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TWO THUMBS UP

A Comedy

by

Colette Mazunik

for Leah, Matt, Angela, Chris, Daisy, Nate,
Colin, Corinne, Tirzah, and Jonathan,
my beloved improvisers

Cast of Characters

Joe: a hitman

Agnes: his housekeeper

Sylvia: a drama professor

Russell: a philosophy professor

Katherine: his wife, a literature professor

Travis: a student

Saul: a student (optional role) —played by the same person who plays Saul

Body #1

Body #2

Scene

ACT I

- Scene 1: Joe's apartment.
- Scene 2: Russell's office.
- Scene 3: Saul's room and mind. (Optional Scene)
- Scene 4: Joe's apartment.
- Scene 5: Russell's office.

ACT II

- Scene 1: Saul's room and mind. (Optional Scene)
- Scene 2: Russell's office.
- Scene 3: Saul's room and mind. (Optional Scene)
- Scene 4: Russell's office.

Time

ACT I

- Scene 1: Evening.
- Scene 2: Afternoon of the same day.
- Scene 3: Anytime. (Optional Scene)
- Scene 4: That night.
- Scene 5: That night.

ACT II

- Scene 1: Anytime. (Optional Scene)
- Scene 2: The next morning.
- Scene 3: Anytime. (Optional Scene)
- Scene 4: An hour or two later.

ACT I—SCENE 1

(JOE quietly unlocks the door to his apartment and lets himself in.)

AGNES

(from the other room)

Joe? Joe—Is that you?

(Pause. Joe freezes in the doorway.)

AGNES (continued)

Joe?

JOE

Yeah.

AGNES

(coming into the room)

You're home, I was worried. You didn't even call.

JOE

Well, yeah. Stuff just came up. You know me and work. You didn't have to stay.

AGNES

It's no problem. I've been trying to keep the food warm. You could have called. I was so worried. Now everything's gonna be overdone.

JOE

(interrupting)

Okay. Okay. I'm sure it's fine. I didn't expect you to still be here.

AGNES

But I made your favorite. Oh, I wasn't gonna tell you that. It was gonna be a surprise.

(Going into the kitchen—SHE will continue to talk from off stage.)

And homemade bread. I made homemade bread too.

(JOE starts to the door and begins to pull in the first of two dead bodies.)

AGNES (continued)

Can I get you a drink or something?

(Joe does not respond. He is struggling with the body.)

AGNES (continued)

Joe? Do you want a drink, maybe some wine?

JOE

No. It will be fine. Just go back in the kitchen.

AGNES

But . . .

JOE

It will be fine.

AGNES

Okay. You're so adaptable. You know I was . . . Oh, but I'm forgetting . . . I'll tell you over dinner.

(AGNES returns to the kitchen and JOE gets both of the bodies inside the apartment and hides them as the conversation continues.)

AGNES

(from the kitchen)

How was your day?

JOE

Good. Good. Same old same old, you know.

AGNES

Why were you late?

JOE

Oh, well. It was busy.

AGNES

You were at the store?

JOE

What?

AGNES

I said, were you at the store?

JOE

Yeah. Lots of people coming in today.

AGNES

Cause someone from your work called, looking for you. So I thought . . .

JOE

Really? Yeah, I had some road work today.

(AGNES comes out of the kitchen with a tray filled with candles, flowers, and a plate of food. JOE just in time gets the bodies out of her line of vision.)

AGNES

I didn't know you worked on the road.

JOE

I don't work on the road. Not on "the road". It was work away from the store.

(Pause)

Acquiring . . . merchandise.

AGNES

(as she turns on Sinatra)

You're so industrious. Pretty soon they'll have you managing the store.

JOE

(referring to the plate)

You know, I think I'll pass on dinner tonight. I just . . .

AGNES

But I made your favorite.

JOE

I know, I know. And I thank you, Agnes. It's just that I've had a rough day and . . .

AGNES

No, no, no, no, no. You just sit down. Sure, sit down. You think you don't need any food, but you see that's just what you do need. You just sit down. Eat a little. You'll feel better.

(Over the next couple lines SHE urges him into a chair and begins massaging his neck.)

JOE

Agnes, I . . .

AGNES

You just sit down, because I want to talk with you about something.

