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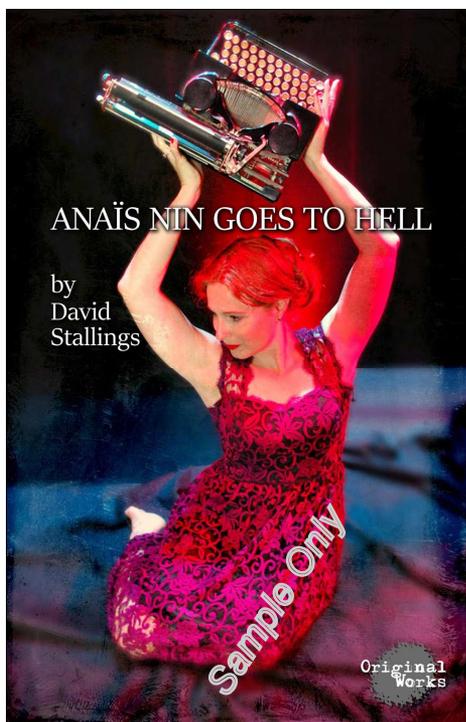
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Hello Stranger
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Anaïs Nin Goes to Hell by David Stallings

Synopsis: Imagine an island in hell where Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, and Queen Victoria wait... trapped in the memory of who they were. What happens when women's lib icon Anaïs Nin arrives to turn their afterlife upside down? *Anaïs Nin Goes to Hell* explores the question of whether Sartre was right and hell really is other people, or whether we carry around our potential for damnation or salvation within ourselves.

Cast Size: 7 Females, 2 Males

HELLO STRANGER

A Full Length Play

by Sharon Yablon

Sample Only

Hello Stranger was first produced by Theatre of NOTE in Los Angeles, CA, Fall 2017. The production was directed by Sarah Figoten Wilson. The cast and crew were as follows:

Audrey: Aliyah Conley and Maren O’Sullivan

Mike: Trevor H. Olsen (alternate cast Jonathon Lamer)

Carla: Reamy Hall (alternate cast Nicole Gabriella Scipione)

Mandy: Elinor Gunn (alternate cast Jennifer Flack)

Carpy: Christopher Neiman (alternate cast Brad C. Light)

Jesus: Alexis DeLaRosa (alternate cast Isaac Cruz)

Produced by David Bickford, John Colella, Reamy Hall, John Money, Kirsten Vangsness

Stage Manager: Kelly Egan

Lighting Design: Martha Carter

Set Design: Fred Kinney

Props Designer: Michael O’Hara

Sound Design: Marc Antonio Pritchett

Costume Design: Kathryn Wilson

CHARACTERS

AUDREY - A young girl who teeters on innocence and a maturity that is muted and never precocious. She is bare-foot and wears a top and shorts, with a boomerang clasped in them. She has an ethereal quality.

MIKE – Old enough to have baggage. A combo of gruff and gentle, a sort of likable loser. He is haunted by his past in ways he might not consciously realize. He wears a suit that's a little disheveled, with a blue flower on it.

CARLA – early 40s, white trash but that is just her exterior. She is cautious and her anger hides a deep sadness.

MANDY – 30s, flirty, with a sense of lost 1940s glamour. She is on a road to self-destruction. Her moods are changeable, and she has bouts of confusion which can unsettle her.

JESUS - A lewd mariachi of mysterious origin. His costume is thrown together from regional flora and fauna, dirty feathers, bells - a piñata of a person, or a scarecrow. He can be creepy at times in that he knows things, like a fairy tale character.

CARPY – Wily and nomadic like a cowboy, and although he buys into the lifestyle, he grapples with loneliness that's underneath any "edge" he presents. He's a mixed bag of having committed minor crimes but with a heart that feels things and regrets.

THE SETTING is a mixture of a dream and real version of Fontana and the Inland Empire, whose rural life and open space is rapidly being developed. There is still a sense of history there, going back to the Indians and early settlements, and a lurking danger that you might not find in cities. Its past charms are buried under scuz. The time is late October, and Halloween and The Day of the Dead Festival are its backdrop.

THE SET is a red and gold panel painted on the back wall to depict a sunset. Bits of a fence that has unraveled are along the back wall. A tree with scant leaves is in the corner. Some leaves may be on the stage.

