an unimaginable consequence should your reprehensible behavior continue."

MISS HARRIS types what he said.

THE BOSS

Miss Harris has a stalker.

JERRY

Look, I want to poke the pirate just as much as the next guy but this is crazy.

MISS HARRIS

Hey rook, need anything dick-tatted?

JERRY

You know, I'm really uncomfortable with this right now.

MISS HARRIS

I'm hot for you too baby.

JERRY

I'm not sure what's in this book but this kind of thing goes both ways.

MISS HARRIS

Grrrrr... Roarrrrr...

JERRY

(Fed-up)

Yeah, well under all that Kmart shit you're wearing I bet you have a pretty nice rack.

THE BOSS runs and sounds the air horn.

THE BOSS

Clear the hallway shows over, nothing happening here.

JERRY

What the hell was that?

THE BOSS

That was our sexual harassment alarm, everybody back to work nothing to see here. I'm disappointed in you Jerry. If you had taken the time to read the manual you'd know that the only thing that goes both ways around here is Miss Harris.

JERRY

I guess I'm fired then?

THE BOSS

What do you think Miss Harris?

MISS HARRIS

I'm done with him.

MISS HARRIS finishes typing; THE BOSS puts in an envelope handing to JERRY.

THE BOSS

You almost got lucky kid. "And in closing, in ad nauseam, like I said, signed me." See ya on the way down Jerry.

Lights down on THE BOSS and MISS HARRIS, JERRY stands alone.

JERRY

When you're young, the reason they make you strong and pretty is so you can fight and fuck. The oldies, they don't have it anymore, they want yours and they don't care how many different ways they have to screw you to get it.

A postal window appears a line forms. FRIEND enters and falls in at the end.

POSTAL CLERK

Next in line please.

A Cell phones rings; the whole line goes for their cell phones. DOCTOR takes his call very loudly.

DOCTOR

Hello. Yeah. I don't think so; I'm not going to a homeless shelter on a lousy Tuesday! I want a high profile day, Easter Sunday or Christmas Eve, and I want a picture in the newspaper with me and a homeless guy; make it a homeless kid, some kind of minority, got to go!

The DOCTOR dials out.

Jack. I'm telling you those guys at Random House in New York were pissing out their hundred story windows. Well I didn't send it to them; this girl I know, Nancy, did. The girl I'm seeing; the one with the amazing ass. She knew a guy up there that knows about this stuff, publishing. I'm a damn physician I don't know about this stuff.

DOCTOR

But I do know one thing; they thought it was compelling shit. I was his doctor for Christ sake. I diagnosed his lung cancer and I helped him through all his treatments and held his hand; I spoke to the press. I wrote down everything he was going through; everything he was feeling before he died. Hell, it's all there in my journal. Every word in detail; the kind of shit nobody knows; but what I need to know is do I have any exposure on this thing? Could his family come after me? Does client patient apply to a dead celebrity? He was big! Really Big! Look it up and call me back. I want know what my legal exposure is if I publish what I know. Write this down, its 303-9871, that's my private cell phone number. I'm out with Nancy later, reach me at that number. Read it back to me. No, 303-9871! You'll call me later? OK.

DOCTOR hangs up. JERRY, down the line from the DOCTOR dials a number. The DOCTOR'S phone rings, he answers it.

DOCTOR

Hello.

JERRY

Hello.

DOCTOR

This is the Doctor.

JERRY

I've got some information for you.

DOCTOR

How did you get this number? This is my private cell number.

JERRY

That's not important. What's important is that you get this information.

DOCTOR

Now you listen to me; I'm a very important doctor.

JERRY

I'm busy too and I took the time to call you didn't I?

DOCTOR

I use this cell phone to save lives.

JERRY

This is really important shit.

DOCTOR

You've got five seconds, what is it?

JERRY

It's your turn.

The DOCTOR looks up and the line moves ahead of him so he goes to the back where JERRY is standing.

Hey Doc...

DOCTOR

Hello there Jerry, how ya feeling?

JERRY

OK I guess; when I'm unconscious. Say, I ran out of those little green pills you gave me.

DOCTOR

Then it must be time for the little red ones. Come by my office, I've got something to show you.

JERRY

Is it really bad?

DOCTOR

No. Just a little lab hiccup, nothing to worry about; you don't look good.

JERRY

I'm not sleeping or eating anything green except for those pills.

DOCTOR

How's the new job?

JERRY

I got fired.

DOCTOR

Way to go.

JERRY

There was a secretary there that wanted me bad.

DOCTOR

Congratulations. How's your sister?

JERRY

Nancy? She's just fine, but you already knew that.

DOCTOR

See you around Jerry.

DOCTOR fades, lights up on FRIEND.

FRIEND

Is he a friend of yours?

JERRY

He dates my sister.

FRIEND

Really, that's an interesting angel.

JERRY

He's my real friend he takes care of me.

(Pause)

Are you judging me? I just got sexually abused on stage! I have a lot of pressure, a wife and a son and that really bad thing hanging over my head.

JERRY lights up a smoke.

What do you care; you're not my mother.

FRIEND

Those are bad for you.

JERRY

What isn't? I started smoking these after dinner, now I smoke while I eat. Swallow and exhale, chew and inhale, fucking insidious these things.

FRIEND

Never regret an impulse; isn't that your motto?

JERRY

Your condescension hurts friend.

FRIEND

I'm not here to hurt you, or to help you.

JERRY

Then why are you here?

FRIEND

Think of me as the Switzerland of cosmic beatitudes.

JERRY

I'm self-destructive, I have an addictive personality. It's what I live with, there's nothing I can do about it.

FRIEND

Then try addicting yourself to something nice.

JERRY

It doesn't work like that and you know it!

FRIEND

Why does the political party with the destructive agenda always seem more focused than the good guys?

JERRY

Yeah, why is that?

FRIEND

They have this knack for tapping into human weakness with their sack full of delicious moral decay.

JERRY

The dark sides, the mischievous sprite, the devil, as it were?

FRIEND

Don't be a child.

JERRY

You know him? Wow, what's he like?

FRIEND

I'm sure you've seen the pictures.

JERRY

I mean the real at home Lucifer? Not the one on TV, the kicked back Satan?

FRIEND

If you ask him he'd say he was misunderstood.

JERRY

I'll tell you one thing; he is one defiant party dude man. He and I have gotten into some shit.

FRIEND

(Amused)

There was this one time a few million years from now him and me got into some six dimensional sin surfing on the delirious plain. It was crazy! It got so intense that it killed me.

JERRY

Pretty funny huh?

FRIEND

No it actually killed me. I'm lying there eight ways dead and he's just standing over me laughing.

JERRY

He killed you?

FRIEND

Oh yeah, he blind-sided me with an enormous slut.

JERRY

Wow. Did he say he was sorry?

FRIEND

You don't know him very well.

JERRY

I feel like I'm getting to know him better everyday. Hey, if he killed you, then why are you still here?

FRIEND

I've been reassigned.

JERRY

Reassigned, to which side?

FRIEND

It's weird, when bad had me by the throat down on the delirious plain I knew that good was around but he didn't help me until I asked him, but by then it was too late. Look, I know this sounds whacked but it was almost like they were working together.

JERRY

Like good cop bad cop?

FRIEND

Like if good somehow got lost we would find it right? And if there were no evil, we would invent it.

JERRY

I think I would.

FRIEND

They're so different we can't see one without the other, but they're so close together that sometimes you can't tell them apart, but until you do you can't figure it out see, and by then it might be too late? It's weird.

JERRY

I'd keep that to myself if I were you. Sister Mogen David will kick your ass!

JERRY pulls a bottle. MILLER appears with a wrapped package. FRIEND exits.

All I know is it's a lot easier to take a drink than to say a prayer.