JOE

I really . . .

Okay. Fine. What.

AGNES

What?

JOE

You want to talk about something?

(SHE stops massaging.)

AGNES

Oh. Um, well. I just . . . It's just that . . . I've been wanting to talk to you about . . .
Wow, we're doing this now. Well. Okay. I've been thinking a lot about things, and I
was . . . I just wanted to tell you that I have really, really have enjoyed working here, and,
I mean, you're such a good person to work for—I have really enjoyed working here and .
. . . You know, I should just say this. I was just thinking that . . .

JOE

I know what you're gonna say.

AGNES

You do?

JOE

Yeah. You can have the raise.

AGNES

Oh, no. No, no, no. I was just thinking that . . .

JOE

Do you want a raise?

AGNES

No. You don't understand. I was . . . Well, I've been thinking, do I want to keep
working here forever? I mean, just working here, and I thought, no, I don't. I mean, it's
not that I don't love working here, and you're, sure you're a great person, I mean, I really
think you're a great person. And you've got a great future and a lot of potential and . . .

(Pause. She is trying to say something, but can't bring herself to say the words.)
Let me get your wine.

JOE

No. No. What are you trying to say.

AGNES

Okay, okay. Maybe I better just say it. Maybe I better just come out and say it.

JOE

I'm fine.

Huh? AGNES

Go ahead. JOE

I'm going to. Will . . .
(pause)
Joe, will you marry me?
AGNES

(Pause.)

What? JOE

Will you marry me? AGNES

(Pause.)

I think I'm gonna get some . . . that wine. JOE

Are you . . . are you sure? Wait a minute; I asked you something here. AGNES

You don't want to marry me. JOE

Oh yes, I do. AGNES

(JOE goes to the kitchen and comes back out. AGNES follows him the whole time.)

Don't you walk out on me! I just proposed to you. And that took a lot of courage. Don't think it was easy for me. Don't think it was easy for me to break gender stereotypes and propose to my employer. AGNES

Okay. Listen. You don't even know me. JOE

AGNES

Maybe you think that. Sure. But I have been cleaning your house and cooking your food for three and a half years now, and let me tell you—you get to know a person when you do that. I know that you read Emerson before you go to bed—I've seen the book on your bedside table. I know the music you listen to. I memorize the CD titles while I'm dusting them. I read every book that I see laying around. I watch all the shows you've Tivoed. You think I don't know you? All the time we've been hearing the same music and reading the same books and seeing the same television. I'm not some stupid maid. I'm not. I even started watching the Mets. You could talk with me. I mean really talk. Not how was your day, but . . .

JOE

Listen to me. You don't know me. I don't care what you've done, but you don't know me. Listen, if it's the money—you can have it.

AGNES

No, No!

JOE

You don't need to marry me for the money: You can just . . . I'll give it to you—a raise.

AGNES

No, No . . .

JOE

I'll double your wage.

AGNES

I don't want that. I don't want that. I . . .

JOE

What do you want then? What?

AGNES

I just want you to marry me, that's all. You think you don't love me, but you do. You show me you love me everyday. You just don't know it yet. You haven't figured it out. But you love me. I know you love me.

JOE

You think I'm the kind of man you want to marry?

AGNES

Joe, I . . .

JOE

No, listen to me for a minute. You deserve better than me.

AGNES

No. No.

JOE

You think you know me because you watch the Mets? Darling, you don't know who you're playing with.

AGNES

(overlapping)

I do. I do. I know you better than you know yourself. I . . . this might sound silly, but I talk to you in my head all day long. I hear you answering everything I ask, and then sometimes I actually try it out on you.

JOE

Come here.

AGNES

Why?

JOE

Come here, I've got something to show you.

AGNES

I don't understand.

JOE

(pulling the bodies out of their hiding places)

Look at this. I think you need to see this.

AGNES

What? Who . . . ?

JOE

Darling, this is a dead guy.

AGNES

A dead guy.

JOE

And this is another dead guy.

AGNES

How did you get those?

JOE

I killed them. Then I dragged them home. Like a cat.

AGNES

You know this really isn't funny.

JOE

This is what I do. When you think I'm working at the store.

AGNES

Are these friends of yours? Are they okay?

