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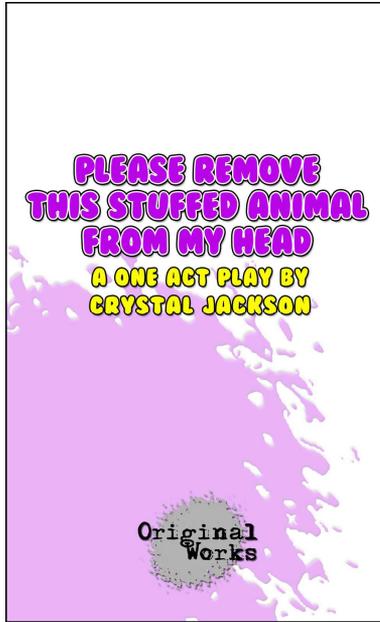
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*The Singularity*  
© Crystal Jackson  
Trade Edition, 2016  
ISBN 978-1-63092-097-5

*Also Available By  
Crystal Jackson*



**Please Remove This Stuffed Animal From My Head**

**Synopsis:** A man has an appointment with the Bureau for Stuffed Animal Removal in hopes of getting a little stuffed lion removed from atop his head. The bureau subjects the man to a series of questions about his character and his motives, even forcing him into an interpretive dance to express his feelings, but he cannot be swayed. Ultimately, the bureau chief is called in for the final decision. The removal procedure is extremely dangerous, unavoidably life threatening, and comes with one severe long-term side effect.

**Cast Size:** 3 Males, 1 Female

# **The Singularity**

**By Crystal Jackson**

## Acknowledgments

*The Singularity* was originally produced by Science Fiction Theatre Company of Boston (A. Vincent Ularich, Artistic Director), September 2014. The production was directed by Cait Robinson. Kelley Holley served as dramaturg.

Astrid	Kathy-Ann Hart
Scientist	David D'Andrea
Nurse	Matthew Zahnzinger
Kyle	Nick Bennett-Zendzian
Bob	Robin Gabrielli
Doctor	Stewart Evan Smith
Lawyer	Ervin Melara

The New York premiere was presented by Virago Theatre Company at The Flea Theater, July 2015. It was directed by Amy Fowkes. The stage manager was Gary Quinn.

Astrid	Laura Lundy-Paine
Scientist, Bob, Doctor, Lawyer	Dan Fagan
Nurse, Kyle	Michael Vega

## **CHARACTERS**

*ASTRID*—Female. Early 40s. Emerging from a lifetime of doing what other people wanted. Flowering.

*SCIENTIST*—Male. Mid 20s. Smart, ambitious and oblivious. Nerdy charm.

*NURSE*—Trans female. 20s to 30s. Major sleep deprivation from working two jobs. Menacing sweetness. Clogs.

*KYLE*—Male. Early 40s. Astrid’s best friend. Tougher than he looks.

*BOB*—Male. 30s to 40s. Attractive like, say, a successful wine salesman. Manipulative.

*DOCTOR*—Male. 40s to 60s. Mostly well-meaning. Your goofy uncle.

*LAWYER*—Male. 20s to 30s. You’d want to wash your hand after shaking his.

*CARETIMER2000*—Off-stage. Female. A recording. Authoritative. Unyielding.

*DR. JIM*—Off-stage. Male. Through a walkie-talkie.

## **PLACE**

A city.

## **TIME**

The near future.

## **NOTES ABOUT CASTING**

Diversity in casting is encouraged.

If you choose to double-cast, here are suggested combinations:

Scientist / Doctor

Nurse / Lawyer

Kyle / Bob

## THE SINGULARITY

### ACT ONE, SCENE 1

*(Early afternoon. An examination room in a large hospital. The room is clinical, cold and brightly lit. State of the art and very clean. A keypad is on the wall next to the door.)*

*Lights up on ASTRID, who is lying on the exam table in a hospital gown, her feet in stirrups and splayed legs covered with a sheet. LAWYER has his head buried under the sheet. ASTRID is staring at the ceiling.)*

LAWYER: Will you hold this?

*(LAWYER hands ASTRID a pair of pliers.)*

LAWYER: And this. *(A small flashlight.)* Now take a deep breath in and exhale as fast as you can. Again. Great. *(He comes out from under the sheet.)* Now say *(With a British accent.)* “Mr. Tuttle’s masquerade ball was attended by heads of state, alcoholic botanists and saxophone players.”

*(Pause.)*

LAWYER: Mr. Tuttle’s masquerade ball was attended by heads of state, alcoholic botanists and saxophone players. I need you to say it. Mr. Tuttle’s masquerade ball—

ASTRID: I get it. Mr. Tuttle’s masquerade ball—

LAWYER: No. With an English accent.

ASTRID: (*With a poor British accent.*) Mr. Tuttle's masquerade ball was...was attended by...I don't understand how this—

LAWYER: Finish the sentence please.

ASTRID: Heads of state, alcoholic botanists and saxophone players.

LAWYER: Very good. Thank you for your cooperation.