JOY

I got this for you.

JERRY

Why?

JOY

It's your birthday.

JERRY

Right, I've been celebrating.

JERRY un-wraps and opens a book.

JERRY

Thanks, he's good. I mean I connect with him, usually.

JOY

You can read it to me.

JERRY

My mother used to get really drunk on my birthday. She said it was her right with all the pain I put her through. Anyway, thank you for remembering.

JOY

That's what wives are supposed to do silly. Matthew drew a picture for you. It's there, inside.

JERRY finds the picture.

JERRY

Look at that.

JOY

It's you. It's what he thinks you look like.

JERRY

He's got his mother's talent for making faces. I'm just saying.

(Pause)

Joy you know I'm trying right, for you and the boy? I've just lost my way lately, that's all.

JOY

I know. Let me get you some ice.

JERRY

I had two liter's of potential; talent, so much talent, promise, so much promise.

JOY

Some ice will make you feel better.

JERRY

I don't want any ice! I want to feel like I'm worth something, instead of like everything I have is being taken away from me.

JOY

I'd never take anything from you.

JERRY

Of course you wouldn't.

JOY

What did the Doctor say?

JERRY

That I'm wasting my time killing myself; funny fucking doctor.

JOY

Yes dear.

JERRY

The police officer said that only porno actresses actually like having their butts grabbed by a total stranger.

JOY

I know dear.

JERRY

And that judge said I have boundary issues. The rest of the worlds weighing in on my shit, what do you have to say?

JOY

I have no complaints. I know this is bad timing, on your birthday and all but...

JERRY

Just say it mouse.

JOY

It's about your Uncle Max.

JERRY

A hell of a thing that thing that happened...

JOY

A terrible thing...

JERRY

I love my Uncle Max! Who doesn't love Uncle Max?

JOY

Well, Aunt Francis and two out their three children...

JERRY

He's a golden scepter at Beaver Lodge #413; raised more money for sick camp kids than anyone. Why can't I be more like him?

JOY

Well, because he's dead... your Uncle Max died on Saturday.

JERRY

What? Saturday, what's today?

JOY

It's Tuesday.

JERRY

It can't be Tuesday already, it was just Tuesday.

JOY

I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner but I was praying for him. He's better off dead, don't you think?

JERRY

Better off dead?

JOY

You're upset. I'll put extra gravy on your bacon, that'll make you feel better.

JERRY

I can't eat if Uncle Max can't eat! All he did was go into the hospital to have heart surgery, like he didn't have a big enough heart already.

JOY

They said that the intensive care nurse had to pee.

JERRY

And while she's in the can, my uncle has what they call a catastrophic incident! The respirator comes apart and spews oxygen into the room instead of my uncle. It's catastrophic all right; it's an incident by God! Uncle Max was Mother Teresa with a beer belly, holding his breath for six minutes!

JOY

I'm so sorry.

JERRY

So he spends the last days of his life looking through a dirty window at loved ones he can't communicate with. He was on track for heaven's head table, he should have watched his favorite team win, shot a 68 at Doral and then die peacefully in his sleep.

JOY

You mean break a hundred don't you dear?

JERRY

Why would a man who loved those that no one else would come to such an uneven end?

JOY

Because life isn't fair, but you already knew that.

The lights on JOY fade.

JERRY

When you're still young by European standards, but the hell raisers are getting younger, the pain comes faster and the people who towered over your life are dying, relax, set your sights a little lower and have another drink.

**JERRY takes a swig and tries to sober up.
INTERVIEWER enters, pigs' squeal.**

I really appreciate you giving me this interview.

INTERVIEWER

So, I see you have an inconsistent work history?

JERRY

I've been finding it hard to concentrate lately.

INTERVIEWER

Well I trust since you're here today, you've come to some understanding of your opportunities as a human being and your limitations as a man?

JERRY

I'm working on that?

INTERVIEWER

So, how long have you wanted to be an Oscar Meyer wiener?

JERRY

Ever since I was a kid, you guys with that singing hotdog.

INTERVIEWER

That's cute, thank you but this position is at our meat packing plant, our slaughterhouse. We kill animals there.

JERRY

Will I get to wear a white coat?

INTERVIEWER

We'll start you off with one.

JERRY

My Uncle Max would have liked that; he wanted me to be a doctor.

(Pause)

So how do you do it? How do you kill Wilber and Babe and the three little pigs?

INTERVIEWER

Jerry, may I call you Jerry? Are you now or have you ever been an agent for the SPCA?

JERRY

No way, I'm a Republican.

INTERVIEWER

That's cute. Thank you. Now before we get to the drug test, tell me why a semi-educated young man such as yourself wants to kill pigs for a living?

JERRY

I figure a pig's as good as a cow, better than a chicken.

(Pause)

No kidding, tell me about what goes on up there?

INTERVIEWER

Where?

JERRY

There, at your slaughterhouse? It sounds bad.

INTERVIEWER

You're not giving up again are you?

JERRY

No.

FRIEND

It says here that when faced with difficult realities you cower, retreat and self medicate. Is that true?

JERRY

Hey, who doesn't do that huh?

FRIEND

That you've done nothing to claim your life as your own...

JERRY

Who said that?

INTERVIEWER

Someone who refers to himself as your friend...

JERRY

That's not true. I'm not sure he is my friend. He doesn't have all the facts.

INTERVIEWER

Obviously...

JERRY

Mister, your pigs know they're going to die but at least they have the dignity to go out squealing. Me, I take comfort in the comforts at hand, things that are taking me slowly, before I know it and without a lot of noise. But what you might be surprised to know is that I haven't always been this way; life can be brutal.

The INTERVIEWER refers to a flip chart.

INTERVIEWER

When terminating Wilber we must first render him insensible with a stun gun.

JERRY

Does it hurt?

INTERVIEWER

No. We're not sure, a little.

INTERVIEWER

Then we hang him by his hind legs on a processing line while his main artery is cut, his blood drains out slowly onto the floor and after a while, he dies. The skin is removed and the carcass is cut, the parts are separated. The remaining scraps bone and residues are remanufactured.

JERRY

Does anyone feel bad for him?

INTERVIEWER

No. Why do you?

JERRY

Maybe...

INTERVIEWER

Where do you live?

JERRY

In my mother's house, she's dead.

INTERVIEWER

No job, no ambition, smells like week old piss. Jerry, pigs live in a pen, wallowing in slop, covered in stink.

JERRY

You haven't seen my wife's housekeeping.

INTERVIEWER

Pigs are food for the decision making, freethinking masses in control of our own destiny. Is that you?

JERRY

It used to be. I need a drink.

INTERVIEWER

You seem like a bright young man. Well pigs are smart too but nobody's teaching them anything. They have no decisions to make, no responsibilities. They lie around and do nothing but feed their instincts and then they die. Sound familiar?

JERRY

I'm working on that?

INTERVIEWER

Pigs are chops and chitlins and really soft gloves, unlucky enough to be born on the wrong side of the pen. I shouldn't feel sorry for them; I feel sorry for you.

JERRY

Well don't! I know I don't look like much, but I'm a fighter.

INTERVIEWER

Of course you are.

JERRY

I'll show you, I'll show everybody.

INTERVIEWER

Of course you will.

JERRY takes a swig. The INTERVIEWER hands JERRY a t-shirt and exits. FRIEND enters on a cell phone.

JERRY

Do I get to drive that Wiener Mobile?

FRIEND

These guys spend their whole lives abusing themselves and still end up with the win. Yeah, like the sixty-nine Mets. If you don't mind me asking sir, what's so special about this one? He's kind of a dick.

(Listens)

Yeah I'll tell him.

JERRY finally gets the t-shirt on it reads "Your hell is our home." JERRY relaxes to a classical CD, steps up to a workbench and begins tinkering.