JOE

Maybe you'd better come over and look at them.

AGNES

Um . . .

JOE

Come over here. Come over here.

AGNES

I, um . . .

JOE

I want you to touch them. Come here. Come here. Give me your hand. Here. Feel this.

AGNES

(Screams, then:)

OH MY GOODNESS. IT'S . . . HE'S COLD. HE'S COLD. HE'S DEAD. WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU MADE ME TOUCH A DEAD BODY! OH MY GOODNESS, I JUST TOUCHED A DEAD BODY.

JOE

Agnes, Agnes, you've got to be quiet. People will hear you.

AGNES

I PROPOSE TO YOU AND YOU MAKE ME TOUCH A CORPSE!

JOE

Agnes, hey, hey, listen to me. Calm . . .

AGNES

NO, YOU DON'T TOUCH ME—YOU, YOU MURDERER. I'LL SCREAM. TOUCH ME, AND I'LL SCREAM.

JOE

If you don't stop yelling I'm going to have to hurt you.

AGNES

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? ARE YOU GOING TO KILL ME TOO?

(JOE grabs hold of AGNES. AGNES begins to scream and does not stop screaming until she is gagged. Over the next few lines JOE proceeds to gag AGNES and tie her to a chair.)

JOE

What do you think you're doing. People are going to hear you. I'm not trying to hurt you, but you've got to be quiet. Would you just calm down? Hey, hey, hey—don't try to claw me. Calm down here. Calm down. Do you want people to come in here and find us here? I'm not going to hurt you. There.

(HE's managed to get AGNES gagged.)

JOE (continued)

Now. You want to marry me? Now I'm sorry to shock you like that and I'm sorry to have to tie you up, but I didn't see that there was another way. So don't you be going and saying that I've treated you bad, because that's just the way the chips fall. I've kept this from you for a long time and you never guessed because of the CD's or the TV shows or nothing.

Now you may wonder what I'm doing so I will explain it to you because I want you to be sure and watch what's going on here, so you won't get any wild ideas into your head any more. You see this. This is a switchblade. I'm going to use it to cut off a couple of thumbs. And don't you worry about your carpet. I'll be sure to put down some newspapers. Now this may be confusing to you. You may be asking, why does Joe want to cut off these nice peoples' thumbs. Well here's the reason. It's my job. People hire me to kill people. And today I was hired to kill this man here and cut off his thumb. Because his thumb carries on it his thumbprint, and his thumbprint will open a safe that contains—well, it's none of your business what the safe contains, but it's something, well let's just say quite valuable. What my client does not realize is that I also have *this* man here, and that I'm going to be giving her *this* thumb, while retaining *that* thumb for myself. Clever, huh? Yeah, I'd say that's pretty clever. And I'm sure you'd like to marry a clever man. But enough about me huh? You're probably sick of hearing me talk, and I've got work to do, so you just sit tight and I'll go about my work.

(JOE has already gone to work. HE is cutting off the right thumbs of the two bodies and he gets out two books to put them in. There are holes cut out in the middle of the pages of the books. HE puts the correct thumb in a copy of Emerson. HE puts the other thumb in a copy of James Joyce. The buzzer for the door RINGS. The BUZZING continues intermittently until JOE leaves.)

JOE (continued)

(on the intercom)

Yeah, I'm coming.

(to AGNES)

Now, I want you to be a good girl and don't do anything to embarrass me, okay.

(to intercom)

Just give me a second and I'll be there.

(HE drags one of the bodies into another room, continuing to speak to AGNES, and returns with a briefcase.)

Don't look at me that way. He was a criminal anyway. How do you think he got . . . ? By being a nice guy? Yeah, and the other one probably was too. And besides that . . . besides that, if I hadn't done it, she just would have hired someone else, and there are a lot of people out there who would have done it in a much worse way—who wouldn't think twice about doing it in front of small children, something like that. So you see, I see it as my duty to make sure people like that aren't the ones getting the jobs, because, you know, he would have died anyway.

I don't know why I'm wasting my time explaining this to you. Hey, watch him, and make sure he doesn't get away, okay?

(retrieving Emerson and Joyce and going to the door)

And don't worry about dinner—you can just warm it up when I get back.