THE SONGS mentioned in stage directions were used as inspiration in the writing process, story, and character. They are an obscure mix of 50s doo wop, 60s, ballads, and lounge. Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted songs in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for all song clearances and shall indemnify the copyright owners of this play and their licensing company and agent, Original Works Publishing, against all costs, expenses, losses and liabilities that may arise from song us-age.

HELLO STRANGER

PART ONE

Scene 1

(A sound cue starts off as disconnected party sounds with some 80s music that is mentioned in the play, which blends into rural nighttime outdoor sounds, which blends into fiesta music, which blends into female humming of Frank Sinatra's "In The Wee Small Hours of the Morning." Humming starts off more expansive/echoing and becomes simpler and representative of a child as lights go up. When they go up, it is clear that Audrey is now singing and the echoed quality is gone. She is near the tree. Mike enters and watches her from afar. Some blood runs down his temple and he is a little disheveled. Audrey stops humming.)

MIKE: Don't stop.

(She stares at him.)

MIKE: Was that a Justin Bieber song?

(She shakes her head no.)

MIKE: I guess you don't have Bieber fever.

(Pause.)

MIKE: I fell asleep in my car. Woke up, rolled down the window, there was distant fiesta music. And I thought, a person could just stay here, exist in their car. They don't need the world. . .my great grandfather came out here looking for gold. Know what he found?

(She shakes her head no.)

MIKE: Syphilis, from a hooker who betrayed him.

AUDREY: Is there any gold left?

(He comes more onto the stage.)

MIKE: Sure!

AUDREY: Where?

MIKE: In the pits. You can follow tracks the carts used to take miners down underground. It's darker than dark. What's your name?

AUDREY: What's yours?

MIKE: Mike. I hope I don't scare you. Do I? It's just I heard your singing. And I followed it.

AUDREY: Followed it?

MIKE: Like it was a sweet road. And it led me here.

(She stares back at him.)

MIKE: Last night I went to my 30-year high school reunion. That probably seems like a long time to you. Well you're right, it is. They were playing Kansas, Haircut 100. Music from when I was young. The room swirled, did I tell you I was drunk? There were pictures on the wall, of all the people who had died from our class. You don't know this, but some of the kids from your class will die soon.

AUDREY: Sherman died.

MIKE: See what I mean?

AUDREY: He was riding his dirt bike. The desert is over there.

(She looks off.)

MIKE: Do you go into the desert?

AUDREY: We get date shakes.

MIKE: Yum. Ever see anyone in uniform out there?

AUDREY: Like a dentist?

MIKE: Why'd you say that?

AUDREY: I don't like them.

MIKE: I don't like them either. But no. Like a marine. Sometimes they go to war and come back. Stay away from them.

AUDREY: I'll hit them with my boomerang.

(She unbuckles a boomerang from her belt, ready to throw it at him.)

MIKE: I'll behave then.

(He bends down near her.)

MIKE: These your dying tomatoes?

AUDREY: They're Carla's. She kills stuff.

(Pause.)

MIKE: Reunions are weird. Even though you knew these people before, there's nothing to say to them

now. There was this woman there. She looked half attractive, the way people do at parties. I guess I lived with her the summer after high school. She tried to remind me of our apartment in Hollywood. Some orange cat. But I didn't remember.

AUDREY: Why?

(Her question throws him for a beat.)

MIKE: I felt like a shmuck.

AUDREY: What's that?

MIKE: A dirt bag. But, I shouldn't have gone. I'm embarrassed about my life. Everyone has a house, kids. Do I look like I don't know how to get those things?

(Audrey shrugs.)

MIKE: Becky's gone; I couldn't even make that work. I planned a trip to White Sands for us. In the middle of nowhere I held Becky. It's always been over, I told her. The sun was a fireball and we made love. I let her be on top because I didn't want to do any of the work. This fine sand was all in and up my ass for days. It's still there. Reunions. Nothing of value is communicated. And then

it was 4 AM. I went outside. Somebody had taken animal tranquilizer. It was somewhere between night and day, and a pimp came towards me. Fontana. You like living here? Marooned, out on the 10?

(Pause, she looks at him.)

AUDREY: I think you went to that party expecting something. If those people didn't like you then, they won't like you now. I guess you could stay in your car, like you said. Drive around. Park. People will know about you.

(She wanders, looks out.)

AUDREY: There's orange trees here, from when the groves were great. The smell is part of the air, but so is hog shit and truck exhaust. I like it here because I'm here.