I have a message for you.

JERRY

Speak, Gabriel.

FRIEND

What are you doing?

JERRY

That's a question.

FRIEND

Well, someone very big wants you to know...

JERRY

I'm working on a new invention.

FRIEND

They want you to know.

JERRY

Turn that up, it's my favorite part.

FRIEND

That you're the most important person in the universe and no matter how long it takes, no matter how late it gets, they'll be waiting up for you. So come on home.

JERRY

Cool. Which one said that?

FRIEND

They both did.

JERRY

Check it out, it's a battery powered with bong water. I have a double A version too.

FRIEND

I didn't know you did that; invented things?

JERRY

I thought you knew everything?

FRIEND

That's a common misconception.

JERRY

I've been tinkering with chemicals since I was a kid. Nobody wants to give me a break so I'm making my own.

FRIEND

Bravo, you might invent the next Velcro, sell it to Wal*Mart.

JERRY

Do you think Wal*Mart would want a bong water battery?

FRIEND

No. But they might be interested in that T-shirt.

JERRY

Thanks; I got it from this guy who took it off a homeless man.

FRIEND

That's nice, two more for hell.

JERRY

Right, what kind of volume you guys doing down there these days?
(Ignored)

My wife is a religious fanatic; she says I'm going to hell because I don't believe like her but I believe there are so many different religious fanatics; we're all going to hell.

FRIEND

How long have you been married?

JERRY

Too long, I'm getting bored and when I get bored I start thinking about cheating on my wife.

FRIEND

Would you like to hear the statistics on that?

JERRY

I think about what I'd do if I actually caught one you know?

FRIEND

What if you got caught?

JERRY

I don't think about that. Besides, if I'm careful, she won't find out.

FRIEND

Maybe she won't find out because good is protecting the loving faithful mother of your son, the totally innocent spouse who you've chosen to blemish because you can't control your pud?

JERRY

She's an enabler. She enables me man.

FRIEND

Then maybe dark is looking after your roaming monster, the master of your loins; the enchanted rouge you've chosen to satisfy because you won't control your pud? Maybe it has nothing to do with being careful, she'll find out or she won't because that's the way they want it.

WOMAN performs the story.**FRIEND**

It could be a letter comes in the mail. The address is correct but it's to someone the wife doesn't recognize, she puts it back in the mailbox and goes back to her soap. A few days later while she's making a BLT, the same letter is delivered again. The regular carrier must be on vacation and again she puts it back in the mail. A few days later, it doesn't really matter what she's doing, it comes back a third time, maybe there's a postal strike and the Army's filling in. She takes a long look at the envelope; curiosity gets the best of her.

JERRY

Opening someone else's mail is sweeter before than after.

FRIEND

The letter is from a fancy hotel in New York City thanking the recipient for staying there. They hoped they'd had a pleasant stay and should he and Mrs. Recipient return to the big apple; please use the enclosed drink coupon at the bar for a discount. She wishes she could go to New York City. She's never been there. The wife takes a long look at the recipient's name. Frank. Frank is her husband's middle name, Conner; Conner is her maiden name, Frank Conner, surely not.

JERRY

How stupid can a guy get? Now he's on a list.

FRIEND

And it's a very long list, hard to get off of... Would you like to hear the statistics on that?

JERRY

The problem is if you've got a dick you view all women as potential conquest, as a receptacle for your perpetual pain? Fat ones, skinny ones; tightly wound bitches that would just as soon cut off your balls as look at you. The fact is you pretty much want to gawk bang them all?

FRIEND

Gawk bang?

JERRY

Careful, that's copyrighted. I'm at the grocery store right, checking out the local talent and a disturbing thought occurs to me. What if while I was standing there, minding my own business gawk banging some chick?

The same woman appears. JERRY'S terrified.

WOMAN

She actually stopped and returned fire?

JERRY

Me? No, I was just noticing, wondering.

WOMAN

I saw you looking at me!

JERRY

Thinking, if you had a third tit how exotic that might be.

WOMAN

OK let's go! I'm hot for you too baby. Right now, right here in produce. I know what you want. I've been checking you out too you mid-forties, balding, married guy! With your piss stained boxers and your geek ass shirt. Let's do it! Let's fuck right here on the check out counter!

The woman fades. JERRY covers his privates and is visibly shaken.

FRIEND

Relax, relish in your vulnerability.

JERRY

How can I relax? How can I relish? It makes me do things. Things I don't want to do. I swear to God, sometimes I look down there and I just wish it were gone.

FRIEND

Intimacy is a powerful gift, shared by consenting adults in a committed relationship.

JERRY

You don't have one do you?

FRIEND covers his face with newspaper.

I didn't think so.

Lights up on A GIRL, A GUY and MATT,
FRIEND sneaks off, as JERRY remains.

A GUY

Hey Matt, how did your Dad die?

MATT

He drugged himself to death in the basement of our house.

A GUY

Wow that sucks, too bad he wasn't famous.

A GIRL

Hey Matt, how did your Dad die?

MATT

He drank himself to death in the basement of our house.

A GIRL

Wow that sucks, but that Academy Award he won for best-
animated short was way cool.

MATT

Thanks; this year on the awards show he'll be on that dead
people film.

A GIRL

Famous people off them selves all the time; I wish my dad
was famous.

A GUY

Yeah, people like self-destructive celebrities.

A GIRL

But anonymous death by self-indulgence, that's just sad.

MATT exits. A GIRL and A GUY are now LYLE
and SWEETIE, the DOCTOR enters.

DOCTOR

Hello there Jerry, how you feeling?

JERRY

I'm slowly disappearing inside this mansion of despair I've
built around myself.

DOCTOR

Dammit Jerry I'm a Doctor, not a realtor.

(Pause)

So what happened, Priests get ya?

JERRY

No.

DOCTOR

A Rabbi, camp councilor, the mailman...

JERRY

It's just life, undiagnosed depression; I could blame my parents but that would take too long.

LYLE

Here it comes Sweetie, the boy's gonna blame us for all his problems.

SWEETIE

Lord knows we did the best we could Lyle.

JERRY

You, you don't get to talk! In case you're too pickled to remember you're dead. You were the worst parents ever! God!

SWEETIE

How was we to know your male babysitter was on that watch list?

JERRY

When I wouldn't go to bed, he set me on fire.

LYLE

I couldn't see everything going on because I was drunk.

SWEETIE

That was a long time ago; get over it.

JERRY

I don't think I will.

SWEETIE

Its luck of the draw boy; some people get born fat.

LYLE

You must have some warm feelings boy; for your old man and your old momma?

JERRY

I like music.

LYLE

You see there.

JERRY

I say quiet prayers, I don't know who hears them but I say em.

LYLE

You see how you are?

JERRY

I guess I'm not a complete monster.

SWEETIE

We did the best we could son. It's what you do with that that makes you a man.

LYLE

I taught you how to fight boy, so fight.

The lights go down on SWEETIE and LYLE.

JERRY

Mom, Dad, don't go. The best you could. That's what I'm doing. It's not all they're fault. I've made some bad decisions.

DOCTOR

And they'll catch up with you. Maybe not today but soon, soon you'll succumb to the perpetual bombardment of relentless free radicals that soak into your being like coffee into donuts, causing you to crumble like so much gravel to the bottom of a deep, dark well.

JERRY

Enough with the damn well! I have to fix my shitty life before something really bad happens to me.

DOCTOR

Jerry, you have cancer.

JERRY

But you said the really bad shit might still be coming?

DOCTOR

With some cancers we don't talk in terms of fatal so much anymore. That's if you don't kill yourself first...

JERRY

That's my guarantee?

DOCTOR

Try treating your body like a gift, not a toilet flushed with sewage and thrills.