(HE exits, leaving AGNES tied up, with one of the bodies.)

ACT I—SCENE 2

(RUSSELL is engrossed in reading.)

KATHERINE

(entering the office)

Hi honey. I need to talk to you.

RUSSELL

Good.

KATHERINE

What?

RUSSELL

Fine. How about you?

KATHERINE

(SHE moves a chair to sit on it.)

Hard day?

RUSSELL

Do you always feel the need to come in—into my office and clean? I haven't come over to your department at all, and I don't touch your furniture. I like my chairs disordered.

KATHERINE

Oh.

RUSSELL

It's kind of an entropy thing I have going on.

KATHERINE

Okay.

(SHE tries to put the chair back in its original location)

RUSSELL

I'm sorry honey, it's okay.

KATHERINE

So what were you working on?

(Pause. KATHERINE just stands there. RUSSELL continues to read.)

KATHERINE (continued)

Russell, honey . . .

RUSSELL

(referring to the book he's been reading--Emerson)
Did you just pick this up?

KATHERINE

Did I leave that in here? Sorry. Yeah. I got it at the Strand.

RUSSELL

We can't be throwing money around . . .

KATHERINE

Russell—it was a dollar . . .

RUSSELL

(overlapping)
. . . not before we know about the grant.

(SHE hears “grant”. Pause.)

RUSSELL

Is Emerson the “Suck the marrow out of life” guy?

KATHERINE

No. Thoreau. You didn't know that?
You know, can we talk?—can I sit in this chair?

RUSSELL

Yeah, sure.

KATHERINE

All right, um, I stopped by the house and there was a letter. I didn't see what it was from or I wouldn't have opened it.

(SHE holds the letter out to him.)

RUSSELL

Okay. Yeah.

KATHERINE

They said some nice things. Said you should apply again next year. . .

RUSSELL

It's okay. It's kind of cathartic—to know.

KATHERINE

Okay, that's a good attitude to have about this.

RUSSELL

It's fine. I've got a student . . .

KATHERINE

Because I know you worked so hard on this, and then to just have it shot down like that. After the other—. I understand if you're having a hard time about this.

RUSSELL

I'm actually, surprisingly, very well.

KATHERINE

Well, good, good; I'm glad you said that because I think this . . .

RUSSELL

Let's stop talking about the negativity of the situation that we're in at this very moment.

KATHERINE

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, because, see . . .

RUSSELL

Why does this rejection have to be . . . I don't—this might just be my twisted mind here, but I'm not buying into the idea that this rejection has to be negative. Maybe there's some other idea here that's . . .

KATHERINE

That's it, that's exactly what I was trying to say. This is a sign.

RUSSELL

I wasn't done.

KATHERINE

I'm sorry. Go ahead. I'm sorry, I'm just so excited about this opportunity.

RUSSELL

Why are you reading this? Are you really into Emerson? This invisible eyeball stuff? Cause you're into Austen, and now you're picking up Emerson. We're a book family; we have a lot of books.

KATHERINE

Yes.

RUSSELL

And I don't . . . this is confusing to me for one. My image of you is not this. And now you're happy that I got rejected for the grant?

KATHERINE

No, no. I know. It is confusing. That's, that's why I need to talk to you.

RUSSELL

I still wasn't done.

KATHERINE

I'm sorry.

RUSSELL

No, go ahead. What is it that is so very pressing at this moment in time? Please. Enlighten me.

KATHERINE

(pause)

You know how I've always said that "Beauty is it's own excuse for being." And I just . .

(starting to cry)

. . . and I don't know. Coming in every day and working as a professor I . . . I just . . . I just need more—I think we need more—and I think that's one of the reasons I got the book. I just . . .

RUSSELL

Katherine. It's okay. It was just a book. We'll pull through.

KATHERINE

No. It's not that. I don't feel like my life is fulfilling any more. I find myself looking for an excuse for being. I just feel I come in every day and do the same thing, and, why? . . .

(Long pause. RUSSELL looks horrified, as if he believes KATHERINE is on the verge of suicide. Then:)

RUSSELL

Do you want something to drink? A cup of tea or something?

