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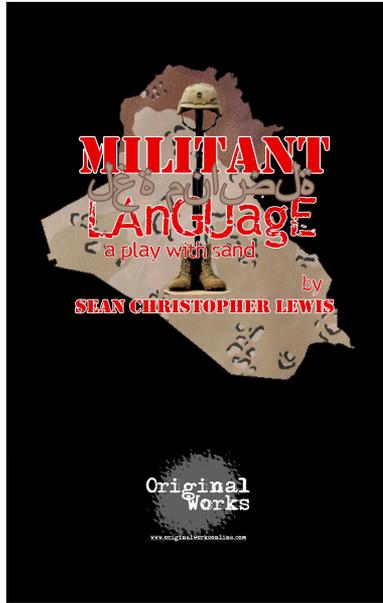
Hugging The Shoulder

© Jerrod Bogard

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Militant Language by Sean Christopher Lewis

Synopsis: Set in modern Iraq, this savage contemporary fable ignites when a pair of American soldiers return from a routine surveillance detail covered in blood. The barracks are no safe haven. The Captain fights to control his troops as they walk the high-wires of a secret homosexual affair, the sexual abuse of a female soldier, a missing Iraqi boy, and a baby found in the desert, ala Moses. This play explores how violence begets violence, lies beget lies, truth is born from trust, and understanding war makes as much sense as sand raining from the heavens.

Cast Size: 5 Males, 1 Female

Hugging the Shoulder

by
Jerrod Bogard

For Dad.

Hugging The Shoulder was originally produced in New York City by Kenny Wade Marshall and Michael C. Free-land and presented by the New York International Fringe Festival (a production of The Present Company) on August 12, 2006 with the following cast:

Brian Floyd as Jeremy
Sam Dingman as Derrick
Jane Petrov as Christy
Justin Ness as the Officer

Directed by Jerrod Bogard
Stage Manager: Tom Powers

Invaluable to the development of the script were the subsequent productions mounted by Nilsa Reyna at Chicago Fusion Theatre (Chicago), Kevin Patrick Murphy at Filthy Rogue Productions (Los Angeles), Darnelle Radford at Represented Theatre Company (Philadelphia, PA), and Amber Kelly at Theater of Thought (Narragansett, RI). The play was revised by the author and produced by Glenn Meche at Crescent Theatre Collective (New Orleans, LA).

Characters

JEREMY—Late 20's. Veteran of the Afghanistan War. Prone to mood swings and sudden character shifts. One moment he's commanding the room, in charge and responsible, the next he's a victim, a martyr, and a little kid. Jeremy still wears his dog tags, but you'll never see him in uniform or desert camouflage.

DERRICK—Mid 20's. Jeremy's younger brother. Much more like his big brother than he suspects himself to be. Derrick is an idealist who is afraid to act on his ideals. He's a little softer than his brother, and a little afraid of him too.

CHRISTY—Late 20's. Jeremy's girlfriend. A hard-headed spitfire with a weakness for lost puppies. Christy is described as "a lilly in a cast iron vase." She's too skinny for her frame, and too old for her age.

OFFICER—Highway Patrolman (man or woman). Professional, courteous, armed.

Setting

America. 2005.

On the highway, in and around Derrick's old van. Also in Jeremy's shabby living room.

Text Note:

The mark ‘/’ indicates that the next speaker should begin speaking here. Likewise, an ellipsis at the end of a line indicates for the actor to continue to his or her next line without waiting for a cue. These lines “dovetail.”

Last Night I Drove a Car

a dream

Last night I drove a car
 not knowing how to drive
 not owning a car
I drove and knocked down
 people I loved
 . . . went 120 through one town.

I stopped at Hedgeville
 and slept in the back seat
 . . . excited about my new life.

—**Gregory Corso**

From “Last Night I Drove a Car” in *Mindfield: New and Selected Poems* by Gregory Corso, copyright © 1998. Reprinted by permission of Thunder’s Mouth Press, a member of The Perseus Books Group.

HUGGING THE SHOULDER

“BABY LOCKS”

(A van. Driving down the highway.

Derrick is at the wheel. He’s been out here a while and he could use a shower and a bed. The sounds of the road swaddle him: the whir of the tires against the blacktop, the whistle of the wind through a crack in the window, the bellowing of an 18-wheeler passing by. This is a spell-binding and meditative place—the road. The lights change as Derrick’s seat bucks forward.)

JEREMY: *(From the backseat, unseen until now)* I’m gonna fucking kill you! Why? Why? Why?! Gimme. Gimme the— Gimme— Gimme the phone.

DERRICK: Got no phone.