(She ends up at the stage edge, sits, looks up. He joins her and looks up too; there is a quiet sense of not knowing who or where they are or how big the universe is. Carla is seen peeking in.)

MIKE: Our star's gonna die someday.

AUDREY: What will happen to us?

MIKE: We'll burn. But I like space anyway.

AUDREY: Yeah.

MIKE: I heard an astronaut talk about it once. He said seeing Earth from the moon was the most beautiful thing he ever saw. And being away from it was the most crushing loneliness he ever felt.

Sample Only

Scene 2

(Carla enters. She holds a rolling pin. She addresses Mike.)

CARLA: Stand up!

(He does.)

CARLA: Don't move!

(He doesn't.)

CARLA: Step away from her.

(He takes a step.)

CARLA: Who the fuck are you?

AUDREY: He lives in his car.

CARLA: What?!

MIKE: That was just an idea.

CARLA: You better start making sense.

MIKE: My car hit something. I think.

CARLA: Is that my problem? Are you hurt?

MIKE: I've got a hangover. Parties are hard. I want to talk to people but I'm not smooth so I drink.

CARLA: Where's your car?

MIKE: Just out there, ma'am.

CARLA: Don't call me that, I hate that.

MIKE: What should I call you?

CARLA: You shouldn't call me anything.

AUDREY: That's Carla.

MIKE: Oh, Carla.

CARLA: What, you know me?

MIKE: I've heard things.

(He smiles at Audrey.)

CARLA: What did you hit?

MIKE: I'm not sure.

CARLA: People don't fix their dogs and cats here.

MIKE: I saw a drum of something, rolling.

CARLA: They dump toxic stuff out here. They're killing us all and they don't care.

MIKE: No, it's okay.

(There's something tender in his voice and it almost comforts her but she's protective.)

MIKE: I heard your daughter singing.

(Carla and Audrey look at each other, a secret between them.)

MIKE: The sound traveled over the freeway, through downtown Fontana and the thugs and porn shops. Teens selling themselves along Sierra Parkway.

CARLA: What's so great about where you live?

MIKE: LA? Not much.

CARLA: LA's got problems.

MIKE: I know.

CARLA: I spent some time there.

MIKE: Were you trying to be an actress?

(She looks at him, annoyed.)

MIKE: You're better off, they're all nuts.

(He breathes in the air, looks out.)

MIKE: Sunsets are prettier out here. The smog enhances the light.

CARLA: No it doesn't.

MIKE: I grew up here.

CARLA: Good for you.

MIKE: One of my friends had horses. We'd go into the hills, ride them around, like the Indians. I haven't been back in a long time.

(He stares off. Something in her slightly softens and she doesn't like it.)

CARLA: You can't just go into someone's yard.

MIKE: Okay.

CARLA: I need to make my daughter dinner.

MIKE: I wish I had a daughter. I've gotten a few women pregnant and they've all chosen to abort. Some have even said, I'm definitely aborting this. Is it something about me?

CARLA: Look. I can give some food to you. But you have to stay outside.

(He stares back at her.)

CARLA: Fried chicken and salad. And that's it. Then back to LA. Or wherever. It's not my problem.

MIKE: Okay.

(Lights change to reflect sunset. They all look out. Sound of distant dogs barking.)

MIKE: Rabid dogs. I remember that sound. They answer each other. It's kind of beautiful.

CARLA: No it's not. They're strays and they have babies. They're out there in a world that someone else made. The mothers troll around, with the pups holding onto their nipples, their little bodies dragging across the asphalt. They sleep in alleys or the holes in someone's foundation. I heard a lot

of them live in the sewer, and that could be. They get shot, people like their guns out here. They get driven over by a dirt bike, people like their dirt bikes out here. Sometimes other dogs kill the mother and eat the pups. Or the homeless eat them. They're born so small, it's so easy.

(Carla has a quiet sadness. Audrey takes her hand.)

AUDREY: Meth heads hide their stash up their butts. They forget about it because their brains are fried. When the baggies open all of their veins pop and they die in a burst of blood.

CARLA: I'm going to close the sliding glass door and lock it.

MIKE: I would.

(Carla and Audrey turn to exit. Audrey breaks away and hands Mike a napkin.)

AUDREY: You got blood on you.

(Mike wipes his forehead as Carla watches, before lights fade and she exits.)