JERRY

I want a guarantee I won't die before I stop killing myself.

DOCTOR

We're all going to die.

JERRY

I want a guarantee I won't die from cancer.

DOCTOR

There are no guarantees. Ask your Uncle Max.

JERRY

I'm out there trying and nothing is working and then for some reason I try again and when that sucks I take a drink to forget about trying for the third time.

DOCTOR

But you do.

JERRY

Yeah I do, until I can't.

DOCTOR

Then you die.

(Pause)

Life could guarantee you a million blessings Jerry, but if you can't see them they'll never exist.

Lights go down on the DOCTOR. JOY appears with her hand on MATT'S shoulder.

JOY

I have some exciting news.

JERRY

Did Wal*Mart call?

JOY

Mathew is graduating from high school.

JERRY

Who the hell is Mathew?

JOY

Your son Mathew...

JERRY

My son is not Mathew his name is Matt! Mathew is for gay shop teachers. My son's name is Matt!

JOY

Matt is going to college.

JERRY

The hell he is! I don't have money for college.

JOY

He has a scholarship; he leaves for Harvard in the morning.

JERRY

So he is.

(To Matt)

I'm sorry I haven't been around very much.

MATT

You haven't been around at all.

JERRY

A father's first job is to protect his children from things their tender hearts can't deal with.

MATT

What makes you think it's so tender anymore?

JERRY

I didn't want you to turn out like your weak old man.

MATT

You're not weak dad; you're sick, and everyone you've allowed in is either too afraid or doesn't care enough to help you.

JERRY

Don't talk about your mother that way.

MATT

It starts with you; but you can't do it by yourself.

JERRY

Some things you can't avoid.

MATT

Like death?

JERRY

Like fate.

MATT

I'll help you dad.

JERRY

Of course you will.

JERRY pulls an old crumpled picture.

And another thing, this picture doesn't look anything like me.

MATT

That was a long time ago; get over it.

JOY

Some people never get it, no matter how much you do for them. All they talk about is their addiction, depression, their anti social behavior and never once say thank you. Let's say a prayer for daddy.

Lights down on MATT and JOY, THE MAN enters with cardboard panels. A plastic bucket says Tips for Tips. JERRY enters.

THE MAN

How about a dollar or a dime for the cause?

JERRY

I don't give money to whack jobs who think they're God.

THE MAN

Beware, your sins have marked you in deadly ways; they are maladies of your heart, your soul.

JERRY

Are you trying to scare me into giving you money?

THE MAN holds up a cardboard panel.

THE MAN

Pride, for I watched Satan fall as lightning from Heaven.

JERRY

Give me that!

THE MAN

Covetousness, for Judas did betray the son of man with a kiss? John said to Herod it is not lawful for thee to have her. Lust!

JERRY

Look pal, you're starting to piss me off!

THE MAN

Anger! Saul did not look on David with a good eye from that day forward. Gluttony! Dives feasted everyday but he gave not to Lazarus.

JERRY

Get away from me.

THE MAN

Envy! Cain rose up against his brother Able. As the bridegroom was long in coming, they all became drowsy and slept. Sloth!

JERRY

I'm out!

THE MAN

Alright but beware, your end is near.

JERRY

Who told you that?

THE MAN

Show me the love?

JERRY

Forget it.

THE MAN

(Writing)

The mighty dragon will destroy those who oppose him and abandon to misery all that embrace him. Death is your only reward; death is your only peace.

JERRY

What does that mean?

THE MAN

They're all around us.

JERRY

Did you escape from somewhere?

THE MAN

I did, from the oppression of good and the destruction of evil.

JERRY

So you're both delusional and profitable?

THE MAN

Most of the time but not today...Resolve that in the new millennium black will be white and sugar is salt. Dogs like cats and Republicans Democrats.

JERRY walks away then turns back.

Ever catch those Match Game reruns on TV Land? That Brett Summers is a fucking riot!

JERRY

You have cable?

THE MAN

Basic...

JERRY

Where?

THE MAN

Under the bridge, where else...

JERRY

OK, so you're wired up and have better than average penmanship; you're wasting your life out here with your crackpot views and cardboard beliefs.

THE MAN

And you're not, with your philatelic ideals and cotton candy morals? Come on, be a giver?

JERRY

I'll give you some advice. If you don't freeze you'll starve. If you don't shoot yourself, somebody will do it for you. You're going to die, right here, alone.

THE MAN

Irony fills the air like last years Easter eggs.

JERRY

Save yourself before it's too late.

THE MAN

What did you say?

JERRY

I said, save yourself!

THE MAN

Yes, save myself! Wow! You did it Jerry!

JERRY

How did you know my name?

THE MAN

I feel just like Willie Wonka! Did you care about me?

JERRY

Maybe...

THE MAN

I think you did. Just for a second there. Do you know how many points that is?

JERRY

Wait a minute, there are points; how many points do you need?

THE MAN

A lot, empathy is a monster human quality man.

JERRY

How many points do I have?

THE MAN

Not so many. But I love you man. Tell you what, let's celebrate, I'm going to share all my riches with you.

THE MAN pulls out tattered papers.

JERRY

You don't have to do that.

THE MAN

But I want too. Check it out. Barrister Callistus Adama; the attorney of the former president of Liberia has a box with thirty point eight million dollars he'll share with us and all you have to do is pretend to be a dead guy. And during the course of his duty, Bruno Micar discovered grossly over invoiced payments in Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, thirty-seven million! Or we could call a Lithuanian Prince who happens to have a shit load of money but no friends. What do you think?

JERRY

You have email?

THE MAN

An hour a day at the library...the word is powerful man.

THE MAN puts panels into JERRY'S hands.

Temperance, for he used this world as if he used it not...

JERRY

Get that away from me!

THE MAN

Fortitude, Stephen full of Grace and Fortitude did great wonders.

JERRY

You think you know me, you don't know me.

THE MAN

Justice, your unjust wages cry out against you.

JERRY

Do you know what it was like to be raised by monsters? I never had a chance.

THE MAN

Hope, for we are saved by hope.

JERRY

Fuck you and your hope. I'll kill you myself!

JERRY leaps on top of THE MAN and begins choking him to the ground.

THE MAN

Faith, I have prayed for thee that thy faith not fail.

JERRY

And guess what? Philatelic refers to stamp collecting asshole!

THE MAN

Prudence, watch ye therefore for you know not the day or the hour.

JERRY stops choking for a moment.

JERRY

What did you say?

THE MAN

He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is Charity.

THE MAN holds out his hand as if to ask for money one more time, JERRY continues choking him.

You make your choices; you become who you are. You can't go back and choose again, just like you can't change who you are.

LIGHTS

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE:

Four years later.

AT RISING:

Classical music plays in the background. JERRY sits in a chair with another empty chair next to him. A spotlight hits the empty chair. JERRY runs his hand through the light. The light goes away; he looks for it behind and under the chair and the light comes back. After a moment he switches chairs so that he is sitting in the light. This makes him warm and happy as he basks in it. The light goes away briefly and he hangs his head. When the light comes back he's pleased again. After a short while sitting in the light the heat makes him uncomfortable and he perspires. JERRY takes his handkerchief and wipes his brow. After a few seconds of discomfort he moves back to the chair without the light. He gets cold again and hangs his head.

JOY

I have your dinner tray dear, should I bring it down?

A rougher looking and more hyper JERRY stands up as the lights come up to reveal his basement hideaway.

JERRY

No, leave it there; I'm working on a secret, secret.

JOY

I'll just stay up here then.

JERRY pours white powder into a nasal sprayer, adds water, and takes a sniff.

JERRY

Did my disability, social security and unemployment checks come?

JOY

Check, check and triple check. Oh and honey, you got another letter from Wal*Mart.