JEREMY: No just—You— Gimme— Give. Me. The fucking phone!

DERRICK: There’s no phone.

JEREMY: Lie!

DERRICK: Lie.

JEREMY: Lie. I know you. I know you. Derrick- Derrick - Gimme the phone. Call m— Call mom. Just let me— just call mom.

DERRICK: Phone's dead.

JEREMY: Plug in.

DERRICK: No signal.

JEREMY: No- honor, you— Know you lie, you fucking little lie. Derrick. Derrick. Derrick. God— pull over. Pull over- Pull over! Pull fucking over!!

DERRICK: Fuck.

JEREMY: Jumpin'—I'm jumping out. I'm jump—

DERRICK: They're all / locked with the baby locks.

JEREMY: Fuck I'll fucking jump the fuck baby what?

DERRICK: The child safety / locks, Jeremy. You ain't goin nowhere.

JEREMY: Kick the goddamn windows out. Let me the fuck out! . . . Out. Why? (*Jeremy weeps. Pause.*)
When I die—

DERRICK: Nobody's—

JEREMY: Gonna kill you. Gimme- the phone.

DERRICK: Phone's—

JEREMY: Lie. Call— just lemme—

DERRICK: Not now.

JEREMY: Who— I'm gon— (*getting sick*) I'm—

DERRICK: Bucket. In the bucket. . . . Jeremy? You—

JEREMY: Lie- er.

DERRICK: Find the bucket? It's right back—

JEREMY: Who are you? . . . Please. Please. This'll be okay. S'important. I gotta tell her something. Just lemme make a call. Please! Lemme just call mommm.

DERRICK: Later.

JEREMY: Please!! Please, Der. I'm just- I'm only- please askin. Mom'll—Mom's worryin. Know she's worried, Derrick. Worried sick.

DERRICK: Mom knows where—

JEREMY: 'Bout Christy? She's gonna- she's liked to flippin out worried. You know she is. S'okay though. S'okay. You be a good brother you be a good son. K? I need to do this.

DERRICK: Later.

JEREMY: Now! I wanna tell her I love her. I'm OK. Derrick I— Lemme tell her I'm OK.

(Jeremy lunges at him, grabbing for the wheel. The van swerves. Tires Screech.

Lights change.)

“A TREE IN THE WOODS”

(Lights up on a shabby hole of a living room.

Jeremy sits across from Derrick. Upstage is a guitar on a stand. A second guitar leans against the couch. Jeremy is slightly, but increasingly on edge.)

JEREMY: Man, she aint my girlfriend.

DERRICK: Well, thinks she is.

JEREMY: I think I'm sober enough to drive but the Breathalyzer disagrees, now don't it? Stop. K? Stop trying to make this a heavy night. Just drink, Derrick, and hang out? When's last time you just hung out?

DERRICK: There's a productive life.

JEREMY: What? Jesus already. Just chill. Don't always gotta be doin' something.

DERRICK: I don't—

JEREMY: Always gotta be working on something / or thinking about working on something or—

DERRICK: I don't— That's not even.

JEREMY: You never just chill. Just chill.

DERRICK: I'm chillin'.

JEREMY: Chill.

DERRICK: I'm chillin' all-freakin-ready. I chill it's cause I'm done with something. Right? Wanna get things done. I want to do something.

JEREMY: Well get over that shit. Sometimes just gotta chill- when things aint done.

DERRICK: Spoken like a true American.

JEREMY: (*Touched a nerve*) Problem?

DERRICK: Easy, Sergeant Slaughter. My patriot pills are here somewhere.

JEREMY: Best take them mugs, ya pinko-rat-commie bastard.

DERRICK: Aaand still with the pinko. Still with the pinko?

JEREMY: Da.

DERRICK: Love it. Love- that the fear of communism was so- what- imbedded in the American psyche, come two decades since the U.S.S.R. falls apart and we're still yellin "commie" at anybody's got a free thinkin' thought in his head.

JEREMY: Shut-up. Lucky I don't call homeland security on yer pinko ass, comrade.

DERRICK: Probably would too.

JEREMY: Got some zip ties under the sink in there. Strap yer ass to the ironing board and show ya what a com-mie's best at.

DERRICK: Right. Well. That's horrifying. . . . So but what's up, man? You told her she couldn't come over or what?

JEREMY: Forget about it.

DERRICK: And she's OK with that or what? That don't sound like—

JEREMY: She was pretty P.O.'d I'd say.

DERRICK: Dude, call her back.

JEREMY: What?

DERRICK: Tell her she can come over.

JEREMY: I don't want that bitch over here.