Scene 3

(Bug zapper sound, intermittently throughout. Lights up on Mike, he sits on a cheap lounge chair. The purple light of the zapper glows in the back. He eats from a paper plate as Carla watches, nearby. Audrey is near the tree. He finishes.)

CARLA: There's no dessert.

(Audrey wanders out. SOUND OF AN ICE CREAM TRUCK.)

AUDREY: Ice cream!

CARLA: I don't want any.

MIKE: You don't need to worry, you have a nice figure. No one wants a Karen Carpenter whose heart will stop in bed.

(Carla is annoyed but also doesn't mind his flirting. Audrey notes their interaction and exits.)

MIKE: I think it's been awhile since I've eaten.
Thank you.

(Carla doesn't answer.)

MIKE: I forgot how nice it is here at night. No helicopters. Or screams from Satanic blood cults. I live in Hollywood.

CARLA: I figured.

MIKE: But I'm not a star.

CARLA: That's too bad.

MIKE: Fame has eluded me.

CARLA: I wouldn't want it.

(He stands, faces her.)

MIKE: Wouldn't you? Isn't it a sort of love?

(He looks out.)

MIKE: A Playboy bunny lived in the apartment next to me. She was from the 50s, around the time the magazine launched. She was old now. One day she had a massive stroke. No one knew and she started to mummify. I noticed mail sticking out her front door. I managed to get in the apartment and there were these pictures around of a beautiful young woman on magazine covers, out on the town. I followed the putrid scent to a body. It was

lying on a bed on a pink bedspread, with some letters around. I read one. It was from a fan of “The Attack of the 50 Foot Woman.” I didn’t know who I was living next to until she was dead. I didn’t know she was alone.

(Pause, telling this has an effect on him.)

CARLA: I loved those Creature Feature movies. They scared me. But I would rather watch them than be with my shitty family.

(She feels self-conscious that she revealed something about herself.)

MIKE: Does she have a father?

CARLA: It’s none of your business.

MIKE: I was just curious.

CARLA: Well don’t be.

MIKE: You can ask me a question.

CARLA: I prefer a cigarette.

(She lights one.)

MIKE: My grandparents came over on a boat.

CARLA: Whose didn't.

MIKE: I'm a Taurus. You like astrology?

CARLA: We're not on a date.

MIKE: That's good. I don't think I'm doing very well.

Sample Only

Scene 4

(Audrey enters with an ice cream bar, she gives it to Mike.)

MIKE: Look at that.

(He takes a bite, relishes it.)

MIKE: Peppermint stick, with the bits of candy in it!
I haven't tasted this in about 40 years! I used to get it at the Woolworth's.

CARLA: That's gone.

(He is surprised, saddened.)

MIKE: Why?

CARLA: What do you mean why? Next you're going to ask about the drive-in.

(He looks at her questioningly.)

CARLA: It's a Quiznos now.

MIKE: The soda fountain was my favorite spot. Eating your sundae in those tall glasses with the scalloped edges. Sitting on a stool at the counter, your

feet dangling. It was like the despair of the world couldn't ever get you in there.

(Audrey wanders towards the stage edge. She looks back at Mike and as she does lights shimmer near her, like the reflection of a pool. He seems to recognize something and is drawn to it.)

MIKE: There was a pool here. . .

(He moves towards her. A strange mood has come over him. He wavers a little.)

CARLA: You have to go.

(He falls, passed out.)

CARLA: Shit.

(Lee Hazelwood's "Wind, Sky, Sea and Sand" plays. Audrey goes to Mike and kneels at his side. She holds her hand elevated over his stomach. She begins to make slow circles over him with her hand, a child's odd gesture but also indicative of something deeper, mysterious. Carla watches, and then looks out. She takes a drag from her cigarette, lost in her own thoughts. Slow fade.)

PART TWO

Scene 5

(Lights up. Mike is still laying on the ground. A liquor cart is in the corner; bug zapper and lounge chair are gone. Mandy is onstage. She wears a peignoir, plum lipstick, and her shoulder length hair has a 1940s wave. She stands in profile with a cigarette and takes a long drag, letting the smoke ooze out of her mouth like a Vargas pinup. Blackout/lights up. Mandy's cigarette is gone. She looks out as if concerned about something. Blackout/lights up. Mandy now looks down at Mike. He comes to, slowly stands, a little confused as song ends.)