(*LAWYER stands. ASTRID brings herself up to a sitting position.*)

ASTRID: So is uh everything in order down there?

LAWYER: I wouldn't know.

ASTRID: Because you're waiting to get some results back?

LAWYER: No.

ASTRID: But you were just, you know. Looking around.

LAWYER: I'm sorry. I'm not a doctor.

ASTRID: You're what?

LAWYER: I'm a lawyer. For the hospital.

ASTRID: Then why were you looking—

LAWYER: It's procedure. I do this with all the patients in your special circumstances.

ASTRID: Oh my GOD.

LAWYER: I should have explained myself. Of course, I assumed you understood what was happening.

ASTRID: Why would I expect a lawyer would come in here and—

LAWYER: I have to check things out before the procedure begins. Make sure no fraud is being committed. A lot of women enjoy it.

ASTRID: A perfect stranger—

LAWYER: Unless you're ashamed—

ASTRID: I want you to leave.

LAWYER: I haven't completed my report.

ASTRID: Get out of here!

LAWYER: Stop acting like I've violated you in some way. I did nothing more than your doctor will do. In fact, I'd wager I did quite a bit less. Didn't even hurt, did it?

ASTRID: That's not the point.

LAWYER: (*Menacing.*) I said, it didn't even hurt, did it?

ASTRID: No.

LAWYER: That's because I put some lube on my fingers. See? (*He wiggles his fingers and then removes examination gloves.*) I've heard that I have a much

softer touch than most of the doctors. Even the lady doctors.

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): This investigation has lasted ten minutes. If you require more time to complete your investigation, please enter your request now.

LAWYER: Do you have any questions for me?

ASTRID: Can you write up the papers for me to sue you?

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): If you require more time to complete your investigation, please enter your request now.

*(LAWYER enters a code on the keypad.)*

LAWYER: Just doing my job.

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): Please advance to the next examination room. Please do this now. Thank you.

*(LAWYER exits as DOCTOR enters and punches a code on the keypad. This is a well-choreographed and familiar routine for both.)*

DOCTOR: Hello Betsy.

ASTRID: My name's Astrid.

DOCTOR: I call all my patients Betsy or Roger. That way I never forget anyone's name. Would you prefer Roger?

*(ASTRID would not prefer Roger.)*

DOCTOR: Let me see if I can guess why you're here. I'm really good at this. Lung vacuum? Massaging your DNA? Maybe a toe straightening?

ASTRID: I'm here to get inseminated.

DOCTOR: Oh. Good for you. It'll be nice to do something old fashioned for a change. (*He consults her file.*) Did you review the list of donors you were given at your last visit?

ASTRID: I was wondering if I might look at another list. One with better options.

DOCTOR: That's an extensive selection. Or a broad one, anyway. You have a few to choose from.

ASTRID: I'd hoped for someone a bit more...normal.

DOCTOR: All of the specimens come from donors who've undergone rigorous testing and are in peak physical condition at the time of their donation.

ASTRID: One of the men is a serial rapist.

DOCTOR: But his semen is healthy. You don't have to have a relationship with him.

ASTRID: Another is a convicted murderer. I don't want to raise the baby of a man who's in prison.

DOCTOR: (*Consulting the file.*) Good news—he's no longer in prison. According to his profile, he was a very attractive, virile man. Before they executed him.

ASTRID: A friend of a friend used a donor who's a vegan veterinarian that raises orphaned kittens. She didn't have to choose from a list of felons.

DOCTOR: Must have better coverage. I don't pretend to know how the insurance business works, but I would assume that inmates come cheaply. I mean, that they—

ASTRID: I know what you meant.

DOCTOR: All you need to do is pick one of the lucky gentlemen on your list and I'll get to work. We'll make you a mommy in no time.

ASTRID: What about leftovers from one of your patients with better insurance?

DOCTOR: You mean, sitting in the fridge with a little foil over the top?

ASTRID: Yes! I wouldn't need much.

DOCTOR: We don't have leftovers. And even if we did, I could lose my license for not following the dictates of your coverage.

ASTRID: No one would ever know. All I need is a couple of minutes with a funnel and blammo, done.

DOCTOR: Absolutely not. And that would never work. A funnel. Now a turkey baster might do the trick.

ASTRID: Whatever it takes.

DOCTOR: You specified you don't want contact with the donor after the baby is born. Have you changed your mind about that?

ASTRID: No, definitely not. No contact.

DOCTOR: Then look on the bright side. You can be sure you won't be hearing from any of these men.

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): This pre-surgery consultation has lasted two minutes and 15 seconds. The average pre-surgery consultation lasts one minute and 45 seconds. If you require more time to complete this consultation, please enter your request now.

*(DOCTOR punches numbers on keypad.)*

DOCTOR: We're running out of time. They start billing you per second at the three-minute mark.

ASTRID: I guess I'll go with...the white collar criminal. Or do you think I should choose the guy who breaks into houses?

DOCTOR: I'm a nurture over nature guy. I really don't think it matters. *(Punches numbers on keypad to summon NURSE.)* Now if you'll go ahead and scoot down to the end of the table for me and *say cheese*.

