

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
Original Works Publishing

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this play is subject to royalty. It is fully protected by Original Works Publishing, and the copyright laws of the United States. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion pictures, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

The performance rights to this play are controlled by Original Works Publishing and royalty arrangements and licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. No changes of any kind shall be made to the work, including without limitation any changes to characterization, intent, time, place, gender or race of the character. PLEASE NOTE that amateur royalty fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a royalty quotation and license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Royalty of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged. Royalties are payable with negotiation from Original Works Publishing.

Due authorship credit must be given anywhere the title appears, on all programs, printing and advertising for the play. The name of the Playwright must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size and prominence of type equal to 50% of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Work. No person, firm or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded to the Playwright.

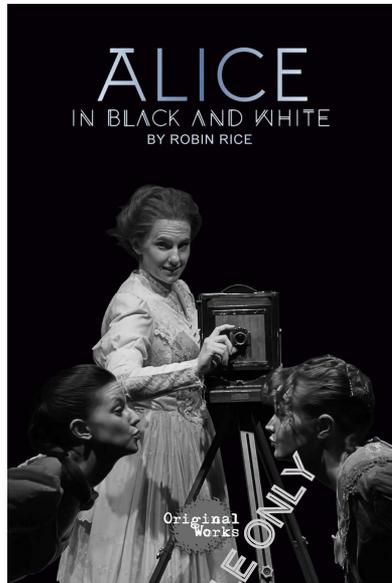
Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable. The purchase of this publication does not constitute a license to perform the work.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing, and advertising for the play on separate line:

**“Produced by special arrangement with
Original Works Publishing.
www.originalworksonline.com”**

Burning
© Ginger Lazarus
Trade Edition, 2021
ISBN 978-1-63092-130-9

*Also Available From
Original Works Publishing*



ALICE IN BLACK AND WHITE by Robin Rice

Synopsis: *Alice in Black and White* brings a true American legend to her rightful place in history. The play tells the story of the first female photo-journalist, Alice Austen, from the late 1800s until a year before her death in 1952. During a time when social conventions for women demanded marriage and child rearing, Alice pursued her passion for photography, found love with life partner Gertrude Tate, and struggled mightily through the Great Depression as her family lost everything. Interwoven with Alice's story is the search of publisher Oliver Jensen for Alice and her photographs in 1951.

Cast Size: 5 Females, 2-3 Males (with doubling)

BURNING

by Ginger Lazarus

SAMPLE ONLY

Burning was originally workshopped by Boston Playwrights Theatre and opened on September 26, 2013. It was directed by Steven Bogart with the following cast:

Cy	Mal Malme
Rose	Jessica Webb*
Cole	Ian Michaels
Sammy	Zachary Clarence
Dulac	Steven Barkhimer*/Alexander

Cook*

The World Premiere was produced in New York City by Resonance Ensemble (Artistic Director Eric Parness and Managing Director Rachel Reiner). The production opened on February 3, 2016, directed by Eric Parness, with scenic design by Ashley Cusack, costumes by Sidney Shannon, lighting design by Pamela Kupper, and composition/sound design by Nick Moore. The cast was as follows:

Cy	Catherine Curtin*
Rose	Shaun Bennet Fauntleroy*
Cole	Sean Phillips*
Sammy	Zachary Clarence
Dulac	Chris Ceraso*

*Appeared courtesy of Actors' Equity Association

Characters

CY, age 40, former Army sergeant turned militant

ROSE, age 32, transplant from the East Coast

COLE, age 25, Army corporal

SAMMY, age 18, local boy, works in Cy's store

DULAC, Army colonel, brigade commander

Setting

Cy's general store in a remote Western town near an Army base. 2008.

Notes on Casting

For the parts of Cy and Sammy, LGBTQ+ actors are strongly preferred.

All the characters can be played by actors of any race or ethnicity.

If no one in the cast has military experience, I highly recommend consulting with someone who does in order to get the physicality, the posture, and the rhythms of speech.

BURNING

ACT I

SCENE 1

(CY in a spotlight, reading aloud.)

CY: “The first time I saw you, I caught you breathing. In the middle of nowhere, you stepped outside—closed your eyes—spread your arms—and drank in the morning air like an elixir. And said, ‘I’ll stay.’”

“I knew right then you were someone born to love—without a doubt, you will ride that whirlwind. Talking to you, watching you, seeing your heart grow big like mountains rising above the desert—I can just about totally forget what a shit heap of a world we live in. Who cares about the miserable things people do, when I can watch you work or make toast, when you listen with your whole body, so that for just a moment I’m the only other human in the world....”