MANDY: Hello stranger.

MIKE: Hi.

MANDY: Have you seen my son?

MIKE: I don't know who he is.

(Disappointed, she turns away.)

MANDY: Downtown is that way. The desert is that way. The artists are that way, in Idyllwild. If you like bad art. Well, you're a looker, aren't you?

MIKE: I don't know about that.

MANDY: Rugged.

MIKE: If you say so.

MANDY: Want a drink?

MIKE: No.

MANDY: Oh, that won't stick.

MIKE: Yeah, I've tried it before.

MANDY: Can you stay? Just to talk, because I have a reputation.

MIKE: I haven't heard anything.

MANDY: I like sex.

MIKE: That's good.

MANDY: People say I give it away.

MIKE: That's bad.

MANDY: It's a small town and I could use some company. Too much darkness. I long for hands on

me, the whirl of bodies. To escape. . .Halloween is so sad now. There used to be children.

(She turns to him, concerned.)

MANDY: What's happened to them?

MIKE: I don't know.

MANDY: The mothers are waiting. . .

MIKE: They almost always don't find the child.

MANDY: Are you a cop?

MIKE: No.

MANDY: I don't mind cops.

MIKE: I do.

MANDY: Their job isn't easy.

MIKE: Neither is a slaughterhouse worker's.

MANDY: I like "Harry-O," you remember that show?

MIKE: Didn't he live on a boat?

(She smiles coyly at him.)

MANDY: Not married?

MIKE: Two years is the longest relationship I ever seem to have.

MANDY: You need to work on that.

MIKE: I don't know how.

MANDY: You'll end up alone then.

MIKE: I figured I'd hook up with someone at my reunion.

MANDY: Reunion?

MIKE: High school.

MANDY: How did it go?

MIKE: It wasn't in the cards.

MANDY: There's always tonight. . .why don't you get me a drink? My father liked that liquor cart so much he often took it to bed with him.

MIKE: What do you want?

MANDY: You'll figure it out.

(She watches him make a drink and approaches, standing behind him.)

MANDY: But don't think about getting lucky.

MIKE: I won't.

MANDY: Because alcohol puts me in a warm bath of love.

MIKE: Sounds nice.

(He turns around and is surprised to find her there.)

MANDY: My male friends can hardly keep their hands off me.

(Beat. She touches him. The touch makes them both uncomfortable although this is unexpected. Nonetheless, she feels rejected. She tastes her drink.)

MANDY: A Black Russian. My favorite.

MIKE: I guess it's my specialty.

(He seems surprised by this. Something has shifted in the scene for them. She wanders toward the audience, looks out.)

MANDY: The mountains are dark. You just moved in next door?

MIKE: No, I live in LA.

MANDY: They keep putting takeout menus on the door even if somebody's dead inside.

MIKE: I don't think they care.

MANDY: The realtors stopped coming around. People hear things, about a house. It keeps things - memories, bad ju-ju, something like that.

MIKE: They tore down Sharon Tate's house because of the Manson murders. But Trent Reznor moved in first.

MANDY: Who's that?

MIKE: A rock star.

MANDY: He didn't mind the murders?

MIKE: I think they were inspiration.

MANDY: Don't you have a lot of murders in LA?

MIKE: Yeah, serial killers like palm trees.

MANDY: And all those poor starlets in garden apartments, crying, slicing their wrists. Could you live somewhere with a bad history?

MIKE: If it was all I could afford. I've been there.

MANDY: Where?

MIKE: Having to live, do things I didn't want to. I've lived in bad neighborhoods.

MANDY: Can't they change?

MIKE: Some do. But some remain the rotting shitholes they are.

MANDY: Why don't you make yourself a drink?

MIKE: As I said.

MANDY: Yes, on the wagon. But why don't you come off. . .for a pretty lady?

(He makes himself a drink. She clinks his glass. He finishes the drink, she follows.)

MANDY: You know I could have shot you, wandering in like you did.

MIKE: I don't remember wandering.

MANDY: I don't remember you wandering either.

MIKE: And we're not even drunk yet.

(She smiles at him.)

MANDY: Fontana was a lovely little town when we moved here. So much charm.

MIKE: I heard the small town in America is disappearing.

MANDY: Where's it going?

MIKE: I don't know.

MANDY: This house even had a white picket fence.

MIKE: That doesn't mean anything.