*(ASTRID scoots. DOCTOR arranges the sheet over her legs. Something catches his eye.)*

DOCTOR: Did you know that we also offer many aesthetic services in this office?

ASTRID: Aesthetic services?

DOCTOR: We have spa staff who can provide our patients with a number of treatments including facials, manicures, pedicures...bikini waxing.

ASTRID: I'm really just here for the one thing.

*(NURSE enters with a vial of viscous liquid and a thin tube and hands them to DOCTOR.)*

DOCTOR: The nurse is here to make sure you are comfortable. If at any time you don't like what you're feeling or want the procedure to stop, let one of us know.

*(NURSE places her hands on ASTRID's shoulders and begins to rub.)*

NURSE: I'm here for you, doodlebug. Now just relax.

*(NURSE starts humming a "relaxing" tune in ASTRID's ear.)*

DOCTOR: Okay, here's what's going to happen. After suctioning the specimen into this collection tube, I will insert it into your—

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): Stop the procedure immediately. The patient has no insurance.

ASTRID: Wait. No. Yes I do!

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): Stop the procedure immediately. The patient has no insurance.

ASTRID: I have it! I have insurance!

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): Stop the procedure immediately. The patient has no insurance.

*(DOCTOR punches numbers on the keypad to silence CARETIMER2000. He hands specimen and tubing to NURSE, who throws it all in the trash can.)*

ASTRID: I brought all my paperwork with me.

DOCTOR: The nurse will give you your options.

ASTRID: That's it? You're leaving?

DOCTOR: I'm sorry, Betsy. If you'd been a little faster making your decision, we might have been able to complete the procedure.

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): Please advance to the next examination room. Please do this now. Thank you.

DOCTOR: Time waits for no one.

*(DOCTOR exits.)*

NURSE: Sometimes they drop you in the middle of a procedure because they decide they don't want to pay, but they'll blame it on a missing form or something. It'll probably take months to get it straightened out.

ASTRID: I don't have months.

NURSE: Poor thing. I'm sure you had your little heart set on this.

ASTRID: What am I supposed to do now?

*(NURSE moves around to the end of the table to remove the sheet. Something catches her eye.)*

NURSE: There is one thing you might want to consider.

ASTRID: Yes. Please. Anything.

NURSE: Did they tell you we offer bikini waxes here? It doesn't hurt. In fact, I get my entire body waxed. Except for the eyebrows. That would look funny, wouldn't it? Me without eyebrows? *(Pause.)* You can give it a go again next month. Cheer up you frowny little goose!

ASTRID: There is no next month. This is my last egg.

NURSE: You kind of waited until the train was pulling out of the station before deciding to hop on board, huh?

ASTRID: Yeah, I guess so.

NURSE: It's like the plane is about to land and you suddenly decide you'd rather stay home. No, no, I know what it is. It's like you've jumped off a cliff and right before going SPLAT you have a change of—

ASTRID: I thought I had more time.

NURSE: Maybe this is for the best. I always say it's important to see the sunshine in every situation, no matter how difficult.

ASTRID: Is that what you always say?

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): Preparing to initiate disinfection procedure. If uninsured patient has not exited examination room, please enter code for pause at this time.

*(NURSE punches numbers on keypad.)*

ASTRID: Can I have my clothes back?

NURSE: Is your spouse in the waiting room?

ASTRID: No.

NURSE: Is he at home?

ASTRID: She moved out when I made this appointment.

NURSE: Making-a-point gone, or gone gone?

ASTRID: Gone gone.

NURSE: Oh dear. Solo parenting is so difficult.

ASTRID: Guess that's not really a problem for me, is it.

NURSE: Is there someone who owes you a favor, maybe? Someone who could provide you with *(Beat.)* the special sauce?

*(ASTRID stares at the trash can that contains the vial of liquid that NURSE threw away. NURSE notices and begins to tie up the trash bag in preparation for removing it from the room and keeping it away from ASTRID.)*

NURSE: You don't have to sleep with him. Get him to put it in a coffee cup, then use...oh, what are those things called?

*(NURSE makes a squeezing motion with her hand.)*

ASTRID: A turkey baster.

NURSE: Exactly! Easy peasy simple squeezy.

ASTRID: I'm not going to go walk around with a coffee cup asking for donations.

CARETIMER2000 (V.O.): Preparing to initiate disinfection procedure. If uninsured patient has not exited examination room, uninsured patient will have to pay triple overtime fees beginning in sixty seconds.

NURSE: We need to get you out of here.

*(NURSE hands ASTRID her clothes.)*

NURSE: Oh, sweetie. I'm sorry things are so rigid at this hospital.

ASTRID: You say that like there are hospitals that aren't rigid.

NURSE: There are a few...underground clinics.

ASTRID: But they were all shut down.

NURSE: Not all. *(Pulls a business card out of her pocket.)*  
I shouldn't do this, but what the heck. This is where I work nights.

ASTRID: Dr. Jim's Health 'N Stuff?

NURSE: They'll see you right away.

ASTRID: But I'm having problems with my insurance.