“But I’m outside the whirlwind, touched by the wrong end of the arrow. I don’t have a way in. I look on... longing...burning....”

(Door jingles and slams offstage, followed by Sammy’s breathless voice.)

SAMMY: *(offstage)* Cy!

CY: *(startled)* Shit!

(Lights reveal her to be in a small café area ensconced in the back of a larger store: a few tables and chairs and a counter with self-serve coffee and bins of baked goods. A water cooler stands nearby. On part of the counter or a small table sits a laptop. Toward the back is a door or exit)

to the café kitchen and the basement. Off to the side are suggestions of the rest of the store, which might be called a general store as it stocks a wide variety of necessities but caters especially to the self-reliant individualists who populate this small, mountainous Western town. The café oddly complements the store's holistic and utilitarian purpose, as does Cy.)

(Sammy enters at a run as Cy stuffs the letter hastily away.)

CY: Jesus, Sammy!

SAMMY: Sorry, but—

CY: I could be unpacking saw blades—

SAMMY: —you're gonna unpack more than that when you hear—!

CY: Spill.

SAMMY: You know how I cut through the canyon and come down Alameda...especially since last week 'cause Stilton and his reprobates joined the crew working on Main Street and I don't need an ambush before I even have my coffee—

CY: Is this all about you?

SAMMY: —so as I'm strolling by Ortegas'—you know that trailer they let Julie Mason move into?

CY: What about it?

SAMMY: There's a Caddy parked outside. And guess who's prowling in her yard at seven thirty in the a.m.?

CY: No—

SAMMY: Army's finest. The Plummer himself.

CY: Are you shitting me?

SAMMY: Stark raving drunk, snarling and howling at her, "Get out here, whore, you can't hide from me in town!"

CY: Was Julie there?

SAMMY: She comes out and yells, "Leave me alone!" but he takes a run at her so she slams the door—he starts pounding on it, "Blah blah goddamn slut, blah blah wring your neck!" That's when I got out my phone and called 911.

CY: You should have called *me*.

SAMMY: I woulda, but...that's when he saw me: "You better mind your business, you little shit!"

CY: Did he recognize you?

SAMMY: Didn't stay around to find out. Deputy's car passed me as I was sprinting down Mesa. I did get a mug shot, though.

(Sammy shows Cy his phone. She's impressed. Takes the phone from him.)

CY: Arrogant son of a bitch. Stalking her off the base, in broad daylight—

SAMMY: His ass is fried now, right? That's a civilian offense, not military.

CY: He might weasel his way out of a charge. And if he really throws his weight around, the fuzz will keep it quiet. But I won't.

(Cy sits down at the laptop and starts typing. Sammy hovers behind her.)

SAMMY: Oh, yeah.

CY: Unbelievable what this bastard has gotten away with. Years of harassing and baiting enlisted women. Four, five of his victims investigated. And he gets...a promotion.

SAMMY: And a massive case of ugly.

CY: *(writing)* “Julie Mason paid the price for speaking up. They threw out her harassment charge and drove her out of the service. But here’s proof positive that Colonel Plummer’s a stalking, lying, lowlife disgrace to the uniform.” Eat blog, you piece of shit!

SAMMY: Hooah!

CY: What was it he said to Julie?

SAMMY: *(imitating the colonel’s growl)* “I got all I need for a discharge. If you ain’t a lesbian, then you shoulda fucked me.”

CY: Bastard better not even think of setting foot in my store again.

SAMMY: His breath smells like rotten sausage.

CY: His breath is the least offensive thing about him. “I know all about you, Burns. I know you got yourself kicked out on account of your per-ver-sion....” Everyone knows that, you prick. The name of my blog is *Army Dyke Tells*.

SAMMY: Hooah!

CY: I want to see how this develops. Get the buzz from the base—call that guy you flirt with—the squirrelly one who works in public relations—

SAMMY: Louis? I've moved on, you know.

CY: Don't move too far. We need the intel. I'll go talk to Julie later. And whatever happened to that PFC who e-mailed me from Taji...?

SAMMY: Tanya Perry?

CY: She's the one. Sounds like raging hell over there. Six other women in her unit assaulted, that she knows of. I've got to follow up—

SAMMY: So you didn't hear.

CY: ...What?

SAMMY: Suicide.

(Cy takes this news hard. She's quiet for a minute, then shoves it down and goes resolutely back to typing.)