MANDY: Why not?

MIKE: Fucked up things can happen inside a cute house.

MANDY: I was a girl when we drove out from the Midwest.

MIKE: From where?

MANDY: Why, you know it?

MIKE: Not really.

MANDY: Just being polite, then?

(A beat of eye contact, and she faces the audience.)

MANDY: My father drove us out from Tulsa. There's a lot of Art Deco there, glittering and green. . .we drove in a station wagon. In Nebraska my father wanted to stop and run through the corn. My mother was annoyed with this playful side of him, his wandering mind, lack of ambition. She stayed in the car but I went with him even though I was scared; the corn was tall, and there were noises in it. We got the hell out of there. Then there were cows everywhere. It was a long drive and apparently I wasn't a very good passenger so I was given a valium. Drugged, I dreamt of milky worlds. When I awoke there were buttes and drifters. We picked one up, my mother was so mad. But my father was sweet, trusting. I loved him.

(The mention of him connects her to old pain.)

The drifter had long black hair, no bag or anything. He was exotic, an Indian, but I didn't really

understand that then. That we had killed them all. He sat next to me in the back. “In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning” was playing in the tape deck, it was my father’s favorite. Do you like Sinatra?

MIKE: Sure.

MANDY: *(sings softly)* In the wee small hours of the morning, you'd be hers if only she would call. In the wee small hours of the morning, that's the time you miss her most of all. . .

(Her song has a weird effect on him, which persists for the rest of the scene.)

MANDY: I could smell the earth on the hitchhiker. He put his hand on my shorts; I watched its fingers creep under the lavender fabric. I could feel it become slippery down there, nobody had touched me in this way before. A knife glinted from his inside pocket. If I said something, cried out, maybe the Indian would hurt us. So I let him keep touching and he did, ever so softly, exploring. It felt good but I was trembling. After a bit he took his hand away. He wanted to get out. Where? My father asked him. Where the mountain meets the sky, he said. That sounds nice, where is that? He pointed, and my father stopped the car. The Indian

got out. But I didn't want him to go. We drove away and I watched him from the back window. He smiled at me with crooked lips, dark eyes. (pause) At the time I thought it was my virginity that he took. It wasn't, but he took something. We got to California. To Los Angeles. But that didn't work out. And we came to the Inland Empire.

(She stares off, her mood has darkened.)

MANDY: I don't want to talk anymore. You found your way in. Now get out.

(“I Apologize” by Sunny and the Sunliners plays. He watches as she stares out for a beat and finishes her drink. Then she walks the periphery of the stage back to the liquor cart. She puts her empty glass on it. She wheels the cart away, exiting. Audrey appears across the stage. She holds a red candle in a jar. She goes to Mike. She hands him the candle. She has vibrant face make-up on, that resembles a skeleton with flowers. She leads him to the edge of the stage. They look out as song finishes.)

Scene 6

MIKE: You're all dressed up.

AUDREY: It's the Day of the Dead.

MIKE: They have that on Olvera Street.

AUDREY: You like the first stand, with the taquitos
and the avocado green sauce.

MIKE: Those are great taquitos.

AUDREY: And then you have a margarita or two.
You watch the people and go home.

(She gestures.)

AUDREY: Recognize that?

MIKE: It's my car.

AUDREY: Not anymore. You leave something out
here and it's not yours anymore.

MIKE: It's been spray painted. What is that? *(tries
to look closer)*

AUDREY: The devil and a duck.

MIKE: They're walking into clouds.

AUDREY: Let's not go over there.

(Mike looks around.)

MIKE: There weren't houses here. It was a field with chaparral, and these purple wildflowers.

AUDREY: Only this is left now.

MIKE: Goddamn developers.

AUDREY: Everyone says that.

MIKE: Doesn't it bother you? Your home is changing?

AUDREY: Can't do anything about it.

MIKE: I used to come here. I liked the open land, looking for things. I found an arrowhead. And something else. *(trying to remember something.)*

AUDREY: There was a path down the garden, a secret way I walked to school. A man used to talk to me. He said he lived all alone in that Victorian house over there.

(She stares off, Mike looks.)

MIKE: That's a big house for one person.

AUDREY: That's what I thought.

MIKE: Something's not right about that story.

AUDREY: That's what I thought.

MIKE: But you didn't go see it, did you? He asked you to, didn't he?