DERRICK: Well, this is new then. Cuz we thought she was, like, living here.

JEREMY: Who's we?

DERRICK: Me & Mom.

JEREMY: Yeah well, she was pretty much. Need another one?

(Jeremy gets two more beers.)

DERRICK: Uhm, OK, yeah. She at her mom's then?

JEREMY: I don't care. Me no care 'bout stupid bitch. No care. Beer.

DERRICK: Yeah. We runnin' out?

JEREMY: If we do I can send my little brother out to get some more.

DERRICK: Your little brother doesn't have any money.

JEREMY: Then he ought not be drinkin my beers then, huh?

(Jeremy tries to grab his bro's beer. Derrick snatches it away and drinks.)

DERRICK: Just—

JEREMY: Aw God, what? Just what?

DERRICK: She waited, dude. 18 months? Yer back for like three months—not even three months, and it's all messed up already? Come on. What are you doin?

JEREMY: Then tell me what to do, Derrick. Tell me. What.

DERRICK: I mean give it a chance at least. Right? Like—I don't know. Stop talking all the time about want'n to go back. For starters I mean. Freaks her out, man.

JEREMY: Yeah, well, she already said she won't- so.
Not an issue.

DERRICK: Won't what?

JEREMY: If I go back.

DERRICK: Won't what?

JEREMY: She's not gonna stay with me!

DERRICK: Are you seriously thinking about going back?

JEREMY: If I am or not aint the point, shit head. It's that
she- she isn't willing to stick it out. So drop it. Drop
her. Drop it.

DERRICK: OK. So you're breaking up then?

JEREMY: Break your face.

DERRICK: Breakin' that little girl's heart's what
you're—

JEREMY: Bitch is screwin the Wendy's guy.

DERRICK: Wait. What?

JEREMY: He's prolly biggy-sizen the whore right now.

DERRICK: What?

JEREMY: Yeah.

DERRICK: Naw.

JEREMY: She's hangin' out with this fuck-knocker like every day and shit.

DERRICK: The Wendy's guy? . . . Naw.

JEREMY: What the fuck you know? Yeah the Wendy's fuck. She's porkin' him on the daily and I'm breaking her heart. Fuck you.

DERRICK: Sorry I brought it up. . . . She's not though.

JEREMY: I'm gonna hit you now.

DERRICK: Please.

JEREMY: Please. Please my ass. Why you all-a-sudden so interested in Christy for, huh?

DERRICK: What?

JEREMY: Yeah "what".

DERRICK: Please.

JEREMY: Yeah ok "please".

DERRICK: Fuck you.

JEREMY: You wanna hit me so bad. Hit me. Do it.

DERRICK: Freakin touch me and I will.

JEREMY: Then stop running and I'll touch you with my fist.

DERRICK: Whatever.

JEREMY: Pussy.

DERRICK: Jerry—

JEREMY: Fucking "Jerry" me. Get the fuck out.

DERRICK: What?

JEREMY: Get out.

DERRICK: What?

JEREMY: Out! I don't need your pussy ass reminding me what I'm related to a fuckin faggot!

DERRICK: Fuck this.

JEREMY: Ah "fuck this". Fuck you. Hit me.

DERRICK: I'll hit you.

JEREMY: Then why don't you do it?

DERRICK: I will.

JEREMY: Then do it.

DERRICK: I'll hit you. I'll—

(Jeremy punches his little brother in the chest. Derrick falls backward onto the couch and struggles to get his breath. Jeremy giggles. Then laughs. Then stops laughing-cold.)

JEREMY: Say you're gonna do something,... do it. Hear me? Come on. (*offering a hand up*) Come on. Get up. Get up! Don't fucking make me mad, dude. . . . Alright. That was fucked up. Alright? Alright. Ok? I'm sorry. Ok? Ok? Dude? Bro? I'm sorry, Ok?

DERRICK: (*Whispering*) Shut up.

JEREMY: Here- here dude. Drink dude. Beer.

DERRICK: Get the—

JEREMY: Dude. Bro. (*laughing*) You're my brother. Come'on. Seriously. Derrick. I love you.

DERRICK: You— Fucking sick.

JEREMY: Sick aint it? Last weekend my ass got jumped— got the holy shit kicked outa me.

(*Derrick takes a few moments to recover from the blow to his chest and his ego.*)

DERRICK: What happened? . . . What happened?

JEREMY: Hmm?

DERRICK: What happened?

JEREMY: Last weekend? Rob and Jim and them. Tore my shit up.

DERRICK: What? Why? Wha'd you do?