CY: I'll sink your ass, Plummer. I'll sink every one of you bastards.

SAMMY: Don't forget his mug shot.

CY: And don't you forget about breakfast. Hop to it.

(Sammy looks at her, then starts making coffee and setting out muffins and bagels. Cy keeps typing.)

SAMMY: You're gonna miss me when I'm gone, you know.

CY: Likewise. When you get to college and have it easy—

SAMMY: You mean when I finally get to exercise my brain?

CY: —you'll appreciate where you came from. Just like I look back on my old days. Reveille at oh six hundred, formation, then hit the paperwork with everything I had. *(holds up her hand)* Still have the paper cuts.

SAMMY: Terrifying.

CY: And imagine those city boys swooning over your stories of small-town life. Just like Rose does.

SAMMY: *(remembering)* Ah—Rose—

CY: For her it's like the Wild West, and I'm Gary Cooper. Wait till I tell her about Plummer.

SAMMY: You can tell her right now.

CY: Why?

SAMMY: She gave me a ride home last night. Said to tell you she's coming by before she goes to work.

CY: *(looking at her watch)* That'd be now.

SAMMY: Yup.

CY: Since when does she need to tell me she's coming by?

SAMMY: I dunno.

CY: Is she all right?

SAMMY: She's great. I mean.... Never mind.

CY: What?

SAMMY: Nothing, nothing.

CY: *What?*

SAMMY: No, really. Nothing.

CY: Sammy. Spill it, or I swear I'll—

SAMMY: You don't think she's been funny lately?

CY: Funny? What the hell does that mean?

SAMMY: Spaced out, distracted. Giddy.

CY: Giddy. Rose.

SAMMY: Like she's slightly high all the time. You haven't noticed?

CY: She's does that when she's painting sometimes. It's an artist thing.

SAMMY: She was so moony last night she almost drove us into the canyon. And there was the way she said it.

CY: Which was how?

SAMMY: "Sammy, I've *got* to talk to her." "Why's that, Rose?" "Oh...you'll find out soon enough."

CY: Sounds like she's on the move.

SAMMY: No way. She digs it here.

CY: Waiting tables and painting mountains—that won't hold her forever.

SAMMY: You know what's funny, though? She comes in here, sits in that chair, and listens to you like you're

some badass oracle. The other day, when you went downstairs? She said to me, “Three things I love about living here. The sky, the mountains, and Cy. And you, too, Sam.” But that was an afterthought. *(pause)* So... does she like girls?

CY: What the hell you asking me for?

SAMMY: It never came up in one of your deep talks?

CY: Plenty of things we haven’t talked about.

SAMMY: *(looking through the aisles to the front window)* Now’s your chance.

CY: Grocery. Restock. Go.

SAMMY: Should I make coffee first? Champagne?

CY: Beat it!

(Sammy runs out. Cy exhales. She takes out the letter she was writing earlier.)

CY: “...mountains...watch you work...only other human in the world—”

(Door jingles. Rose enters as Cy hides the letter away.)

ROSE: Good morning!

CY: Rose!

ROSE: You in the middle of something?

CY: ...Inventory.

ROSE: Looks intense. You must take inventory very seriously.

CY: My Army training. And you? You look...vivacious.

ROSE: Do I?

CY: Want something? Coffee, muffin?

ROSE: Not right now. Thank you. *(pause)* It's beautiful out. Isn't it? Don't you love summer here?

CY: That's right—your first.

ROSE: So different from summer in the city. Where the heat sits on you like some kind of dirty beast. Here, the air's so fresh— *(inhales)* I could be out all day.

CY: It's still hot. You better—

ROSE: —wear my sunblock and drink lots of water. Yes, ma'am.

CY: Just looking out for you.

ROSE: Like a good sergeant.

CY: Don't want the Rose scorched by too much sun.

ROSE: I think I'm ready for a little mountain heat. Aren't you?

CY: I...think we need some water. *(at the water cooler)*
Dammit! No cups.

ROSE: I'll get them.

CY: They're over there, in the—

ROSE: I know.

(Rose gets cups from a cabinet.)

ROSE: I'm here all the time. You should still have me on payroll.

CY: I'll get on that.

ROSE: Work is kicking my ass right now, truth be told. You heard we lost Rita because she went on disability? I haven't painted in a month.

CY: Really.

ROSE: I caught a lucky break when Trish took me full time, but I have to say...we had a lot more fun here—

(Cy pours water, fumbles a cup and spills.)

CY: Shit—

ROSE: Let me help.

CY: I got it. I got it.