NURSE: You don't have to have insurance at Dr. Jim's. The fees are very reasonable. And since they aren't constrained by the same regulations as a place like this, they're a lot more...open minded about their patients' needs. Your simple procedure would be a piece of cake.

ASTRID: And they'd be able to find a donor right away?

NURSE: Oh sure. We offer a modest stipend to people off the street. Pays more than a blood donation. We're practically swimming in the stuff!

ASTRID: Do you think they can see me today? This... window of opportunity will be closed in about 30 hours.

NURSE: My number's on the back of the card. Call me in an hour.

End of scene.

## ACT ONE, SCENE 2

*(Evening, the same day. ASTRID is in the waiting room of Dr. Jim's Health 'N Stuff, a back-alley clinic. The place doesn't look clean enough to be a low-cost veterinary clinic. Maybe there's a dog or cat asleep in the corner. If there were a receptionist, she would be cooking something cabbage-based on a hot plate at her desk.*

*Though ASTRID is unimpressed with her surroundings, she's hopeful that Dr. Jim will be able to address her issue and is willing to overlook certain unfavorable elements. This is her last chance, after all, and her outlook is bright.*

*ASTRID is shaking her leg trying to wake it up after having been seated on a hard plastic chair for hours. BOB is looking at her. Intently. Buzzing light from the neon Dr. Jim's Health 'N Stuff sign outside the storefront washes over them.)*

ASTRID: My leg fell asleep.

BOB:  
I love it when  
that happens.

ASTRID:  
I hate it when  
that happens.

ASTRID: You like it when your leg's asleep? The tingling drives me nuts.

BOB: The tingling drives me crazy, too. I'm talking about the part before that. When the leg or foot or...arm...is numb.

ASTRID: I never really notice it. Until I try to move and then it starts screaming.

BOB: Limbs can be so useless.

ASTRID: I wouldn't go that far.

BOB: They get in the way. When I'm trying to sleep on my right side, this damn thing keeps me from getting comfortable. It would be nice if you could detach your limbs, you know? Like if you could just screw your arm on and off.

ASTRID: You could keep it in a case when you weren't using it. Like a pool cue.

BOB: Or maybe throw it away. If you cut the blood supply off with a tourniquet, your flesh will eventually begin to die. Then they have to amputate.

ASTRID: When I was a kid, I constantly worried about losing a body part. I'd be jumping on the bed and then get scared I'd hit the ceiling and knock my head right off my neck.

BOB: It's not that easy to “lose” a body part. Trust me.

ASTRID: I was consumed by the thought of it. Every day on the bus to school I worried we'd be in an accident, and as everyone climbed from the wreckage dusting themselves off, someone would point at me and say, “Look! Astrid lost an arm!” and I'd look down at myself and see that I—does that sound weird?

BOB: No.

ASTRID: You're looking at me like—

BOB: I'm wondering why you're here.

*(ASTRID doesn't respond.)*

BOB: This is kind of the end of the road as far as medical procedures go. You have to be desperate. Or broke. Or in need of something the traditional medical community frowns upon.

ASTRID: Oh, I uh...

BOB: Dammit, Bob, you're doing it again. Leave this nice lady alone. I'm sorry. Why you're here is none of my business. If it's too embarrassing to talk about.

ASTRID: I'm not embarrassed.

BOB: It's obviously very personal, and I'm sorry for prying.

ASTRID: It's not that personal. Actually, it is personal, but it's not that unusual. I want to have a baby.

BOB: They sell babies here?

ASTRID: Not ready made. They have the...ingredients.

BOB: The mister have trouble with his swimmers?

ASTRID: There isn't a mister.

BOB: Oh. I guess the misses has trouble with her swimmers?

ASTRID: Dammit, Bob, you're doing it again.

BOB: Sorry. I spend a lot of time in waiting rooms. They're like confessionals.

ASTRID: It's okay. I'm a little on edge. Been a rough day.

BOB: Job troubles?

ASTRID: Not anymore. I quit about two hours ago.

BOB: Good for you.

ASTRID: Yeah. Good for me. It was a demeaning, soul-crushing place. I was only there for the insurance.

BOB: Now you never have to go back!

ASTRID: I never have to go back!

BOB: Because you have a lot of money in savings!

ASTRID: I have almost nothing in savings. But it'll...I'll be alright.

BOB: Well, congratulations.

ASTRID: Thanks.

BOB: Things are looking up already.

ASTRID: Maybe they are.

BOB: Good for you.

*(ASTRID and BOB enjoy a companionable silence for a moment, though ASTRID's poor financial outlook begins to hit home for her.)*

BOB: That's a fairly straightforward procedure. Why here?

ASTRID: Really?

BOB: This is the place you come when you want to be inseminated by your dog. Or your brother. So which is it?

ASTRID: My brother's dog.

BOB: I'll bet it's a German Shepherd. I've always found them to be a regal, masculine breed.

ASTRID: I was kidding.

BOB: So was I.

ASTRID: Good one.

BOB: Are you looking for any special requirements?

ASTRID: In what?

BOB: The donor.