A paper airplane floats down. JERRY puts it into a two-foot stack.

JERRY

They turned down "turbo hair," highly pressurized actual eatable human hair you spray right on your bald spot? Shit!

A box is thrown down the stairs.

How many times do I have to tell you, deliveries to the back door!

JOY

Jesus loves you.

JERRY

When everyone you know is doing better than you are, you start to wonder if you haven't gotten it by now, you might not get it at all. There's still time, relax, take another bong hit.

(Pause)

I thought you'd never get here.

**JERRY opens the package feverishly.
JERRY pulls out a plastic party doll
and starts to unfold it.**

A lonely existence, a man and his basement; sometimes it feels like it's closing in on me, every wheezing, coughing, painful morning with its puking and dizzy bouts of panic and paranoia. I should get out more.

JERRY blows up the doll as FRIEND enters.

FRIEND

Isn't she supposed to be blowing you?

JERRY

What? You think I'm going to have sex with this? She's helping me perfect my new invention, I call it disappearing girl friend, for when that one-night-stand goes wrong.

FRIEND picks up a book from the table.

FRIEND

Good luck with that. What are you reading?

JERRY

That was a birthday present from Joy, years ago...

FRIEND

The collected poems of Dylan Thomas; no wonder it's so dark in here.

JERRY

I've always liked poetry. It's beautiful and kind, it's honest. Everything I'm not.

FRIEND

It's tormented and confused, it's clever. Everything you are.

JERRY takes the book from FRIEND opens it to a book-marked page and reads.

JERRY

"Do not go gentle into that good night, old age should burn and rave at close of day; rage, rage against the dying of the light".

FRIEND

(From memory)

"Though wise men at their end know dark is right, because their words had forked no lightning they do not go gentle into that good night".

JERRY

"Good men, the last wave by, cry how bright their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay, rage, rage against the dying of the light"? Dylan Thomas, now he was clever.

FRIEND

And tormented, and confused.

JERRY

I guess I connect with drunken Irishman.

FRIEND

He was a Welshman.

JERRY

Whatever...

FRIEND

A raging alcoholic drank himself to death.

JERRY

I connect with that.

FRIEND

He was humble, shy and insecure on the inside and neglectful, selfish, and egotistical on the outside, and like you, always and extremely charming.

JERRY

You knew Dylan Thomas?

FRIEND

No, neuroticpoets.com... What is this place?

JERRY

Don't you go to the movies? It's where all the bad shit happens, the basement.

FRIEND

Didn't you get four months house arrest for choking that homeless mystic?

JERRY

You mean Gandhi with a Sharpe?

FRIEND

That was four years ago, why are you still down here?

JERRY

I like it. Nobody bothers me; food comes to the top of the stairs, deliveries to the back door. Pretty sweet huh?

FRIEND

There are no clocks. It's like a casino.

FRIEND peeps through a telescope.

JERRY

I got satellite on my TV. I watch whatever I want for as long as I want, whenever I want. I can close the shades and make it totally dark.

FRIEND

Is that a man or a woman?

JERRY

It's nice when you discover a neighbor's hidden talents? Over here I got my own private head with seven day deodorant cakes. Hey, you want a drink? I got a fully stocked bar.

FRIEND

No thanks I'm driving.

JERRY

A friend of mine taught me how to put blow in a nasal sprayer, add water and get high anytime. I love this shit. If God made anything better he saved it for himself.

FRIEND

Red Pepper dust... He made Red Pepper dust. Never mind, it won't even be around for like another five hundred years.

JERRY

Why did you mention it then?

FRIEND

Just forget about it.

JERRY

Don't be a Bogart. What's Red Pepper dust?

FRIEND

Common household pepper; in the future it's genetically altered into a red neon powder.

JERRY

And?

FRIEND

And it becomes this amazing little mood-altering drug that stimulates total euphoria then shuts down the entire central nervous system.

JERRY

It sounds intense.

FRIEND

It's perfect for that wind down after a hard day.

JERRY

Are there any side effects?

FRIEND

Not really, a prolonged vegetative state, bleeding from the eyes, pissing from the nose and if you happen to have a certain latent chromosome, it'll kill you in six seconds.

JERRY

Cool, got any?

FRIEND

I thought you were turning your life around?

JERRY

I am; I'm in rehab.

FRIEND

Rehab, where?

JERRY

Right here, it's Jerry's rehab. Who knows better how to fix me than me? I got my inventions going, I'm having one of those meetings and in my spare time I'm cutting back a little. Now what about that Red Pepper Dust?

FRIEND holds up a straw.

FRIEND

I have a trial size hit that came in my cereal box this morning. But five hundred years from now tolerances are much higher, morals looser; the average life span much shorter.

JERRY

Give it here.

JERRY grabs the straw.

Are you running out of time? Has chronic abuse claimed your edge? Do your dreams only happen while you're asleep? Would you like to fight but you're just too tired today. Relax join Jerry's rehab.

JERRY exits. DOCTOR enters.

FRIEND

A little birdie told me you were here.

DOCTOR

It's such a small town. And here we are in the same union.

FRIEND

A guy can't be out there by himself. A brother needs his brothers.

DOCTOR

And competitions have rules.

FRIEND

Don't worry about me.

DOCTOR

It's Jerry you should worry about; he's a mess.

FRIEND

And what are you doing about it?

DOCTOR

Who gave him the Red Pepper Dust?

FRIEND

I'm sorry but the guy's like Keith Richards.

(Pause)

So, which way is this one going?

DOCTOR

Either way, it won't be long now. What? If he's hell bent on an early exit what can I do?

FRIEND

It's that free will. It's not as easy as it used to be.

DOCTOR

Makes it harder to protect the weak, or corrupt the strong.

FRIEND

Stalin had it right. Next time we vote, I say we vote that free will shit right out. Are you with me?

DOCTOR

I'll have to let you know.

FRIEND

I'm just saying.

JERRY enters holding up an envelope.

JERRY

You know what this is?

DOCTOR

Hey there Jerry, how you feeling?

JERRY

Like shit, I got another rejection letter from Wal*Mart,
they don't think their customers need my fart neutralizer.

(To Friend)

I thought you said I had talent?

FRIEND

People spend their entire lives chasing their dreams.

JERRY

How do you two know each other?

FRIEND & DOCTOR

We're brothers.

JERRY

Nice, you have to go now; I'm having friends over.

FRIEND

You have friends?

JERRY

What's so funny about that?

FRIEND

I'd like to meet your friends.

JERRY

I bet you would.

DOCTOR

So would I.

JERRY

(Reluctantly)

OK, but don't drink the coffee and nobody speaks.

**Men and women enter single file all carrying
a chair. They sit in a semi-circle. THE
LEADER stands with JERRY.**

THE LEADER

Welcome everybody. I know this is a bit out of the ordinary but Jerry here has among his other issues not been out of the basement in several years. So tonight we thought we'd bring our meeting to him. Thank you all for coming, my name is Mark and I'm an addict.

The group responds "Hello Mark!"

JERRY

I forgot the chips.

JERRY exits.

THE LEADER

I hope you've all been working your steps? The topic of today's meeting is what we're feeling and how we feel about that. Mary, how about you starting us off?

DOCTOR

Mary, Mary, quite contrite, how does your Karma flow?

MARY

Good evening. My name is Mary and I'm an addict.

The group responds "Hello Mary!"

DOCTOR

And may I say you're looking fine tonight, Mary.

FRIEND

You're so predictable.

MARY

I feel so naked up here, so vulnerable, I must look terrible.

DOCTOR

No, you look good. Mary stays in shape so she can turn tricks while her husband's at work.

MARY

God knows I'm not perfect.

FRIEND & DOCTOR

Yes he does.