JEREMY: I deserved it. I picked a fight with'm. Was stupid really. Bein' retarded. I was—I had my rifle out. Was—It was stupid.

DERRICK: Wha-Why? Wha-wh-what would you— Why? Why... do that?

JEREMY: So they'd kick my ass.

DERRICK: But— but why?

JEREMY: Why not.

(A beat.)

DERRICK: That doesn't make you deep.

JEREMY: What? Who's trying to be deep, hippy? What doesn't?

DERRICK: "Why not?"

JEREMY: Why not what?

DERRICK: Said you got all your friends to kick your ass last week and I said—

JEREMY: No I didn't.

DERRICK: You did. You said—

JEREMY: I'm gonna kick your ass you don't—

DERRICK: I said why.

JEREMY: Shut-up.

DERRICK: I said why, and you said,...?

JEREMY: What.

DERRICK: Do you remember what you said?

JEREMY: I remember why I don't hang out with you.

DERRICK: I said why. You said "why not?" Now- now- now that doesn't make you smart or intense or deep or deeply fuckin intense. It makes totally, uh, uh, irrational. How 'bout in-freakin-sane, dude. It makes you fucking crazy, and deeply fuckin disturbed.

JEREMY: I'll give you that bro. I am fuckin crazy.

DERRICK: I know.

JEREMY: I know you know.

DERRICK: I know.

JEREMY: You better know.

DERRICK: Believe me I know.

JEREMY: Good. Cause.

JEREMY & DERRICK: Knowing is half the battle.

DERRICK: Go Joe.

JEREMY: Go motha fuckin Joe. . . . Drink up, bro. Come on, you gotta keep up. Fuck. Fuckin whatever dude. Going to bed.

(Jeremy exits to bedroom. Derrick briefly flips through a magazine he finds on the floor, then he picks up his guitar, strums a simple tune and hums a melody to himself.

After a few moments, Jeremy enters. Jeremy's perceptibly calmer, even peaceful. He picks up his guitar and sits, but just as he begins to lay down a sweet lead guitar part to Derrick's rhythm, Derrick stops playing.)

JEREMY: Ho-ho-ho- Leave me hangin'- what's that about? Go. *(A beat.)* Man, y'aint always gonna have someone beggin' you to— You know what you're like? Yer like that tree, man.

DERRICK: I'm like a tree-man?

JEREMY: You're like that tree,... man.

DERRICK: Which tree?

JEREMY: Oh shit. Oh shit. You just- Wow. You reminded me of Gainer when you said that. Oh shit. . . . Wow. Aint thought of that guy in a minute. *(getting lost in the memory)* Oh no.

DERRICK: Jer? . . . Jeremy. Yo.

JEREMY: Ho ho and a bottle o' rum. Yeah. Forget it.
Yeah.

DERRICK: But what about it? I'm like a tree?

JEREMY: You're the tree in the woods, man. . . . You
heard about the tree in the woods.

DERRICK: Must not.

JEREMY: Shit. Then I guess it really didn't make a
sound after all.

DERRICK: Oh, that tree.

JEREMY: Oh that tree. Yeah. But dig it though. If no-
body hears that tree goddamn fall? If nobody hears it
fall? Right?

DERRICK: Yeah. . . . Yeah. You're a real Buddhist.

JEREMY: You're a fake Christian. Go.

*(Derrick strums his guitar, and Jeremy joins in with a
lead. They play beautifully together, communicating musi-
cally in a way they never can with words.)*

*The music continues, transitioning to a pre-recorded ver-
sion of the same, as the lights change.)*

“STRAWBERRY”

(Lights up in the van. Nighttime. The music, continuing from the previous scene, transitions to the van’s speakers.)

DERRICK: Jerry. Jeremy. I’m pulling over.

(He pulls to the side of the road, turns off the motor. The music stops.)

DERRICK: I’ve gotta... Oh, my God. Gotta get some sleep. Oh man.

(Derrick leans his chair back, closes his eyes.)

DERRICK: We’ll get back- get back on it in a... a little... *(yawn)* back on the road. Hooo.

(After some silence.)

JEREMY: Lemme out. Let me out. Gotta shit. I gotta shit, Derrick. Not a fucking dog. Let me out.

DERRICK: Fuck.

(Derrick gets out, walks around the van and opens the side door. Jeremy rolls out of the van. His legs give out. He vomits.)

DERRICK: Careful. Careful, man. Oh, shit. Y’alright? Right? Get it out. Just... Just get it out there.

(There's light traffic on the highway. Intermittently through the scene we hear the sounds of passing cars as headlights illuminate the boys in bursts of white.)

JEREMY: Leave.