ASTRID: The opposite, actually. I don't want to know anything about him.

BOB: Ah, you want a mystery man. I applaud your choice to leave things to chance. But there's no telling what kind of person you might end up with. What if he has the psycho gene? Or is ugly?

ASTRID: I don't care what my baby looks like. And a safe, loving environment is much more important than genes. Nurture over nature.

BOB: I don't believe in that. I wasn't nurtured at all as a kid, and I've done pretty well for myself. I own an entire block downtown. An entire block.

ASTRID: How did you end up here, then?

BOB: My reasons for being here are much more...delicate than yours. *(Pause.)* Some people, most people, actually pretty much everyone doesn't understand. Instead of empathy, all I get are questions.

ASTRID: I won't question you.

BOB: *(Takes a deep breath and delivers a familiar speech.)* I'm going to get what would appear to be part of a perfectly healthy arm cut off.

*(ASTRID stares at him, not quite believing.)*

BOB: Not the entire thing. From here down.

ASTRID: Why would you do that?

BOB: It gets in the way. I'm extremely left handed, so I don't use it that often. Just more real estate to wash and groom. Plus, I hate it.

ASTRID: You hate your arm?

BOB: You think I'm crazy. I'm not crazy. I've been tested.

ASTRID: No, I...it's just...it doesn't...I'm sorry.

BOB: It's okay. It's a pretty common reaction.

ASTRID: Isn't there another option that's not so...final? Maybe you could wear a long glove on that arm?

BOB: Thing is, it's not *my* arm. It's not part of my body. It feels like I'm carrying around a ten pound tube of meat with dangly meat fingers on the end. This...this thing doesn't belong to me.

ASTRID: Who does it belong to?

BOB: Don't know, don't care. The only thing I'm focusing on is that one quick chop to freedom.

ASTRID: I don't know what to say.

BOB: Maybe you'd like to ask more questions?

ASTRID: Sorry. I wasn't expecting you to say that. I thought maybe hair plugs.

*(BOB touches the top of his head, suddenly self-conscious.)*

ASTRID: What will they do with it? Will you take it home?

BOB: What, and put it on my mantel? I never want to see it again. A reminder of an unhappy past.

ASTRID: How are you going to celebrate? Give out a bunch of high-fives?

BOB: Funny. I'm thinking about throwing a "Bob's Whole" party.

ASTRID: Bob's hole?

BOB: No. Bob IS whole. Maybe that's not the best name—

ASTRID: Are you scared?

BOB: Nope. I've thought about this for a long time. Are you?

ASTRID: Yes. But I've been scared about having a baby for a long time. And scared about not having one.

BOB: Yet here you are. Ready to take the leap.

ASTRID: Yes. Not exactly as planned, but.

BOB: You'll do whatever it takes to have a baby?

ASTRID: Yes.

BOB: Even if people don't understand or think what you're doing is crazy?

ASTRID: Yes.

BOB: Even if they try to talk you out of it?

ASTRID: They tried. And yes.

BOB: You know, our situations aren't that different.

ASTRID: Well. I wouldn't say that—

BOB: We both have a big, life-changing goal in mind and won't stop until we reach it. That's special. *(Pause.)* Is it just me, or are we making a connection here?

ASTRID: It's just you.

*(BOB moves a little closer.)*

BOB: No, I can feel it. Like a gravitational pull. Deny it all you want—

ASTRID: Oh, I will—

BOB: It's there.

ASTRID: Does it smell like cabbage in here?

BOB: I won't be good for physical activity for a couple of days—

ASTRID: No, cabbage and antiseptic. That's what it is—

BOB: But after that I'm all yours. You won't have to conceive in this shithole, which I'm sure would be an emotional relief. And, of course, no charge! First one's on the house! (*Pause.*) I'm kidding you.

ASTRID: Oh thank God, I thought—

BOB: They're *all* on the house!

ASTRID: I'm not...absolutely not.

BOB: This is the offer of a lifetime. I'm very talented. Very talented. And, bonus, I have great genes. My DNA is a-okay.

ASTRID: I'm going to pass, but thanks.

BOB: Are you worried about me having only one hand? Because you'll never be able to tell.

ASTRID: You're right about that. I'll never be able to tell.

BOB: I get it. You're one of those high-maintenance women who wants compliments first, huh? Get your motor running? Okay. You have nice tits. They're still round and not too saggy. Our baby will enjoy sucking on those. Me too.

ASTRID: You make a compelling case, Bob. I can't imagine why you're single.

BOB: Oh, I'm not single.

ASTRID: Of course.

BOB: We have a real progressive relationship.

ASTRID: You're very lucky. To have anyone.

BOB: And now I'm going to be a father!

ASTRID: No! You're not!

BOB: I had to come in for a number of pre-surgery consultations. While I was here, I decided to make a few bucks instead of spending all my time in the waiting room by myself. I've donated gobs of the old man juice! Odds are pretty much one hundred percent I'll be the father of your baby. You'll have to send me a picture after it's born. Let me give you my address.