ROSE: Are you okay? Is sunstroke catching?

CY: Not at all. Fine.

ROSE: You seem a little...jittery.

CY: Working on a new post.

ROSE: What's going on?

CY: Just caught Plummer red-handed, trespassing at Julie Mason's.

(Cy shows Rose the computer screen. Rose gasps in scandalized excitement.)

ROSE: That bastard!

CY: Yep.

ROSE: (*reading*) ...Holy crap. Oh my God, you reamed him!

CY: (*indulging in a little nervous bravado*) Gave him my signature treatment. Step out of line and “Cy burns ya!”

ROSE: Damn, you’re amazing. Always sticking it to those creeps. You have the words at your command.

CY: Sometimes.

ROSE: Always.

(*Pause.*)

CY: Something on your mind, Rose?

ROSE: You know when you’ve got a secret so tender and precious, you just want to hold it close? Because once you let it out, it gets colored over by all the messy imperfection of the outer world?

CY: Um....

ROSE: On the other hand...just come the hell out with it, Rose. Right?

CY: Absolutely. Just...come out.

ROSE: Right. So. Cy. You of the wondrous words. What advice would you give me...to court a soldier?

CY: ...A soldier?

ROSE: One I was deeply, deeply smitten with.

CY: I’m...I....

ROSE: The mountain air got to my brain, right? Oh, God, I'm out of my depth for sure.

CY: Not possible. You're the top...you're peerless.

ROSE: Seriously. I need help.

CY: Rose.... You come over the hills like the sunshine—how can anyone not know it's daytime? You're the light. You're radiance itself. It's done. You've won.

ROSE: *(taken off guard, and moved)* Wow. Thanks, Cy. I got shivers. But no. Not done. The honest truth? I've barely talked to him. We've met just a handful of times, and—

CY: Why are you telling me?

ROSE: Like I said, I could use your advice.

CY: Those ladies in your artist collective. You don't talk about men?

ROSE: Yes, but they're...I don't know. I just thought of you first. Aren't you flattered?

CY: Flabbergasted.

ROSE: Should I drop it?

CY: Of course not. Tell me all about this paragon of warrior manhood.

ROSE: He's new on the base. Just transferred in from somewhere...Virginia, maybe. And before that, Iraq—

CY: Just tell me one thing—

ROSE: Corporal.

CY: Go on.

ROSE: Thank God. If he were brass, you'd disown us both.

CY: I didn't say I'd own the grunt. Corporal? How old is he?

ROSE: Maybe twenty-five?

CY: Twenty-five.

ROSE: Stop giving me that look! I've dated enough guys to know that age means nothing.

CY: And I've known enough twenty-five-year-old corporals to give you that look.

ROSE: Keep an open mind, will you?

CY: Where's he from?

ROSE: Around here, actually. Ackerton.

CY: Great.

ROSE: Open mind—

CY: Have you *been* there?

ROSE: He did get out.

CY: I know that routine. When home makes the Army look good—

ROSE: You survived.

CY: Sure, whatever.

(Pause.)

ROSE: Do you want to hear how we met?

CY: Spill.

ROSE: He came into the diner. He was sitting at the counter by himself, reading a book—

CY: What book?

ROSE: Some spaceship thing I've never heard of.

CY: They eat that stuff up.

ROSE: Really?

CY: Total escapism. When it's not real war, it's killer robots or aliens or giant fucking bugs—

ROSE: Anyway, I said hello and kind of startled him... and suddenly we were both embarrassed. I asked him the usual—where're you from, how long you been on the base—but he got all tripped up and we got into this weird pantomime about ordering eggs. And then I had to run to the bathroom because I was blushing like crazy.

CY: Is that it?

ROSE: He's been back with his buddies a few times. Yesterday he was by himself, so when I brought him his Reuben I casually mentioned my shift was over at one and did he feel like taking a walk. And he got all flushed and kind of nodded, so at one on the dot I put my apron away with a pounding heart. But when I came back out, he'd vanished.

CY: Disappointing.

ROSE: Left me a huge tip.

CY: Even so.

ROSE: And I can't let it go! We've talked about nothing, but almost because of that...and I like his eyes.

CY: His eyes.

ROSE: Something deep about them. Soulful.

CY: Anything else?

ROSE: He's pretty hot.

CY: No talk, big tips, and soulful eyes. And based on this, he's the one?

ROSE: I didn't say *that*.

CY: Not to mention he ran out on you.

ROSE: Maybe there was a reason—

CY: Like he's a jerk?