(She doesn't answer. He gets stern.)

MIKE: We could hurt you. And no one will give a shit about your boomerang. Do you understand?!

(She runs off as he looks after her. Lights darken. Sound of wind.)

Scene 7

(Wind fades, lights brighten. Jesus is crumpled in the corner, a sombrero covers his face. Two goblets are turned over next to him. Carla enters with a bouquet of purple wildflowers. Mike watches as she places them down.)

MIKE: People leave flowers on the road in LA after a crash. Off Mulholland Drive you can see cars in trees from when they went over the cliff. They look like sleeping birds from a machine age.

(Pause.)

MIKE: My mother is buried somewhere. I haven't been to her grave. But what's the point, right? This is for us, not the dead. You feel better now, right? Because you left those flowers? But whoever that is, is still dead.

(Upset, she hits him. Toni Fisher's "The Big Hurt" plays. Jesus pops up.)

JESUS: Lovers, look at the two of you.

CARLA: We're not lovers.

JESUS: Aren't you tired of diddling your clitty alone on the couch with a beer? *(pause)* There's a taco truck over there, I suggest you get a few carnitas, enjoy them, they give you some potent gas so careful. Then fuck each other's brains out! And don't neglect around back, the woman needs to be shown that the anal is carnal! I just got out of the hospital, a back scratcher up my ass and she still didn't find the prostate!

MIKE: It's well protected up there.

JESUS: Yes it is! But the genitals are the most fragile. I dream of the days when my dick worked; now it's like a banana slug in my hands, bloated, yellow. They dump crums of toxic waste where I live. I get depressed about it, but Quaaludes help.

MIKE: I used to take those and listen to Led Zeppelin III.

JESUS: *(sings "The Immigrant Song")* Ahh! Ahh! We come from the land of the ice and snow, from the midnight sun where the hot springs blow! *(stops singing)* I get my ludes from the video store on Walnut Ave., you go past the roped off pornos and my god! The things that are going on in that back room!

CARLA: I've seen you.

(Pause, Carla and Jesus have a beat of eye contact.)

JESUS: And I've seen you, Senora. I have a periscope and I've seen those titties.

CARLA: You play over there with your son, near the tree. He can't catch or throw a ball.

JESUS: He's retarded. I don't like the term 'special needs,' there's nothing special about it. It sucks and his brain is a blob.

CARLA: You have so much patience. I want to tell you that it's beautiful.

(Pause; Jesus is moved by this but tries to hide it.)

JESUS: He knows nothing of his ego, and he loves unconditionally, what we all want but few can do. A great love was unearthed inside me when he was born. You know what I'm talking about.

(That has some significance for Carla.)

JESUS: I love the messiness of his emotions. The way he looks at the world, sweet and drooling. That fucking kid is curious about everything,

where most of us could give a shit. He'll be a child forever, full of wonder. *(pause)* But he will need a woman, a hooker with daddy issues or mental mania, who will do anything, and won't mind my diseased ganglia as well. We have a beautiful life in the hills with other Mexicans. There are fresh tortillas. Wild chickens running around. Places to hike and dream.

CARLA: Where is his mother?

JESUS: We met when we were 11. I impregnated her immediately in the old Kaiser Steel Mill. *(pause)* He killed her coming out. And I hated him for a bit. But I'm not angry anymore. It doesn't get you anywhere. Every year we celebrate her at the Day of the Dead Festival. I tell my son about her, the shadow of her long eyelashes on the ground. *(pause)* I know you and we have never spoken and that's not right. My name is Jesus and I live in the hills of your town with my retarded son. We are deformed from the chemicals.

CARLA: I'm Carla.

JESUS: So, you guys burying a guinea pig here or some shit?

MIKE: Is there an actual cemetery around?

JESUS: People bury shit in this field. There's dead gang bangers, meth heads. ATV accidents. A lot of dead people in the Inland Empire. McDonalds hides their factory accidents here. Better check that order of French fries for a finger! I've got a few dozen hamsters around here, one of them my boy strangled.

CARLA: *(to Mike)* I can take you there.

JESUS: Oh no, get those carnitas and fuck! Listen to me missy, before your vagina dries up and retreats in shame with all the other old vaginas! And don't think they talk to each other they are alone. Well, I'm off to an illegal truck stop. It's a beautiful place. There is no violence, just marijuana and strippers. They use a fuel rod as a pole. Some are horrid to touch, but I can assure you, everyone gets fucked.