KATHERINE

No, ah . . . Actually I don't. Actually, what I think is, ah, ah. . . Well you know, I've been thinking it over—well, with these last few grant rejections which have got to be horrible for you . . . We're not talking about it any more, I'm sorry. I've been thinking maybe we're ready for a change. I think, personally, we'd better just get out of here. That's what I think.

RUSSELL

Honey, what are you saying?

KATHERINE

Russell—I need to get out of here.

RUSSELL

We just got here.

KATHERINE

I know it.

RUSSELL

I just got here. You just got here. I'm not even a full professor yet.

KATHERINE

I think it was a mistake.

RUSSELL

Your classes are mistakes? Pursuing knowledge is a mistake?

KATHERINE

Yes. Because that's not what we're doing! I look at myself—I'm living a life of quiet desperation. Enduring, counting days. And I refuse to live that way. I want more for us than—than passive desperation. And I want it so much, you know what I did? I went, and I found us a cabin upstate, in the woods, that I, I think we should buy. I did.

RUSSELL

You . . . Where, woods? Whose woods? What are you talking about here?

KATHERINE

Russell. Don't you see? "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

RUSSELL

You found a cabin in the woods?

KATHERINE

A cabin by a stream where we can greet each day intentionally and learn to live fully awake.

RUSSELL

Don't you think we should have talked this over?

KATHERINE

Oh, Russell—this is just what I need. I couldn't pass up the opportunity.

RUSSELL

You want us to own some woods. Trees.

KATHERINE

Yes. No. No. I . . . Does it really matter? I mean, can any person really own the woods?

RUSSELL

Well, well . . . I concede this point to you about ownership of the woods. I mean, I'm with you, but . . .

KATHERINE

Listen, listen. It's trees. It's clear water. It's fresh air, *it's fresh air*. You can start doing your own work for yourself. You don't have to worry about this, this: writing books, stupid classes—grading papers . . .

RUSSELL

I like writing books.

KATHERINE

You can take walks . . .

RUSSELL

I like grading papers.

KATHERINE

. . . breathe in fresh air, not the muddled stagnation of apathetic minds.

RUSSELL

So just how expensive is this Ralph-Waldo-Smoky-the-Bear place of yours?

KATHERINE

Ours. We can cover the down-payment if we put down 10% instead of 20.

RUSSELL

How much money does it cost?

KATHERINE

And we can get a tax rebate.

RUSSELL

I mean I can go out back and make us one for—with an ax and some firewood—and I could make us a house.

KATHERINE

You think you could do it?

RUSSELL

Well not right now, and I'm feeling a little bit perturbed in this whole situation, because I . . .

KATHERINE

You should listen to yourself—you are completely stressed out.

RUSSELL

Dear, ever since you came in here my stress level has increased astronomically. You just—can't you comprehend the idiocy of what you've been saying? You come in, out of the blue—announce you've gone out and . . . found a cabin—without consulting me, who, I think I should point out, am, last I knew, your husband—found a cabin somewhere. For all I know it's probably someplace with loons and woodchucks wandering in and out with the occasional deer. And if there are marmots running around who chew on wood, first of all that lowers the resale value of this cottage, and endangers us, and they, they carry rabies. First of all, you have to think about your safety here. And we have no money, so if you have rabies you will die, because I cannot . . . I'm sorry. This, this is just sensation overload.

KATHERINE

You know what, you're not thinking clearly here.

RUSSELL

This . . . that's absolutely clear.

KATHERINE

Listen to you. Academia has completely polluted your mind. All you can think about is . . . Here, here—listen to this. Don't think for a change, just listen. "In May when sea winds pierced our solitudes, I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods, Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook, To please the desert and the sluggish brook."

RUSSELL

Please stop reading that book.

KATHERINE

I'm sorry; it just spoke to me.

RUSSELL

Well, I'm not leaving right now to any sort of cottage in the woods.

KATHERINE

Why not? I need this.

RUSSELL

I'm writing a book. And I need that.

KATHERINE

But you just . . .

RUSSELL

I'm writing a different book. A new book.

KATHERINE

Well for goodness sakes, you could write a book in a cabin.

RUSSELL

All my research is here.

KATHERINE

Well, take it with you. I need this Russell. I really, really need this. And I mean, it's . . . Research?