ROSE: That's judgmental!—

CY: I'm sorry, but he split just when you gave him an opening.

ROSE: He was nervous?

CY: For a friendly walk?

ROSE: So you think I should just forget it.

CY: Rose...you are far too good for someone who can't cherish you. I won't stand for it.

ROSE: You're very gallant. Unfortunately, I'm too stubborn to give up just like that. What's love without a little frustration?

(Cy doesn't answer. She moves away, busies herself at the counter.)

ROSE: I came out here because I wanted to stop all the chatter in my head and just let my heart lead. And my heart is....

CY: Is what?

ROSE: Awake. And happy.

(Cy slams something down, too hard.)

ROSE: What is it? What's wrong?

(Cy composes herself and turns around.)

CY: Happiness makes you bright and fierce. It's... overpowering.

ROSE: I thought for a minute you were done with me.

CY: Never, Rose. Go on and court this hot young corporal. See what happens.

ROSE: If it doesn't work out, at least I have you to cry to.

CY: Sure.

ROSE: So what do I do? How do I stop him from running away?

CY: Give him time. He's probably terrified of you.

ROSE: Terrified of me? After what he's been through?

CY: IEDs have nothing on love.

ROSE: Right. And...right. My love woes are trivial in comparison.

CY: With what?

ROSE: What poor Sammy deals with every day. And you...I mean, I can't even imagine.... I got the impression there was someone...while you were in.

CY: Oh. Yeah.

ROSE: That's why you quit? Because you couldn't be together.

CY: Something like that.

ROSE: And I'm complaining. It's inhumane, isn't it? Not to let people love each other.

CY: It's the Army.

ROSE: *(stands up)* Keep up the good fight. Burn those bastards good.

CY: I'll burn, all right.

(Rose starts to exit. Sammy enters in a rush, phone in hand, and nearly collides with her.)

ROSE: Whoa, Sammy!

CY: You trying to kill us all?

SAMMY: Plummer.

ROSE: What?

SAMMY: I called Louis. He sent your post to his CO, it shot up the chain of command, and now the brass is in an uproar. Already they're talking early retirement.

ROSE: Cy, that's amazing! You guys nailed him!

CY: Early retirement? Bastard should be court martialled.

ROSE: But still—

CY: Slap Plummer on the wrist, pretend it's because he didn't file his paperwork on time or some bullshit. And go right on doing what they did before.

SAMMY: Also...they already have their eye on a replacement. A name came up.

CY: What name?

SAMMY: Dulac.

CY: Dulac.

ROSE: Someone you know? Have you blogged about him?

CY: Not yet.

ROSE: He better watch himself. Famous badass Cy Burns will have the brass quaking in their boots from now on. Congratulations. *(gives CY an affectionate embrace)* And thank you. I have to go to work.

SAMMY: So long, Rose. Come back soon.

ROSE: You know I will.

(Rose starts to leave, stops, goes up to Cy.)

ROSE: If you happen to—if you meet *the guy*—be nice to him, okay? Not that I don't love your powers of intimidation—

CY: What's his name?

ROSE: Noyes. His first name's Cole. Thank you, again.
Good luck to us all!

(Rose exits. Cy stands motionless. Sammy looks after Rose and back at Cy.)

SAMMY: Cole Noyes. That's—

CY: Five boxes of hardware sitting in the aisle. Get cracking.

SAMMY: What are you going to—?

CY: Jesus, Sammy, that stuff doesn't unpack itself! Let's go!

(Sammy disappears. Cy takes out the letter and looks at it in her hand. She crumbles the paper and sits alone, brooding.)

SCENE 2

(A day or two later. Evening. Cy types on her laptop.)

CY: “Three things the world should know about Colonel Jack Dulac.

“Number one. His name means ‘of the lake.’ Sounds very soothing. And true to form, he has the easy temper found in those confident of their own power.

“Number two. He's the Army, through and through. Lives, works, breathes it. His ascent up the ranks has been steady and rapid. No one can come up with any reason to stand in his way.

“Number three. As lieutenant colonel, he commanded the unit I attached to during my last deployment. I worked with him closely through some of my worst

battles—which were not with the enemy.

“And then something happened. Nothing broke the calm surface of Dulac’s waters. On behalf of the status quo, he let this horror sink way down to the bottom.

“But here it comes. Rising up again.”

(Sound of front door opening.)

CY: My favorite kind of customer: the one who shows up when you’re dying to get the hell out of here.

(Cole enters, sees Cy, and stops.)

CY: Can I help you?