MARY

The truth is I miss being a drunk, but I'm happy to be clean.

DOCTOR

Ah now Mary...

FRIEND

She says she's clean but the truth is her afternoon rendezvous still support the alcoholism that is slowly ruining her life and driving her family away.

MARY

If you could see inside my heart, you'd know that it is filled with love for all men.

FRIEND & DOCTOR

Nope, too easy...

MARY

With your help I'm going to beat this thing.

DOCTOR

Mary secretly lusts after the college kid who cuts her grass. She's not reported a single cent of her hooker income to the IRS and her double fudge cookie recipe uses skim milk, isn't that right Mary?

MARY

I really appreciate you all.

FRIEND

Mary's parents killed themselves when she was ten. She raised her two siblings while living with an uncle who visited her bedroom every night.

DOCTOR

Do you reject Satan and all of his empty promises?

MARY

I'm sorry for being so human.

DOCTOR

Do you regret your past indiscretions and kneel before us, a repentant sinner?

FRIEND

Are you kidding me?

DOCTOR

What?

FRIEND

Shouldn't you be working the Vatican?

DOCTOR

Here, use my notes.

MARY

Does anyone have a Kleenex?

DOCTOR hands **JERRY** some 3X5 cards.
Lights down on the **DOCTOR**, **JERRY**
enters with a hand full of poker
chips and tries to comfort **MARY**.

JERRY

I do.

FRIEND

Go now and sin no more.

JERRY

Don't listen to him; he's a double agent.

THE LEADER

Jerry, are you OK?

JERRY

Yeah I'm good.

BARNEY stands and raises his hand.

BARNEY

My name is Barney and I'm an addict.

The group responds "Hello Barney!"

I've been sober for four months.

The group applauds. JERRY tries to keep FRIEND quiet. FRIEND reads from the DOCTOR'S cards and throws them away.

FRIEND

Liar...

BARNEY

But I feel like I'm still addicted.

FRIEND

You'll always be addicted; it's how you were made.

BARNEY

I've always been in charge of my life, now I feel like a follower instead of a leader.

FRIEND

Of course you're a follower Barney, because he's the leader. You can only have one leader unless you're a communist, are you a communist Barney because that group meets on Tuesday nights.

BARNEY

I look down at my hand and it's shaking for no reason. It's just trembling uncontrollably.

FRIEND

Barney is also sleeping with Mary and has been stealing money from his law firm to support his meth habit.

BARNEY

I've never felt so emotionally vulnerable. I was thinking I might try religion.

FRIEND

Here, wear this bull's eye.

BARNEY

Maybe I need to be saved?

FRIEND

Save yourself!

BARNEY sits down.

FRIEND

I have a question.

JERRY

No he doesn't.

FRIEND

Aren't we here in a spirit of love and trust with burdens made lighter by sharing? Well this guy won't let me talk.

FRIEND throws the cards in the air.

JERRY tries to get **FRIEND** to stop.

THE LEADER

I know this is your first meeting Jerry but perhaps you could leave yourself alone over there and tell the group how you feel.

FRIEND

Well done. It's clear to me why you are the leader sir.

JERRY

(To **FRIEND**)

They can't hear you, can they?

THE LEADER

Jerry, would you like to tell the group what's on your mind?

FRIEND

Don't do it, don't drink the cool-aid!

JERRY

I'd like to know how Mike feels.

FRIEND

There's nothing wrong with Mike, he's just here to meet girls.

JERRY

What about you Julie?

FRIEND

Julie is a single mom holding down two jobs. She's fights the urge to return to the life but she's remained clean for sixteen months, four days and seven hours.

THE LEADER

Jerry, is there something you want to say?

JERRY

Yes, my name is Jerry and I'm an addict.

The group responds "Hello Jerry!"

JERRY

These days everything that used to roll off my back gets caught in the crack of my ass.

(To Friend)

Go ahead; I know they can't hear you!

THE LEADER

We can hear you Jerry.

JERRY

Him! You can't hear him.

THE LEADER

It's all right; hallucination can sometimes be a side effect of withdrawal.

JERRY

I don't understand what's happened to me. I can barely move. I'm afraid to leave my basement, I'm afraid to live.

FRIEND

The stronger the dose the harder it hits the brain and the more addictive it is.

JERRY

I'm dealing with depression, anxiety, paranoia and diaper rash. When things don't go my way, I fall back on what makes me feel good instead of facing life head on.

THE LEADER

How does that make you feel?

JERRY

I don't know I can't feel anything anymore.

FRIEND

Even a neutered dog feels the heat.

THE LEADER

Thank you Jerry, we all have crosses we hope are made lighter by sharing. Thank you all for coming, see you next month.

As the group files out and FRIEND approaches the final girl in line.

FRIEND

Excuse me miss, can I ask you a question?

A GIRL

Sure.

FRIEND

What does this do for you?

FRIEND sprays his chest. The girl reacts violently, gagging and running.

A GIRL

Oh my God that smells like a rancid asparagus farts!

FRIEND

It's my friend Jerry's new invention, disappearing girlfriend.

JERRY takes the can from FRIEND.

A GIRL

Bye!

JERRY

Give me that!

FRIEND

I think you might have something there.

JERRY sprays FRIEND as he exits and notices someone left from the meeting.

JERRY

Hey pal, the party's over.

PSYCHIC TOO

(Effeminate)

I stayed because I have a strong feeling for you.

JERRY

Thanks, but I'm not into that.

PSYCHIC TOO

I'm Jerry.

JERRY

You're name is Jerry?

PSYCHIC TOO

That's right, what's yours? Wait a minute don't tell me. I should know this one. Oh my god, you're a Jerry too? Nice to meet you, I wonder if we're related. Wait a minute I got it, nope I'm afraid not.

JERRY

What's wrong with you?

PSYCHIC TOO

I'm a Psychic.

JERRY

Yeah OK, since when?

PSYCHIC TOO

Since the day I was born. It's a gift.

JERRY

It's a curse. How do I know you're a real Psychic?

PSYCHIC TOO

Look into my eyes, so sad. Feel my shoulders, strong from the weight of the world. Everyone else gets to walk around not a care in a bucket but me; I see when the shit is coming.

JERRY

Did you say when the shit was coming?

PSYCHIC TOO

Not yet.

JERRY

So Jerry, thirty years ago I went to see your mother or maybe it was your father. They tell me something really bad is going to happen but they won't tell me what it is.

PSYCHIC TOO

A clairvoyant with class, that is so rare.

JERRY

Since then all kinds of bad things have happened but when is the really bad one coming?

PSYCHIC TOO

Oh boy, this is a bit out of my area. Are you sure you don't want to know how many kids you're going to have or the winning lottery number? The pick four is three, six, nine, seven and ten . . . OK but I'm not making. Oh now that's interesting, I do see something and, oh that is bad.

JERRY

You can tell me.

PSYCHIC TOO

You're going to die.

JERRY

That's not it!

PSYCHIC TOO

OK wait I see something else it's; you're going to die, young; you'll die before you're done. No that's not it either, maybe it's you'll be young when you're done then you'll die? I'm sorry I can't make out adverbs very well.

JERRY

(Confused)

Before I'm done with what?

PSYCHIC TOO

How should I know? It could be your hopes and dreams it could be your Chia pet.

JERRY

This is crazy; I'm as stupid now as I was five minutes ago.

PSYCHIC TOO

The thing is they really don't want you to know this stuff.

JERRY

How much longer do I have?

PSYCHIC TOO

I'd buy my aspirin one at a time.

JERRY

Is that it?

PSYCHIC TOO

No. When it gets bad and you want to give up remember what daddy said. "Don't worry it's going to happen. It's a guarantee." I'll get it.

There's a knock at the door.