*(ASTRID begins to gather her things.)*

BOB: Don't worry, I won't intrude. I'd like to see a photo every now and then. Maybe come over for dinner once a month. Go on the occasional family vacation. I'll even pay for it. For everything.

ASTRID: No, okay? No. What is wrong with you?

BOB: Well you don't have to be such a bitch about it. I'm trying to help you out here, but you're being very rude. And inconsiderate.

ASTRID: Because I don't want to have a baby with a man I just met in the waiting room of Dr. Jim's Health 'N Stuff?

BOB: You're a selfish person. You'll be a horrible mother.

ASTRID: Screw you, Bob. I hope they cut the wrong arm off.

*(NURSE enters to find ASTRID and BOB in the midst of their heated exchange.)*

NURSE: Bob, we're ready for you. Come on back.

BOB: *(Cheerful.)* Okay, great! *(Menacing.)* Astrid, right? I'll look you up later.

*(BOB exits.)*

NURSE: You're our last patient of the night. Glad we were able to squeeze you in.

ASTRID: Could I ask you a question?

NURSE: Yes, doodle?

ASTRID: Is there any way I can choose the donor?

NURSE: That's not really how it's done at this clinic.

ASTRID: That guy I was talking to said that he contributes here a lot.

NURSE: I can't discuss that. Patient confidentiality

ASTRID: Oh. Right.

NURSE: Forgot where I was for a moment. Night job! There's no patient confidentiality here. Bob doesn't "contribute" as far as I know. I don't even think his ding-a-ling works. Why dear? Did you want to use his sperm?

ASTRID: No. I specifically *don't* want to use it.

NURSE: I don't blame you. There's something off about that guy. (*She looks around to make sure they're alone.*) I just came back from the doctors' lounge and was going to put this in the fridge.

(*NURSE shows ASTRID a vial of fluid.*)

NURSE: We'll make sure to use this one, which definitely isn't Bob's.

ASTRID: Great. That's a relief. Thank you.

NURSE: Made sure to think nothing but loving, happy thoughts when I made this.

ASTRID: It's yours.

NURSE: Yes, and it is *fresh*. Piping hot! I only do this for my favorite patients.

ASTRID: Would it be possible for me to use someone else's?

NURSE: Did you hear what I said? I only do this for my favorite patients.

ASTRID: I appreciate the gesture but I was hoping—

NURSE: I'll have you know I have an almost one hundred percent track record. Even for you oldies. I've got kids crawling all over this city. I'm encouraging the mothers to get together and create a play group. Wouldn't that be a kick? Make sure you give me your number before you go so they can get in touch.

ASTRID: I don't want to be part of a play group, I don't want to give you my number, and I don't want to know who the donor is. If you could just give me someone else's, not yours and not Bob's, that would be great.

NURSE: I thought you'd be more open-minded. Didn't figure you'd look down on me because I'm a nurse and not some fancy pants doctor. You know they barely do anything, right? Just walk around in their long white coats acting like they hold life and death in the palm of their hand when in reality nurses are the backbone of the—

ASTRID: I don't. Want to know. The donor.

NURSE: It's not like I want to raise the child with you. Don't flatter yourself.

ASTRID: That's what people say, and then when the kid is five years old and celebrating his birthday at Kiddie Wonderland with the mother and sister who've loved him his whole life, some strange man suddenly shows up with a court order and takes him away. Before the birthday cake. And the loving mother isn't so loving anymore and the sister stays in her room and they never see the boy again.

NURSE: What, did you see that on *True Crime Stories* or something?

ASTRID: Please, can you just put that back and use someone else's? No offense.

NURSE: You're being a picky little prickly pear for someone with no other options.

ASTRID: I do have other options. You said you were swimming in the stuff—

NURSE: We seem to be fresh out—

ASTRID: From people off the street.

NURSE: You can come back on Monday if you'd like.

ASTRID: My egg will be gone in about twenty-four hours.

NURSE: Pity, that.

*(A voice emanates from the walkie-talkie that NURSE is wearing on her hip.)*

DR. JIM (V.O.): Nurse?

NURSE: *(Into walkie-talkie.)* Yes, Doctor Jim?

DR. JIM (V.O.): Bob is ready to have his arm chopped off. Think you might be able to join us? I need some help with the saw.

NURSE: Yes, Doctor Jim. I'll be right there.

ASTRID: Please don't send me away.

NURSE: I need to go help a patient who's a lot less particular about things than you are. But before I go...

*(NURSE feels around in her pocket for something.)*

ASTRID: *(Hopeful.)* Yes?

NURSE: I need to lock this door, so you should probably gather your things and skedaddle.

ASTRID: I didn't mean to insult you.

NURSE: In order for you to insult me, I'd have to care about what you think.

*(NURSE ushers ASTRID to the door.)*

ASTRID: Wait! Okay, I...I'll take it.

NURSE: You'll take what, dear?

ASTRID: Yours. I'll use yours.

NURSE: Mine is no longer available.

ASTRID: Please. I'm really sorry. I had these ideas about how things were supposed to go today and—

NURSE: Best laid schemes of mice and men—

ASTRID: And nothing has gone according to plan.