RUSSELL

It's Age of Enlightenment stuff—

KATHERINE

What?

RUSSELL

French philosophers.

KATHERINE

Oh.

RUSSELL

I can't—Katherine, I like the image I have here. Right here. My own office with easy chairs and a coffee maker. I wear a ball cap and tennis shoes to class. Smoke a pipe. I like the whole academia thing I have going here. It makes me feel excited, makes me feel a part of the conversation of the ages. Don't you understand that? And now I have found this great idea, and I'm writing a book, and nothing's gonna pull me along on your Laura-Ingalls-Wilder, Ralph-Waldo-Emerson little adventure.

KATHERINE

You haven't seen it; you haven't even seen the place.

RUSSELL

You don't understand. Read . . . I'll read it to you. "I am ignorant of how I was formed, and of how I was born. For a quarter of my life I was absolutely ignorant of the reasons for all that I saw, heard and felt, and I was nothing but a parrot at whom other parrots chattered.

When I looked round me and within me, I conceived that something exists for all eternity; since there are beings who exist today, I concluded that there is a being who is necessary and necessarily eternal. . . ."

This is a Freshman dear. A freshman wrote this paper. And it's full of truth and it's full of everything that . . . I'm going to stay here because of this. I like this. I like how I feel when I read this paper. I like who I am when I read this paper. And I'm going to take this paper, and I'm going to write a book about it so that other people will feel this way.

KATHERINE

Now, okay—wait a minute—what are you?—you're going to write a book on this student's paper?

RUSSELL

I'm going to take this student's paper, put it here

(he touches his heart and head)

and make it come out here,

(computer)

or here

(paper)

—whatever way I write this book.. And it's going to be on shelves, and people will hold big symposiums in my name.

KATHERINE

Alright, alright.

RUSSELL

I will come and say, "I conceived that something exists for all eternity; since there are beings who exist today. . ." Listen, I've given the student a low grade. He'll come in to get help—and while I'm telling him he's all wrong, I'll be able to pick his brain and glean this kind of material. He'll forget about it, figure he's not cut out for this class and go become an environmental science major, and leave philosophy. And then I'll be free and clear, make a name for myself, and spread truth everywhere. That's the mission I'm about to go on.

KATHERINE

You're going to plagiarize the student's paper.

RUSSELL

I'm not plagiarizing. I'm . . . The truth belong to everybody.

KATHERINE

You're plagiarizing a student's paper. He might . . .

RUSSELL

You're plagiarizing Ralph Waldo Emerson's ideas.

KATHERINE

I didn't write a book on these.

RUSSELL

You're trying to buy a shack. I mean, it's like Hollywood.

KATHERINE

I'm only thinking of us.

RUSSELL

If you were thinking of . . .

KATHERINE

Listen to you, you're talking crazy.

RUSSELL

Honey, you're the one talking crazy; you bought a shack. You've got "cabin fever"—you're "shacking up".

KATHERINE

You are plagiarizing a student's paper.

RUSSELL

I am not. And so what if I am?

KATHERINE

Russell, I want you to listen to me. I am sick of this. I am sick of students who come to class and sleep and care less about Robert Browning than they do about how to make their eyelashes curl. I'm sick of teaching classes of five hundred odd students who have never in their life heard of Dante and who will write five hundred thousand word essays on him that I will have to grade, and then leave my class and still not recognize his name. I need to get out of here. I'm not real here. I'm someone who stands in front of a class and mouths words that nobody ever hears, and I don't even know who I am anymore. I want to know who I am, and I am not going to let you stand in the way of this opportunity for me.

If you do not support me so that we can get this cabin, I will speak to the academic dean about your little incident here with plagiarism.

RUSSELL

It's not plagiarism.

KATHERINE

Well, then the dean shouldn't be bothered at all by it, should he.

RUSSELL

No, Katherine, wait. Listen, honey, this is the best chance I've had in years to really get into the circle of people who matter in philosophy. They don't take you seriously until you can get in and this could get me in. And then from here on out everybody would be reading my papers. Everyone would be publishing my books. You can't do this to me.

KATHERINE

So we can buy the cabin?

RUSSELL

Don't you think you're being a little demanding?

(SHE turns to leave.)