Come in! I'm sorry, I have to go; can you point me toward 1600 Pennsylvania Ave? The poor man was practically weeping on the phone.

MR. WAL and MS. MART enter clearly having issues with each other. PSYCHIC TOO pauses and shakes hands with them as he exits.

Oh, you two are going to be very successful with your business. Can you say soul-sucking monolith? Guaranteed!

MR.WAL AND MS.MART

Thank you.

PSYCHIC TOO

But your love monkey twist in twang, getting together and dipping that thang needs some work honey, tootles.

MR. WAL

Pardon the intrusion but we're looking for Jerry.

JERRY

Yeah well if you're here about the cat; I didn't know it would explode.

MS. MART

Obviously he lives here, look at this place.

MR.WAL

Are you Jerry, the inventor?

JERRY

Who wants to know?

MR. WAL

I'm thrilled to meet you sir. I've come a long way with something very important to talk to you about.

MS. MART

We'd have been here sooner if somebody'd ask for directions.

MR. WAL

My name is Mr. Wal. And this is my...

MS. MART

I am Ms. Mart.

MR. WAL

That's right Jerry.

JERRY

Wal*Mart, holy shit I don't believe it!

MR. WAL

Jerry I'm sure you could tell by my many letters that I've been quite unimpressed with your work up until now, but this new invention, Disappearing Wife, it has my attention.

JERRY

It's Disappearing Girlfriend.

MR. WAL

Yes, but has it been tested on wives?

JERRY

No. But what the hell, all we'd have to do is make it smell like laundry.

MR. WAL

Brilliant! I like it so much I'm reconsidering your earlier inventions.

MS. MART

Imagine a whole section at Wal*Mart with stuff by "Jerry".

MR. WAL

We'll back it up with television, radio and billboards across the country all with your picture on it.

JERRY

Imagine that.

MS. MART

This is a personal services contract allowing us to sell all of your inventions exclusively at Wal*Mart.

JERRY

Sounds good to me...

MR. WAL

Excuse me do you have a restroom?

MS. MART

Hold it! Sign this and you'll be rich and famous beyond your wildest imagination.

JERRY

Imagine that.

JERRY signs.

MS. MART

Congratulations Jerry. We'll be in touch.

MR. WAL

I'm looking forward to receiving my sample of Disappearing Wife Jerry. Overnight if possible.

JERRY

Thank you Mr. Wal, Ms. Mart.

MR. WAL & MS. MART

Please, just call us Wal*Mart.

MS. MART

Come on Stanley I'm driving, you drive like a proctologist.

MR. WAL

Yes dear.

MR. WAL and MS. MART exit...

JERRY

Do you know who they were? Wal*Mart, they want my inventions.

The lights come up on the DOCTOR.

DOCTOR

Congratulations; but we should talk about your lab results.

JERRY

Who cares about lab results! You know as well as I do Doc, they have secret science hidden in caves to cure rich people of anything. How much money do I need?

DOCTOR

Let's see, you've got HIV and hepatitis B and C.

JERRY

Yeah? How did that happen?

DOCTOR

Sex addiction, IV drug use. You look malnourished.

JERRY

I've been drinking most of my meals lately.

DOCTOR

Your immune system is poisoned. Your liver has cirrhosis, pervasive scarring so it's stopped filtering out toxins; you've lost IQ points, co-ordination and you're jaundiced.

JERRY

I thought that was the yellow pills.

DOCTOR

No. The alcohol has destroyed your liver; it's stopped making proteins that make your blood clot so you could bleed to death. Your Pancreas no longer has any insulin-producing cells, you could develop diabetes, pancreatitis.

JERRY

My stomach is killing me.

DOCTOR

This time you really did it Jerry, congratulation.

JERRY

What about the cancer?

DOCTOR

Ah, don't worry about it.

The DOCTOR smiles and fades, JERRY, agitated, gathers exercise equipment and begins to work out vigorously. FRIEND appears eating an apple.

JERRY

When you're old and ugly and you don't want to fight or fuck anymore; when all you want to do is stay alive, regret becomes a priority. You think about what you could buy if you just had back all the money you wasted. You wake at three in the morning just to worry about not waking up at all.

FRIEND

Relax; watch Oprah.

JERRY

Where have you been?

FRIEND

I figured I'd watch you go round and around for a while.

JERRY

I knew it; we're all just rusted metal marching men, trudging along an elastic track so the God of the Israelites can pick us off one by one like so many targets in his heavenly arcade.

FRIEND

God of the Israelites, I love you man.

JERRY

Do you? I thought you were out to boil me.

FRIEND

I'd never boil you Jerry, not in my job description.

JERRY

Doc says I'm dying. How could you let that happen?

FRIEND

Why don't you ask him?

JERRY

Wal*Mart finally calls and now I'm dying?

FRIEND

Your anger is misplaced.

JERRY

I have to save my life. It's starting to get interesting.

FRIEND

How do you plan to do that?

JERRY

Exercise and nutrition! If I have a bad decision left to make it's just because I haven't thought of it yet. I'm a social retard.

FRIEND

Don't be so hard on yourself, you have a black friend, a Jewish accountant; you're a people person.

JERRY

Maybe I should feed the children, start going to church?

FRIEND

Bad idea, as long as you're a fuck-up, they'll leave you alone. But if all of a sudden you become a saint, they'll come after you with everything they got.

JERRY

Who?

FRIEND

They; they hate that shit.

JERRY

What shit?

FRIEND

Saintly shit.

JERRY

I didn't know that.

FRIEND

That's because you've always been a fuck-up.

JERRY

I haven't always been.

FRIEND

I'm sorry. Have some carrot juice?

JERRY

Back in college I had potential; talent, so much promise. You remember? I've just lost my way that's all.

FRIEND

It's not all your fault.

JERRY

Who said it's better to be clever than honest? I can't croak, not now. I still have some great ideas. I've written a thousand songs in my head. I'm writing a novel about a guy writing a screenplay.

FRIEND

"Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight, blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay, rage, rage against the dying of the light."

JERRY

I'm finally going to be famous and my destruction is complete?

FRIEND

Dylan Thomas, Ernest Hemmingway, John Belushi; history is riddled with self-destructive artist who on some level understood that their gifts were enhanced by their behavior. That the same choices that limited the longevity of their own lives, made the lives of others more enjoyable; they literally poured their humanity into their art.

JERRY

Is that me? Is that what I'm doing?

FRIEND

It depends on if anyone ever buys a "Jerry" invention at Wal*Mart. If they do then yes, that's you. If they don't, then you're just pouring your humanity into a deep dark well with no bottom.

JERRY

Fuck me! And the damn well too!

FRIEND

Only a few are meant to surrender their lives so that others may live more interesting ones, Jerry. For those few in order to achieve greatness they had to die.

JERRY

Maybe I don't need to die, no one's ever heard of me.

FRIEND

Ah, the Emily Dickinson syndrome.

JERRY

What's that?

FRIEND

You create an amazing body of work in total obscurity and it's only after you die that anyone discovers it. It's great for mankind, sucks for you.

JERRY

I'm not feeling too good.

FRIEND

Do some more pushups. The human body has tremendous regenerative powers.

JERRY

Right; I won't use alcohol or cigarettes anymore.

FRIEND

Throw away those pills and that really nice bong.

JERRY

Give me some broccoli!

FRIEND

Here, I'll keep that bong for you.

JERRY

I came down here to commit suicide but everybody's doing that now.

FRIEND

It's not even that cool anymore.

JERRY

I need to lie down.

JERRY lies in a hospital bed. The group in white coats enters and pushes past **FRIEND** and quickly hovers around him as **DOCTOR** enters writing on his clipboard.

DOCTOR

Out of my way, I'm Jerry's doctor.