COLE: Cy, right? Cy Burns?

CY: That’s me. And who might you be... *(reads the name on his fatigues)* ...Corporal Noyes.

COLE: They said I’d find you here.

CY: What did *they* say—go in that store and look for the big dyke?

COLE: Yeah.

CY: I feel like a prize in a scavenger hunt. Now that you found me....

COLE: Want to talk.

CY: Talk.

(Cole hesitates. Can’t seem to get a word out.)

CY: Is there a problem, Corporal?

COLE: No.

CY: Well, then. If you're all set, you'll have to excuse me. I have work to do and I might get a paying customer.

(Cole takes out some money.)

COLE: Cup of coffee. For here.

CY: We're closed.

(Pause.)

COLE: You treat every guy in uniform this way?

CY: Mostly the brass. But some grunts annoy me, too.

COLE: Cup of coffee and five minutes. Please.

(Cy pours Cole a cup of coffee.)

COLE: This your store?

CY: No, my salon.

COLE: Been here a long time?

CY: Since I got out.

COLE: Sergeant, right?

CY: First sergeant. Two hundred sixty-second supply company.

COLE: How long were you in?

CY: Tick, tick, Noyes. Unless you came in here for my life history—

COLE: Rose.

CY: Rose.

COLE: You're friends with her?

CY: You could say that.

COLE: She talk about me?

CY: Maybe.

COLE: What'd she say?

CY: That's private.

COLE: Good things?

CY: You're well read. Elusive. A great tipper.

COLE: I added wrong.

CY: I guess she's not looking for a math whiz.

COLE: So she likes me?

CY: What do you think?

COLE: Think so.

CY: And you? You like her?

COLE: Yeah.

CY: You're all set then.

COLE: ...Why?

CY: You know what to do next.

COLE: ...Ask her out?

CY: No, Noyes. Toss her in a mosh pit of rattlesnakes.
Yes, ask her out.

COLE: ...I can't.

CY: "Rose, do you want to go out sometime?"

COLE: Yeah, but—

CY: It's really that simple.

COLE: For you maybe.

CY: This is not about me. What exactly is your problem?

COLE: I can't talk to her.

CY: You *have* talked to her—

COLE: About the fucking menu!

CY: So just expand. "Hey Rose, you like sausage? I know a great place for sausage."

COLE: That's all you got?

CY: You'll think of something.

COLE: Wait—you won't help me?

CY: *Help* you?

COLE: Thought you and Rose were friends—

CY: I'm her friend, not her pimp.

COLE: You can't give me anything? To start?

CY: Look, I don't know who gave you the idea that I'm First Sergeant of Love Advice, but the fact is the Army doesn't pay me to wipe your little asses anymore. So stop whining to me about the lumps in your throat, go off by yourself somewhere, and try really hard to grow a pair. We're closed.

(Cole starts to leave. Stops.)

CY: WE'RE CLOSED.

(Cole stands there. Suddenly he stifles a sob.)

CY: Jesus Christ. Are you kidding me...? Stop. STOP. I'm in a bad mood, okay? I got carried away.

COLE: Don't know me—got no reason to help—

CY: You have no idea how little reason I have—

COLE: She's just so...goddamn beautiful.

CY: You noticed.

COLE: And smart! And—you know—interesting. And so....

CY: Alive.

COLE: Yeah—

CY: Delicate and strong.

COLE: Uh-huh—

CY: Naive and daring.

COLE: Right—

CY: A flower out of her element, passing beauty on. A sweet light that rushes into your heart—

COLE: Makes me crazy—

CY: Fills you with longing that lifts you up, then drops you into freefall. Makes you feel unworthy. Goodness you'll never deserve.

COLE: You talk like that. And I can't get a word out.
(rises to leave) You don't want to help, so—

CY: Stop. Sit down.

(Cole sits at one of the tables. Cy pauses, then takes two beers out of the mini fridge.)

CY: I don't have a liquor license. But I am prepared.

(She opens the beers, sets them on the table, and sits down with a sigh.)

COLE: Thank you.

CY: Don't thank me yet, Cole—it's Cole, right? I was in sixteen years. Joined up right out of high school because I got kicked out of my house and needed a place to crash. Sound familiar?

COLE: Didn't finish high school.

CY: Any road out of Ackerton is the right road. Rose said you just came off deployment.

COLE: FOB Anaconda, nine months.

CY: How'd it go?

COLE: Pretty fucking boring.

CY: Glad to hear it.