DERRICK: *(Yeah right)* Hmhhh.

JEREMY: Leave then! Get. Take me— Uhhhnuh.

DERRICK: Alright, Jerry?

JEREMY: Puked.

DERRICK: That's cool.

JEREMY: *(Vomits again.)* Puked again.

DERRICK: S'alright. S'no biggy. Got more shirts.

JEREMY: Cold. Oh God.

(Derrick goes through the van for clean clothes and a towel.)

DERRICK: Shit-shit-shit-shit-shit...

JEREMY: Oh God. Ahhh. Here comes. Ahahhhhh.

DERRICK: Shitty-shit-shit-shit.

(Derrick comes out of the van with a shirt, pants and a towel.)

DERRICK: Getcha- here. We'll getcha all- here go. Get you cleaned up, right? There go. Done? For now?

(He helps Jeremy take off his shirt.)

DERRICK: Oh, God, man. Holy puke, you pukey fuck. You aint eat nothin', man, what is all this?

JEREMY: No-oh-no. Nu-unh.

DERRICK: Ok. S'ok. S'ok.

(He wipes Jeremy's face with the towel, tenderly, like you would a child.)

DERRICK: I'm sorry. Hey, I am. *(Derrick sees blood on Jeremy's elbow.)* Uh-oh.

JEREMY: Uh-oh.

DERRICK: Oh- yeah you- gotcha a little cut there.

JEREMY: Wha?

DERRICK: S'no biggy. Just little scrape is all. / We get you fix up in no time. Jer. Jerry.

JEREMY: Huh? Is it— Oh God. Oh no. Oh God. Blood.

DERRICK: Jeremy.

JEREMY: Blood!

(Jeremy tries to get away while Derrick moves to restrain him.)

DERRICK: Listen to me. Listen to me. You fell coming out of the—

JEREMY: *(Delusional)* It's all over. It's on you! It's all over you!

DERRICK: It's OK – it's OK.

JEREMY: My blood is on you!

DERRICK: *(Pinning him down)* Listen to me! Jeremy. Shh-Shh.

JEREMY: Am I? Am I? Oh God I am!

DERRICK: Shh-sh-sh-sh. You- you just scraped your elbow. K? Just like a little scrape, OK? A strawberry.

JEREMY: *(Like a scared kid)* A strawberry?

DERRICK: Just a strawberry.

JEREMY: *(A beat.)* I ruined yer shirt. I ruin- everything.

DERRICK: No, man, fuck this shirt. I hate this shirt.

JEREMY: Blood. I'm sorry! I'm sorry, Derrick, I'm Sorry!

DERRICK: I'm sorry! . . . *(to himself)* Do this. We can do this. People do this. *(to Jeremy)* Come on. You're alright. Come on. Let's- let's get those pants off. Let's go, pukey. Come on.

(Derrick takes off Jeremy's pants.)

JEREMY: My blood ruins. Does all the things. Everything. Burn that shit. Gotta burn it. Rid of it.

DERRICK: Here ya go. *(helping him into fresh pants)*
Heeere ya go. Ok. Ok.

JEREMY: You know you'n drown like that? 'Fore anybody even knows, you'n drown. Choke on your blood? Drown on your blood? You wouldn't like that none.

DERRICK: Probly not.

JEREMY: You gotta drain it. You know how to do that?

DERRICK: No. No I—

JEREMY: It's OK. I know how. You won't drown- alright? I know how. Make a hole- lets it out. See? Sticky though. Blood. Sticky. So sticky. Crust up there on your lips. Alright? It's glue- it's glue in your eye. OK? Don't burn the boots. Don't wanna burn your boots. Don't burn the boots. Clean'm clean'm clean'm. Clean them bitches. Clean them bitches too because the blood'll glue you to the fucking ground bro. Blood'll-

blood'll— Listen! Listen-listen-listen! For once. For once, for once please listen, Der. This will save you. . . Cuz it will glue you to the ground. It will hold you in place and you are stuck. You are froze. And you don't want that. You are a target. You are a target. You are a target. . . . We gotta spread out. Hear me? Go! Get away from me! . . . Ohhh... You're like a baby. My ears are... Shhh. . . . Sh-sh-sh-shhhh. Listen-listen-listen-listen-look. . . . Look.

DERRICK: But if I—

JEREMY: Why is it? . . . Oh. It's blood. . . . Blood. . . . Blood. . . . Dries like mud. (*A beat.*) I was a baby. I'm a baby, Derrick. A man. You're a man.

DERRICK: You're a man, man. You are a man.

JEREMY: I'm fucking dead.

DERRICK: No.