NURSE: Poor thing. You really don't know if you're coming or going, do you?

ASTRID: No, I guess I don't.

NURSE: I suppose I could reconsider.

ASTRID: Please? I would be very grateful.

NURSE: We've wasted a lot of time with all of this hen squawking. Here, hold this while I call the doctor.

*(NURSE tosses her vial of sperm to ASTRID, who isn't expecting it and doesn't catch it. The vial hits the floor, shattering, and splatters ASTRID's leg.)*

NURSE: Oops.

ASTRID: You did that on purpose.

NURSE: No I didn't.

ASTRID: You just tossed it at me without any warning.

NURSE: Oh, and it got on your clothes, too. You'll probably want to pick the glass shards out before we use it.

ASTRID: I'm not putting this... You'll have to get some more.

NURSE: I already told you. We don't have any more. And I don't have time to make another batch—

DR. JIM (V.O.): NURSE! You need to get your ass back here. *(Remembering appropriate walkie-talkie lingo.)* Uh, stat.

NURSE: Duty calls. *(She responds into the walkie-talkie.)* Be right there Doctor Jim. *(To Astrid.)* I'm sorry we couldn't make this transaction happen, but you really do have to leave.

ASTRID: Can I have a towel or something?

NURSE: There's a bar across the street. Maybe they'll have something for you. I've got to lock this door. Bye now.

*(ASTRID moves toward the door, defeated. NURSE waves and smiles as she leaves.)*

NURSE: Have a great weekend!

End of scene.

### ACT ONE, SCENE 3

*(Having left the clinic, ASTRID is now sitting at the bar across the street having a stiff drink. Not her first of the night.)*

*The bar may have been a popular place at some point in the distant past, but it's now populated with the sort of people who just want to disappear for a little while. A place where their spouse or the police won't find them. The décor is black and red with an ancient film of cigarette smoke.*

*SCIENTIST is checking out ASTRID. He's sipping on a drink and looking at his watch. SCIENTIST does this over and over again, look-sip-watch, look-sip-watch, until ASTRID can't help but notice him.)*

SCIENTIST: Uh, hi.

ASTRID: Hi.

SCIENTIST: Did you park in the lot across the street?

ASTRID: No.

SCIENTIST: Oh. I just wondered because I'm not sure if you can park across the street or not. I don't want my car to get towed.

*(No response from ASTRID. SCIENTIST looks at his watch.)*

SCIENTIST: Not that anyone wants their car to get towed.

ASTRID: Yeah, probably not.

SCIENTIST: Maybe if you were on your way somewhere really horrible, like an execution, then you might like it. You know, to slow you down.

ASTRID: Yeah.

SCIENTIST: Are you meeting someone?

ASTRID: Nope.

SCIENTIST: Not that you have to be meeting someone. I mean, a lot of times people just want a drink. Nothing wrong with that. What are you supposed to do, drink at home? That works too, but sometimes it makes you feel like an alcoholic. Not *you*. I mean me. *(Beat.)* You know. *(Beat.)* I'm not an alcoholic.

ASTRID: I was looking for someplace quiet.

SCIENTIST: One of those days, huh?

ASTRID: Yup.

SCIENTIST: Here's to forgetting your bad day.

*(SCIENTIST raises his glass. ASTRID does not raise hers in return. He looks at his watch.)*

SCIENTIST: Work got you down?

ASTRID: Nope.

SCIENTIST: Oh. I'm a scientist.

ASTRID: Yeah?

SCIENTIST: What are you?

ASTRID: I'm the person who's going to get drunk tonight.

SCIENTIST: I mean during the day.

ASTRID: And hopefully not have to get anyone's permission.

SCIENTIST: For money.

ASTRID: Is it still legal to get a drink around here? Is that okay with everybody?

SCIENTIST: If you want me to go—

ASTRID: I don't care what you—

SCIENTIST: You might want to scoot over a little.

*(SCIENTIST refers to the chalk outline of a human body that is on the floor near ASTRID's feet. She looks down to see the outline of an arm very near her leg. SCIENTIST looks at his watch.)*

SCIENTIST: You were about to get chalk all over you.

ASTRID: I'm throwing these clothes away when I get home.

SCIENTIST: That seems extreme. I don't think you got any on you—

*(SCIENTIST bends down to wipe ASTRID's leg clean.)*

ASTRID: Don't touch me! (*Pause.*) I'm sorry. Nothing personal.

SCIENTIST: I didn't mean— Looks like he died holding his drink. You usually don't see that much detail in chalk outlines. It's kind of artistic.

ASTRID: This is a real classy place.

SCIENTIST: It's not the greatest, but at least no one bothers you.

ASTRID: That hasn't been my experience.

SCIENTIST: A lot of the customers are on alcohol assistance, so they're always buying rounds on the first of the month. And as far as I can tell they don't do sweeps in this area. (*Pause.*) So what's your name?

ASTRID: You're a scientist, huh?

SCIENTIST: A researcher. Well, an intern. But I'm about to finish my master's, then I'll be a researcher. I was put on this highly classified, top-secret project that's going to change the world.