COLE: You know the only good part? When we get out and engage those fuckers. Look them in the eye. Arrest them or line them up against the wall, or...whatever. Makes sense. You know?

CY: Human contact.

COLE: Yeah. *(pause)* You deployed?

CY: Gulf War, Kuwait, ninety-one. And Son of Gulf War, oh four to oh five.

COLE: See any action?

CY: I saw enough. Frankly, I did most of my fighting with the chain of command.

COLE: Plummer got the axe. They say you busted him, writing that stuff on your blog.

CY: You know my work.

COLE: You some kind of troublemaker?

CY: I hope so.

COLE: Sounds like you have it in for guys like him.

CY: He's a bastard. You should all have it in for him.

COLE: Don't really give a shit what the brass do. Long as it doesn't get us killed.

CY: What about your new colonel?

COLE: Dulac? Seems all right.

CY: That's exactly how he seems.

COLE: You got something against him, too?

CY: It's like you said. As long as they got our backs.

COLE: You were discharged.

CY: During my last deployment.

COLE: For—?

CY: Yeah. For that.

COLE: You got caught?

CY: Nope. I knew the system and I worked it.

COLE: So how did you—?

CY: I told.

COLE: Told? Why?

CY: Had no choice.

COLE: If you got away with it, why did you—?

CY: Because silence is a killer. Let's get to the point.

COLE: Rose.

CY: First things first. *Why* are you freaking out?

COLE: Every time she talks to me, I get...frozen, like...
like....

CY: A deer in the headlights?

COLE: Trapped. So it's run, or... (*mimes shooting a rifle*)

CY: Not the ideal approach to courtship. You always have
this problem with women?

COLE: If it's just about a fuck? No.

CY: So this is different.

COLE: When I know she likes me.... When she wants... something.... (*mimes strangling himself*)

CY: That's a bitch of a problem, Cole.

COLE: I know.

CY: In your service...anything ever bother you?

COLE: Did my job, didn't see nothing wrong with it. Why?

CY: Just wondering.

COLE: Combat makes sense.

CY: She's another human being. Contact—it's what you want, right? Take away the fight and let it happen.

COLE: Okay.... I could do that...if I knew what to say.

CY: If you're being yourself, you *will* know what to say.

COLE: How do I say what she wants me to say?

CY: You think like that, you're screwed. Rose is *not* interested in bullshit.

COLE: It's not bullshit. I just can't think of words.

CY: Let's start at the top. You need to ask her out.

COLE: I told you—

CY: Just make up your mind and ask her.

COLE: Ask her to what?

CY: Ask her to go on a walk. You can walk, right? Up behind the high school, there's a path along the creek. Very rustic and charming. I'll show you where.

COLE: Okay....

CY: You're getting that deer in the headlights look.

COLE: We go on a walk, and....

CY: Talk about trees. The wildlife, the sky—tell her your best Army stories. She eats it up.

COLE: Okay....

CY: She's a painter. Ask her about art.

COLE: Don't know nothing about art.

CY: That's why you *ask* her. You like sci-fi.

COLE: Yeah.

CY: What's the attraction?

COLE: In this book I'm reading. This kid joins up with this intergalactic force to fight this race of alien bugs. Everyone thinks he sucks and puts him down, but he has this secret...he's got a little bit of bug inside him. So he knows how to kill them, and starts leading all the missions and blowing bug cities apart...he saves the world. Makes me want to be part of something.

CY: May not be Rose's thing. But tell her what it means to you.

COLE: Okay. But....

CY: What?

COLE: How do I—what if she wants to hear stuff like you were saying before? Like, about how great she is, and what I....

CY: Feel about her?

COLE: Yeah. Light and flowers and all that. She'd love it, right?

CY: She would.

COLE: So...can I use it?

CY: Go ahead. Just say it in your own words.

COLE: Fuck!

CY: Look, just tell me. How do you feel about her?

COLE: Crazy. Freaked out.

CY: Why do you like her so much?

COLE: Because she's beautiful, and...all that stuff you said.

CY: That's right, *I* said it.

COLE: So tell *me* how to say it.

CY: What do you want me to do? Feed you lines from behind a bush?

(Cole pounds the table in frustration.)

COLE: Every time I come into town...walk into that diner, my heart going a hundred an hour...she looks at me, and...it burns me up. There's this wall. I can't get over it, First Sergeant.

CY: No one's called me that in a really long time. *(pause)*
Damn you, Noyes. All right.

COLE: All right what?

CY: When do you go back on duty?

COLE: Oh six hundred.