FRIEND

Excuse me, let me through, I'm his best friend.

DOCTOR

Nurse, I think the patient has destroyed his insides from the outside in. Jerry can you hear me, how are you feeling?

JERRY

My life has just begun and now I've gone and thrown it all away. Can you help me Doc?

DOCTOR

Sure Jerry, but I'll need your American Express card.

FRIEND points at the **DOCTOR**

FRIEND

You, go stand over there! Everybody out, Jerry needs his sleep.

JERRY pops up in bed.

JERRY

Why? So I can dream about adults with baby faces?

FRIEND

Maybe, bathed in blue light with bright red eyes?

JERRY

That's it, friends of yours? Standing in a cosmic doorway, gentle, peaceful but I'm still afraid, I want them to leave my room, my sight, my sleep! And every night they come back, each time I'm less afraid. What if I get so comfortable I don't ask them to leave? Holy shit! That's how it works? At first they scare the piss of you but they keep coming back and each time they don't scare you as much until.

FRIEND

You just don't wake up.

JERRY

That's terrifying! Note to self, rage against adults with baby faces standing in the cosmic doorway of my dreams. Shit! How'd I get in this mess?

FRIEND

What you think is a mess...

DOCTOR

Might be another dimension's mission statement...

JERRY

What? There's more than one dimension? How come I didn't know about this?

FRIEND

I told you that.

JERRY

No you didn't.

FRIEND

Yes I did, you just forgot.

DOCTOR

You can feel them all around you.

FRIEND

Like a little shudder...

DOCTOR

The euphoria of addiction, the rage that consumes you...

FRIEND

That fuzzy little creeper warming your heart, leaving you hopeful... Jerry, we're going to lose contact with you for a while but I don't want you to be afraid.

JERRY

I'm sorry it turned out this way.

FRIEND

I told you, it's not your fault.

JERRY

I bet you're sorry I picked you?

FRIEND

You didn't choose me, I chose you.

THE REPORTER with microphone stands in.

THE REPORTER

I'm here on deathwatch for famed inventor simply known as "Jerry." Since coming to prominence, Jerry has made nothing from his line of designer inventions available exclusively at Wal*Mart, but his soon-to-be widow and her almost certain string of lovers and confidants stand to make millions. This just in, we're sad to report that Jerry, universally loved humanitarian and father has suffered a massive stroke.

The crowd moves to reveal JERRY frozen. His voice comes from above.

JERRY

What's for dinner? I'm starving. What's all the fuss?

DOCTOR

He's still breathing.

JERRY

What's going on here?

DOCTOR

But his brain is indistinguishable from shit.

JERRY

Shit? But I'm right here. I can hear everything you're saying.

FRIEND

I've seen this before. It doesn't end well.

DOCTOR

Jerry, listen to me, you've had a massive stroke, we're doing what we can but there's not much we can do.

JERRY

Wait a minute, I can't feel my hands; do I have a face? I can't move; can anyone hear me? Doc, it's me Jerry.

DOCTOR

There is good news; he's number one on the transplant list.

JERRY

Holy shit, they can't hear me. I'm scared. No, don't be afraid; Friend can you hear me? Will you scratch my back?

DOCTOR

Who do I have to fuck to get a bagel around here? I'm Jerry's doctor for Christ sake. I diagnosed his cancer and I helped him through all his treatments, held his hand; I'm the press spokesman.

THE REPORTER

Doc what happened to Jerry?

DOCTOR

What we often find with a Karmic profile like Jerry's is that cosmically, no one really notices him; he quietly goes about his business of destroying himself while one side considers him a slam dunk and the other, to much work.

JERRY

Don't listen to him; he was supposed to be helping me.

THE REPORTER

Tell us more Doctor.

DOCTOR

It's all in my new book, "Jerry: What Could We Do?" from Random House...

THE REPORTER

Thank you doctor... Perhaps we can get a few words with Miller, Jerry's wife and their son Matt, you both must be devastated.

JERRY

Of course they're devastated.

JOY

My husband was a very unhappy man.

JERRY

Misunderstood...

MATT

It's a relief really.

JERRY

All I needed was a little more time.

(Pause)

Joy, look at me. How can I tell you how sorry I am? I had an addictive personality; it's what I lived with.

THE REPORTER

What about the reports that your husband was a notorious womanizer, alcoholic and drug addict?

JOY

He was a loving husband and father.

JERRY

Listen to me Joy! I loved you. I wanted you Joy. I spent I whole life trying to find you.

JOY pauses as if she heard JERRY.

JOY

And I loved him very much, too much sometimes.

THE REPORTER

Is there truth to the rumor that he lived in your basement?

MATT

He liked solitude.

THE REPORTER

Is it a fact he didn't leave once in the past five years?

MATT

He was very dedicated to his work.

THE REPORTER

Where do you think your father is now?

JERRY

I'm right here, and I love you too son.

MATT

He'll always be here with us.

JOY

(Reading)

"Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight, and learn, too late, they grieved it on its way, do not go gentle into that good night".

MATT

(From memory)

"And you, my father, there on the sad height, curse,
bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray. Do not go
gentle into that good night".

JOY

"Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

THE REPORTER

This just in, we're very sorry to report that Jerry, the
inventor's inventor has died.

Lights come down on MILLER, MATT and THE
REPORTER. The DOCTOR and FRIEND move to
either side of JERRY now covered with a
sheet; INTERVIEWER, MISS HARRIS, THE MAN
and PSYCHIC TOO join them with all
characterizations gone.

INTERVIEWER

All of Jerry's life his eyes were brown.

THE MAN

On the day he died they were blue.

PSYCHIC TOO

You should have gotten to this one earlier.

MISS HARRIS

It might have helped; it's hard to tell.

INTERVIEWER

I for one gave it a good try.

FRIEND

So is this it? The really bad thing..

MISS HARRIS

Isn't it funny, they always think that the really bad thing
is the dying?

FRIEND

It's not that bad.

PSYCHIC TOO

That depends on which way it goes.

THE MAN

Some people think it doesn't go anywhere.

The group shares a hearty laugh.

DOCTOR

What was the really bad thing this time?

PSYCHIC TOO

Sir, he lived long enough to see his dreams come true but not long enough to enjoy them.

MISS HARRIS

Nice.

PSYCHIC TOO

He endured the pain and the struggle, but as far as we could tell there was no earthly reward.

MISS HARRIS

We're still trying to confirm that.

FRIEND

So, what do you think Doc? Should we take him then?

DOCTOR

I hadn't really thought about it.

INTERVIEWER

He was a tortured soul, a self-destructive spirit, and he suffered his entire life because of it.

FRIEND

Look how it ended.

DOCTOR

Yeah.

MISS HARRIS

Isn't that the idea, to rise above? He clearly didn't do that.

PSYCHIC TOO

It could be argued he's already been on vacation.

THE MAN

But he also loved. He cared and he served.

INTERVIEWER

He certainly left the world a better place than he found it.

MISS HARRIS

There should be compensation.

FRIEND

You've already had your fun.

PSYCHIC TOO

So many souls, so little time... Sir, he made his choices.

DOCTOR

That's enough. OK, you take him then.

FRIEND

Are you sure?

DOCTOR

Sure, we'll get he next one.

FRIEND

Thanks, tell you're boss we said hey.

DOCTOR

I will, you too...

INTERVIEWER and THE MAN exit one direction and DOCTOR, PSYCHIC TOO and MISS HARRIS exits another. FRIEND and JERRY under his sheet are alone.

FRIEND

When a lifetime of bad decisions finally catches up with you, you wonder if in your case, free will wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Relax; some things last forever.

LIGHTS

When we no longer recognize our surroundings we are:

'FURTHER THAN WE'VE EVER BEEN'

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