JEREMY: And, you're alive, and I wish you had fucking died. Wish I'd killed you when you were a baby, waste. Not that. Not that way. Not that way. I love you and I say these fucking hate you things. I'm fucking dead. I wanna be dead. Dead me. So stop this. Stop it. Stop this— Please. You can stop this inside. Please gimme... gimme?

DERRICK: I don't have any.

JEREMY: AHHHHHHH!

DERRICK: S'gonna be OK. Gonna pull through. It's hard.

JEREMY: Shit.

DERRICK: Fuckin'-A shit. It's tough, bro. But you're tough.

JEREMY: Shit.

DERRICK: We'll do this. Right? Just keep you hydrated, get some food up in your system you're gonna be good. You're gonna. We'll do this. Can do this. Maybe we—

JEREMY: No Van!!

DERRICK: Cool.

JEREMY: Don't get in the van, Derrick.

DERRICK: Well, I aint gonna leave ya, man.

JEREMY: Never left you. Don't you. Don't me.

DERRICK: I aint.

JEREMY: Don't.

DERRICK: I aint leavin', man.

JEREMY: Fuckin hell trap. Don't.

DERRICK: Right here, bro. Goin' nowheres.

JEREMY: Left.

DERRICK: No, man. Right here. Right here.

JEREMY: Left. Left.

(Pause. Derrick strays a bit, looking for a distraction and some fresh air.)

DERRICK: Crickets. Wow. Hear them crickets? When's last time heard crickets like that? Fuckin forest. Lucky it's still here. Like the last untouched piece a land in the state maybe. Loud as hell. Like back on the lake. Out on that government land. Had the times out there. Hey. Hey. Hey you- you 'member when Dad got us them BB guns? BB gun war?

JEREMY: I don't know.

DERRICK: Like them old westerns Dad'd make us watch? You went one way, I went the other. . . . We were out there for like all day. Out there deep woods. Looking for each other. Climbing trees and hiding under brush and shit. Playing like commando, right? Waitin' to get the jump on you. Right? What was the rule? No shoot'n above the waist. Safety first.

JEREMY: Shut up.

DERRICK: Cool. You remember though, right?

JEREMY: I was in the house.

DERRICK: Hmm? . . . Wha?

JEREMY: Please shut up.

DERRICK: Naw, 'member, I found you by the lake. You were taking a leak. I got the drop on you.

JEREMY: I was watchin TV.

DERRICK: What?

JEREMY: People's Court. On all day.

DERRICK: What? Then how'd I find you by the lake?

JEREMY: Dad sent me out to find you. Thought you got lost.

DERRICK: You were not inside all day. I was humping the goddamn jungle like a freakin' lunatic. Shut up.

JEREMY: 'Ever, man.

DERRICK: What the fuck ever, man. I got the drop on you. Caught you with your pants down, literally. You're all trying to reach for your rifle. I'm all like "Don't move!!" Intense man. How do you not remember this? Probly still got the scar.

JEREMY: You missed.

DERRICK: Fuck what?

JEREMY: You missed.

DERRICK: Are we fucking ten? I hit you in the ass, dude. The right ass cheek. You were crying.

JEREMY: Fuck you.

DERRICK: And that's what you said— right before I shot you. Shit, think that was the first time I ever heard you cuss.

JEREMY: You missed.

DERRICK: I did / not miss.

JEREMY: Missed. (*noticing*) I stink.

DERRICK: Say I did miss. Right? Why'd you fall on the ground and fall down makin' just a big ol' fuss and / and start to crying and screamin' all...

JEREMY: I was- I was-

DERRICK: "My butt, My butt!"

JEREMY: Was acting.

DERRICK: Yeah. You acted pretty F'n good then.

JEREMY: (*Smelling himself*) S'that me? Smells like- Oh man.

(Jeremy starts to get up but stumbles. Derrick catches him.)

DERRICK: I got you, man.

JEREMY: Didn't want Dad to know. And you begged me not to tell on you.

DERRICK: He'd a messed me up. And you. 'Member I had to be like—You made me be your slave for like a month after that so you...

JEREMY: Wouldn't tell dad.

DERRICK: That I'd shot you.

(Jeremy pantomimes shooting Derrick. It occurs to Derrick that he's been had.)

DERRICK: Ass-hole.

JEREMY: Acting!

DERRICK: Get back in the van.

JEREMY: Nuh-uh. Air.

DERRICK: We're get'n going. Get in.

JEREMY: You my big brother now? Yer not my boss.

DERRICK: I sure as hell am. I'm responsible for you. Come on, man. S'get a move on. We'll get to a nice spot couple hours—

JEREMY: No.