CY: When's your next day off?

COLE: Seventeenth. Why...?

(Cy gets a couple pieces of paper and pens. She slaps one set down on the table and starts writing with the other.)

CY: Put down your email and cell number. You can cut and paste, I hope.

COLE: Cut and paste what?

CY: Just what you wanted. Something to boost you over the wall.

COLE: But you said—

CY: You have the feelings, I have the words—we'll put them together and see what happens.

COLE: You'll do that? Why?

CY: I'm...curious to see if it will work. Are you game or not?

COLE: Okay.

CY: By the way, you're going to have to say some things out loud. So you better practice on your way to the diner.

COLE: What—?

CY: Rose is working the dinner shift. Go over there and... *(hands him the paper she was writing on)* ...lay this on her.

COLE: *This?* Now?

CY: After she comes out of her swoon, make a date for the seventeenth. Between now and then—maybe a few heart-melting emails and texts.

(Cole is frozen to the spot.)

CY: Why are you standing around, soldier? Move it!

(Cole rallies and starts to leave. Stops.)

COLE: Thank you.

(Cole exits.)

CY: No, Cole. Thank you.

SCENE 3

(Two weeks later. Sammy sits at a table. His face is bloody and he holds a bag of ice to his temple. Cy tends to his cuts.)

CY: How long have you been here? Why didn't you call me?

SAMMY: You were on your way—owww!

CY: They pushed you?

SAMMY: Face first. It hurt like hell.

CY: No kidding. You've still got wall in your—

SAMMY: Owwww!

CY: Stay with me. *(pause)* You sure they were soldiers?

SAMMY: Too clean shaven to be townies. And young, but not that young.

CY: Junior officers. On a rampage at seven-thirty in the morning.

SAMMY: They didn't even seem drunk, Cy. Came right after me. I turned the corner and there they were. Followed me up to the alley and....

CY: Did they say anything?

SAMMY: Blah blah blah "faggot" blah blah blah "teach you to shut your cum receptacle...."

CY: Jesus. That bastard Plummer.

SAMMY: How nice he takes up face-smashing in his retirement.

CY: Speaking of faces, do you remember theirs?

SAMMY: You know all straight people look alike to me, Cy.

CY: Enough smart talk. When I'm done, we're going down to the base.

SAMMY: Oh, no.

CY: Yes.

SAMMY: They won't do anything.

CY: Saying nothing only gives them a better excuse.

SAMMY: Can't you just blog about it?

CY: It's beyond words, Sam. When they hit you in broad daylight, you hit back.

SAMMY: And they hit you back harder. I know this routine. I went to high school.

CY: You survived long enough to graduate. Let's go.

(Sammy won't budge.)

CY: Sam—

SAMMY: I don't want to be known down there. For this.

CY: Why the hell do you care how they know you?

SAMMY: Because. *(pause)* I'm...keeping my options open.

CY: No. No, no, over my dead, rotting, stinking body—

SAMMY: My dad's not paying for college, Cy. Not a cent. As of September, I go work in his shop or I'm out on my ass.

CY: I told you I'll give you all the hours you want—

SAMMY: It's not enough—

CY: —you can sleep on my couch until you earn it—

SAMMY: Oh, yay. *Stay* here!

CY: One more year—we will get you down to Mountain State, so help me—

SAMMY: Or I could get the hell out, right now.

CY: Shut your mouth.

SAMMY: Louis thinks he can help me get a desk job.
And Sergeant Small said—

CY: Sergeant Small! Don't you ever listen to that scumbag, you hear me? He'll tell you anything—he'll make the Army sound like the fucking Rainbow Coalition with rifles if that's what it takes.

SAMMY: I'll keep my head down.

CY: And your mouth shut?

SAMMY: And I won't have sex, ever.

CY: It's not a joke, Sam. It's not some fucking parlor game. People *die*. You think I didn't do the same calculation? Play the system and come out on top. Works for some. Works for a while. Until you realize just how deadly serious the system is about keeping you in your place.

(Sammy knows what she's talking about. He looks away uncomfortably.)

CY: The daily lying and hiding...that's not even the worst. The worst is when it all gets inside you. *(pause)* Julie Mason won't talk to me. Told me not to write another word about her. The torment Plummer put her through, the way they treated her for bringing the charge, and now these assholes trying to run her out of town. But she says *I'm* the one who ruined her life.... I never said the truth won't hurt.

SAMMY: Julie's not your fault. And neither was—

CY: Don't talk about that. Not a word. I only told you—

END OF SAMPLE