CARLA: I hope to meet your son one day.

JESUS: His name is Luis and I have told him about the joys of the pussy and the a-hole. Are you busy later?

CARLA: I'm not going to have sex with your son.

JESUS: I'm sorry, I can't help myself.

MIKE: Couldn't you introduce him to other retarded girls? Maybe they'd fall in love.

JESUS: Yes, that is down the line, but I want him to have good sex first.

(Carla steps out and gestures.)

CARLA: The cemetery is over there.

(Mike joins her. They both look out. Jesus starts to back away.)

CARLA: At the edge of town.

(Jesus ends up back at the wall and slumps, covering his face with the sombrero.)

Scene 8

CARLA: Is your father buried there too?

MIKE: She told me he was a preacher. That he lost his mind in scripture.

CARLA: There are people like that.

MIKE: Then she said he was a fisherman. He left us for the sea.

CARLA: You never knew who he was?

(Pause.)

MIKE: One day a termite man came over, and he didn't leave for a few weeks. He was kind, he cooked us steaks. He danced with my mother to Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. And they drank. Finally, he had to get back to his wife. The walls to our house disintegrated, he wasn't a good termite man. A coyote came in. You could see stars where our ceiling fell. She liked that. *(pause)* There are pictures in my mind of her, but I don't know if they're real. She comes to me in dreams.

CARLA: There was a woman who used to live around here. She would wander through town in

these dresses, like the kind in old movies. A ghost from another time, people thought she was a freak. But I wished I could tell her that no one wore hats and gloves anymore and it was good she was doing that, so we wouldn't forget how people used to be. There was talk. Of fathers bringing their sons to lose their virginity. Sad men whose wives had died of cancer. Old men trying to forget their futility. They all went to see her.

MIKE: My mother was the town whore.

(Pause, Carla takes this in.)

CARLA: I'm sure she helped a lot of people.

(Sound of distant children's laughter/celebration, but with an ominous undertone. Carla is drawn out.)

CARLA: The children! They've come back!

(She exits, toward the sound.)

Scene 9

(Jesus awakens. He hands a drink to Mike.)

MIKE: This is good.

JESUS: It's sangria from the slums of Hemet.

MIKE: I've been thinking about your son.

JESUS: Thank god for booze.

MIKE: What kind of life he'll have.

JESUS: It'll suck.

MIKE: Couldn't he surprise you?

JESUS: Like one night without stomach acid? I don't think so. The moments between us are so violently beautiful and then they are gone and I am breathless. I hope you have exhausted your woman and she lay in your bed, swollen and dreaming. I don't get invited much to dinner parties. I sour the conversation with reality. No one wants to hear anything bad, you know? Our parents are old and dying, and then we will be old and die, what should we do? My body is changing, getting uglier. Hairier. Viagra gives me an erection till dawn. It's pul-

sating, conjured by demons. Who will touch it, in the fire light?

(Yells to the offstage.) Throw the ball back, you fool! Aiyee, this is so hard! A shrink said to let the children be, to not always save my son from shame so he can feel life.

MIKE: He is looking up at the sky.

JESUS: God I love him.

MIKE: How can we know what he is thinking? He could be dreaming of terraforming new worlds.

(Pause.)

JESUS: There was a killer here. A killer of children. He lived in a house hidden by orange groves. It smelled sweet, but he wasn't.

MIKE: What happened to the killer?

JESUS: He got what he had coming.

MIKE: What was that?

JESUS: What do you think? The town got together. We stormed into the field, to his house. We ripped him apart.

MIKE: I understand.

JESUS: The parents here are grotesque creatures who have outlived their children. This goes against nature, like meeting a woman hornier than you. But there is a calm in this town now. The most terrible thing has already happened to many people here. Unlike others, in LA. They're scared, waiting for the horrors that will be but haven't taken shape yet. Come and watch the fuckin' sunset with me.

JESUS: But don't even try to jiggle my balls. Don't get any romantic ideas.

MIKE: It's strange not to feel the planet turning around. It's moving so fast.

JESUS: If gravity went away, we would all fall off in different directions. How do you die if you never crash into something?

MIKE: You suffocate in space. But you keep falling. And you become a skeleton twirling in the sky.

(Pause.)

JESUS: Don't drink all that drink now, okay?

(Jesus winks at him.)