DERRICK: Have lunch a nice sit-down.

JEREMY: Can't eat.

DERRICK: Feel better when we get going.

JEREMY: Van makes it sick.

DERRICK: Everything makes you sick.

JEREMY: I'm fucking dying! I'm fucking sick!

DERRICK: You're not dying. You wish you were but ya
aint.

JEREMY: Don't touch me. Don't-don'-don'-don touch
me!

DERRICK: Come on.

JEREMY: Help!! Kidnap. I'm being kidnapped!

DERRICK: You're already kidnapped! Your three days
fucking kidnapped. Little— Way late be screamin' for
help, bro.

JEREMY: I will stab you in your left eye. Come'ere!
Come'ere! (*out of breath*) Fuck. Just- just come here.
Why won't you come here? Why won't you just leave
me alone?

DERRICK: Know why.

JEREMY: Lemme be. S'not your problem.

DERRICK: Is my problem.

JEREMY: My problem. My life.

DERRICK: Your death.

JEREMY: Then let it be. . . . Why?

DERRICK: (*Sudden outburst*) Cause you're my brother!

I don't just let you kill yourself. I don't just watch you waste your fucking life so I can think about you dead on your couch for the rest of my life saying. . . . "Fuck!! I should a done something!!" . . . You think-you think? You don't fucking think. All you think about's yourself. You're fucking stuck! Stuck & tied up to this idea that you were shit on so bad you can't get—that you can't get clean- and you want punish everybody around you by punishing yourself. To fucking death. Well hoorah, Jeremy. It worked, and we are sorry, man. We feel bad. Now we just want to get you better. Fix the mistakes.

JEREMY: You can't.

DERRICK: Get you back. So fuck you. I'm here to help.

You're here because you got your way. Signed up for it. Lined up for it. You chose that. You chose that and you chose this.

JEREMY: I didn't know.

DERRICK: You knew! Gimme me that shit?! We all knew! . . . Centuries they warned us, and you are not a stupid man. And if Homer, and Hemingway, and fucking who—fucking Ken Burns weren't enough... there was me. (*A beat.*) And here's me- (*to himself*) making no goddamn sense at all. Couple days, everything's clear. Everything's better a couple days. We'll get somewhere. We'll get somewhere and get clear, and then when things are clear— when things are clear we'll go home.

JEREMY: Things don't get clear.

DERRICK: Things don't get clear you don't go home.

JEREMY: Take me home.

DERRICK: Get in the van.

JEREMY: Need air.

DERRICK: I'll op' the windows. Get in the van.

JEREMY: Windy. . . . Please, Der. Please. Call mom. Or call Leon. Get me just a little and this'll be easy. You know. Go easy. I get in the van. You be the hero.

DERRICK: That's not what this is about me bein' the—

JEREMY: You're the hero.

DERRICK: Just get in.

JEREMY: Where we going?

(A beat.)

DERRICK: Jeremy?

JEREMY: No.

(Jeremy tries to run away. Derrick grabs him. They scuffle.)

JEREMY: Air! Air! . . . Air!

(Derrick easily gets his weakened brother back in the van. He slams the door.

Lights change.)

“ROTTEN”

(Lights up on the living room.

Christy is on the couch. Jeremy is in the bathroom Off-Stage. Christy has been chanting this mantra for some time now. She was speaking as the lights came up, or even before.)

CHRISTY: ...Rotten. Rotten. Rotten. Rotten. Rotten inside. Rotten outside. Rotten. It's all rotten. It's me though it's me I'm rotten. Rotten. Rotten. Rotten. Rotten. Rotten inside. Rotten outside. Rotten.

JEREMY: *(From off)* Stop it!

CHRISTY: It's all rotten. It's me though it must be cuz.

JEREMY: *(From off)* Stop it or get the fuck out!

(The cellphone on the table vibrates. She answers the phone.)

CHRISTY: Just an idiot is all. I mean. It's an idiot who—
Hello.

JEREMY: *(From off)* Your not a idiot already! Gimme a minute in here, right?

(Christy, distracted by Jeremy, forgets about the phone. She drops it or lays it aside, but without hanging up.)

CHRISTY: S'possible. Suppose that's possible. That it's rotten like that. Idiot. . . . Such, such an idiot.

JEREMY: *(From off)* Shut!! I love you fucking shut-up!

CHRISTY: *(Inhaling deeply through her nose as if waking up from a blackout)* What am I doing?

JEREMY: *(Off stage)* Chris! Killing this for me. Drink or come in here or shut the fuck up or get the fuck out.