(*SCIENTIST looks at his watch.*)

ASTRID: Please tell me you're working on a time machine.

SCIENTIST: I'm working on the most important question known to man.

ASTRID: Why do bad things happen to good people.

SCIENTIST: No, I'm actually—

ASTRID: Does God exist.

SCIENTIST: That's not exactly—

ASTRID: What happens after we die.

SCIENTIST: No. (*Dramatic pause.*) I work with dark matter.

ASTRID: Never heard of it.

SCIENTIST: It's the fundamental building block of... everything. Picture the universe, right. Billions of galaxies, each populated with billions of stars and planets spinning around in what appears to be empty space. Only, it's not empty. It's dark matter, and it's alive. And growing.

ASTRID: That sounds terrifying.

SCIENTIST: No, it's beautiful. Dark matter pre-dates everything, including the Big Bang. Maybe it's been around forever. Once we figure out what it is, exactly, we'll have the keys to the cosmos.

ASTRID: Cosmic.

SCIENTIST: It's hard to predict when discovery will come, but I think we're on the cusp of a breakthrough. We've been able to isolate small amounts of it in the lab, but it remains inert. We haven't found the trigger to activate it. The start button. But we will. It's almost like it wants us to figure it out. I can feel it egging us on.

ASTRID: You said you were working on humanity's most important question.

SCIENTIST: Yes. Why are we here. And I already know the answer.

*(SCIENTIST looks at his watch, realizing he's been so caught up in his favorite topic he wasn't paying attention to the time. He's almost too late. He darts out the door of the bar to the street where he screams at the top of his lungs. We don't see him, but we do hear him. It's a cathartic, enthusiastic scream. When he's emptied his lungs, he comes back to his seat at the bar. There's no longer a need to look at his watch. There is a need to explain to ASTRID what just happened.)*

SCIENTIST: It's this thing I do. That I'm trying to start. Each night at 8:59, no matter what I'm doing or where I am, I go outside and just...let it all out. All the tension and frustration of the day, gone. The pressure, gone. I'm trying to get everyone across the city to do it. I think it'll cut down on crime and lower stress.

ASTRID: How long have you been—

SCIENTIST: I'm on week 27. Haven't missed a night.

ASTRID: And has anyone—

SCIENTIST: A few people have screamed at me to quit yelling, but no one's joined in. But they will. I have to be constant and regular, every night at 8:59.

ASTRID: And you always do it in the street here?

SCIENTIST: Always outside, no matter how bad the air is. I work late a lot, so it's mostly in front of my lab. They said if I do it around my apartment anymore they're going to evict me.

ASTRID: You should set an alarm so you don't have to keep looking at your watch.

SCIENTIST: I don't want to rely on technology. The lab's artificial daylight and caffeine keep me on a continuous loop. So I'm trying to train my body to tell me when it's time.

ASTRID: What happened 27 weeks ago that made you think, "This is it. This is the thing."

SCIENTIST: It was in the news. The Chimera Project?

*(ASTRID doesn't recognize the name.)*

SCIENTIST: We were creating hybrids, putting the sperm of one species with the egg of another. Our biggest success, or failure, depending on your point of view, was a gorilla-human hybrid. *(Pause.)* It wasn't our fault. That thing wasn't supposed to get out of the lab and...do what it did. I felt like the world was closing in on me. Have you ever felt like that? Like you want to jump out of your skin and start running?

ASTRID: Yes.

SCIENTIST: You should try it, the scream release. Totally change your life. But not tonight. The time has passed and it would confuse people to hear another one. Can I buy you a drink?

ASTRID: Sure.

SCIENTIST: *(To a bartender who never arrives.)* Another round, please? *(To ASTRID.)* I figured out who you remind me of. My mother.

ASTRID: Great. We probably went to high school together.

SCIENTIST: She's strong and pretty like you. Married to her work. Same as I'll be. I'd be happiest if I could spend seventy-five percent of my day researching dark matter, twenty-four percent sleeping and one percent, uh, you know.

ASTRID: Getting laid?

SCIENTIST: Yes.

ASTRID: Only one percent?

SCIENTIST: It doesn't sound like much, but it works out to about fourteen minutes a day.

*(SCIENTIST moves a little closer to ASTRID. He hears a noise emanating from ASTRID's body.)*

ASTRID: My stomach. I haven't eaten today.

SCIENTIST: Do you like grilled cheese sandwiches? I make a pretty good one. I know how to get the cheese all melty and the bread crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside.

*(ASTRID makes "mmmm" noises. She's pretty hungry. And she realizes SCIENTIST has something she needs.)*

SCIENTIST: I live right down the street. Across from that vacant lot on the corner. It's a two-minute walk.

ASTRID: I thought your car was parked across the street?

SCIENTIST: Oh, I, uh.

ASTRID: Let's have another drink.

*(ASTRID raises her glass in a toast. SCIENTIST raises his glass to meet hers.)*

ASTRID: To never becoming a chalk outline in a seedy  
bar.

SCIENTIST: To releasing pressure.

*(Their glasses clink together.)*

End of scene.