CHRISTY: *(To herself)* Wait. Wait-what's— Who is this? This' not me, right? Cuz why would I— No. What am I— Jeremy? Why do I love you? . . . Jeremy? . . . Do I love you?

(After a long pause. Jeremy storms in from the bathroom. He has a rubber tube wrapped around his arm and holds a small syringe between his teeth. He grabs Christy by the wrist and tries to force her out of the room- out the front door. They struggle. She escapes his grasp, scuttling across the floor and ducking behind a chair.

Jeremy plops down on the couch. He wastes no time in giving himself his shot. Then he stretches out and nods. The room gets very quiet, Christy crawls to his side. She takes his hand in hers and lays his palm upon her head. She dries her tears with his finger and pets her hair with his limp, unresponsive hand.)

CHRISTY: Awe sweetie. Oh sweetie. You need me so bad. You would die. You would die, baby, you would die. Couldn't breathe without me. Couldn't see. Oh, baby. You know what it is. It's all the things that hold it

all together coming loose. It's all the little pieces falling off and melting down. It's every thing they ever said now turning black and fading out, and you can see that. I know you can see that. Taste and smell and see it all it's rotting out. Give'n way. It's rotten in and out, baby. It's rotten. Rotten.

(She picks up the cell phone, looks briefly at the screen. She flips it closed or hangs up the call. Then to Jeremy)

CHRISTY: You left a little bit, right? You left a little bit.
For me. You left a little bit.

(She crawls into the bathroom like a sick cat.

The lights change.)

“4 0 7”

(In the darkness...)

DERRICK: I brought some weed. I have some weed. . . .
You wanna smoke? . . . Mind if I do?

(A flame sparks in the darkness, then the lights come up in the van. Nighttime. Derrick is driving, puffing on a one-hitter. Jeremy is in the back, unseen.)

DERRICK: Forgot. You don't puff the herb. Don't rock de gange. Nope. Nopers. Just. You like, uh, yeah. We know what you like, don't we. I like it. I like it cause- I like it. Wish you liked it. Cause I got some. . . . *(cell phone rings)* Shit on me. *(re: the caller I.D.)* Who's callin me from a 407? 407, that's- what is that? Savanna? Orlando? Well holy-freakin-moly. Am I gonna talk to you right now? 407, are you Christy? Are you Christy right now? *(ringing)* Hell are you doin callin me? *(phone stops ringing)* Well wait-wait-wait-wait-wait aww- hell. *(to the phone)* Aughta put you on vibrate, you. Disturbin' the peace up in here. My sanctity. *(puts phone on dashboard)* My van. This is our sanctity! This is our base. *(like a robot)* “All your base are belong to us.” This like our fort. No girls allowed! We are in- this is our safe haven from the wicked winds of the world, man! From all that... bad stuff. From... Rude though, not even leave a message. . . . Sheesh. Christy. *(pause)* Well you not gonna call back then?

Are you OK? Dig this dig this— I'm not your fairy god-mother. I got no magic wand make you what you wanna be. You wanna be a good girl- be good. . . . Word for you, Christy? Word for you? Fragile. Fragile. Matter how big and bad you wanna be in them steel-toe boots, girl- Goin' off to prom in that white dress in them black combat boots. Like a- like a- . . . a lily in a cast iron vase. What you are. Same as Jeremy. Yep. And that's why ya'll were so close. Yeah. Flowers in vases though- they got no roots do they? Yeah, and ya'll just- just keep changin' the water like that- changin' the water in your heavy-ass vases- wondering why you were wilting. Why are we wilting? Well, I won't. Won't keep you and water you, and wonder why you're dying. Go on down Orlando. Try and put roots down down there. No soil down there, babe. Sand and swamp down there. Nothing but cut flowers down there. All everybody tryin' to plant their flowers in the sand. Walt Dismal World: compost heap of the rootless and wilting. . . . Guess I aughta told you that I guess. Shit. Guess I still could. (*A beat.*) But that's my thing I guess. I won't. God damn me.

JEREMY: Derrick!

DERRICK: I'm sorry. I'll shut—

JEREMY: Derrick? Who's here? Are you here?!

DERRICK: Right here. You're Ok.

(Jeremy comes forward, rising to his knees beside Derrick.)

JEREMY: I heard the phone. It was— And you outside and—

DERRICK: Naw man. S'OK.

(The phone rings. Jeremy grabs it from the dash.)

JEREMY: *(Re: caller ID)* Who's 4—

(Derrick snatches the phone and throws it out the window.)

DERRICK: Phone's dead.

JEREMY: I heard it—

DERRICK: It's dead. Dead! No one's there!

(Lights change.)