RUSSELL (continued)

Katherine, if you talk to the dean, I'll tell about how you use departmental funds for your personal library.

KATHERINE

That was entirely justified, and don't you try to make it sound like it isn't.

RUSSELL

Oh, I'm sure it was. So I wouldn't worry, if I were you, about having the dean know about it.

KATHERINE

You can be cruel, you know that?

RUSSELL

I'm cruel? You go off—without talking to me—want to throw our money around—. And now—there you go—you're moving my furniture again!

(KATHERINE tries to move as much furniture as possible. RUSSELL tries to put it all back in the right place. THEY fight over the furniture.)

KATHERINE

Calm . . .

RUSSELL

Why don't you just go get your oilcloth table cloths and drink your nectar and go live in your shack.

KATHERINE

Well maybe I will.

RUSSELL

Well, yeah.

KATHERINE

Fine, fine.

(SHE storms out.)

RUSSELL

(going to the door and yelling)

And take your Emerson with you.

(HE throws the copy of Emerson down the hall. Then HE goes back to his desk.

Sighs. Picks up a student's paper and begins to read.)

“It needs twenty years to lead man from the plant state in which he is within his mother's womb, and the pure animal state which is the lot of his early childhood, to the state when the maturity of the reason begins to appear. It has needed thirty centuries to learn a little about his structure. It would need eternity to learn something about his soul. It takes an instant to kill him.” Amazing. “It takes an instant to kill him.” You can take your cabin and . . . cause I will publish.

ACT I—SCENE 3

[This may require quite a bit of explanation. I'm including in this play an optional subplot that is entirely improvised. Saul is a college student who's great passion at this moment in his life is to write the best murder mystery or detective story or crime novel that's ever been written. And he thinks he's really good. He's not. He over does stuff—but he's convinced that he can write the next great classic.

Saul can talk directly to the audience. He can also make reference to the fact that this is a play, but he is not aware that he is an actor. He is Saul. As Saul writes we see the characters from the other scenes act out the story he is writing. When dialogue is appropriate, Saul shuts up and the characters take over. The characters in Saul's story are aware that Saul is the writer and can talk directly with him. He can talk to them to. They can argue with Saul—but Saul is ultimately in charge. There should be a sense of back and forth in the creation of the story. Saul's words guide what his characters do and say, and what they choose to do and say guides the story Saul is writing.

Saul's story should closely parallel the stories we are seeing played out on stage. But he tells the parts of the stories we don't see. We should not get the sense that what he writes is actually what has happened, but the sense that it's one plausible, if overly heightened and romanticized possibility. For each scene in this subplot I will provide a suggested story to tell, but feel free to deviate.]

[SUGGESTED OPENING:]

SAUL

Hey. My name's Saul. I'm a junior here at the university. I'm a business major, but I don't know, I'm thinking of changing it. See, I'm in Professor Marshall's Intro to Murder Mystery class. She's the one you saw in the last scene—who wants to buy a cabin. Anyway, I'm in her class and yeah, she's got us writing this short murder mystery thing. And it's my passion. Ever since I was a little kid I was watching Murder She Wrote, and uh, Alfred Hitchcock, and Perry Mason, and everything like that. And it just like strikes a chord, you know. Everyone wants to like—you know—everyone wants to kill someone. I mean, sometime in their life. Everyone wants to get away with the perfect crime, whether it's killing someone, or robbing a bank, or whatever. Everyone wants to live that out, but I mean, who in their right mind is actually going to carry it out, you know, so they gotta live through these things, and I want to write the best one ever, so that someone could live through my writing—their deep-down animal desire to just pull off the perfect crime, you know.

So I figure, this is what I'd do. I'll get into the mind of the character. That animal drive. So I've put blankets and cardboard over all the windows, so I can't tell if it's night or day. It's just me and the notebook until I get this done. No food, no water, no going to the bathroom. Just the story. Nothing else. Cause see, I think that way it will give me the drive—the motivation. I'll have hunger gnawing inside me, and I'll channel that into the mind of the character. That hunger. That drive. So here goes.

Chapter one . . .

[SUGGESTED STORY: The Story of Sylvia. Sylvia has a large sum of money that she owes to the mob due to gambling debts. Unable to get the money, she turns to her cousin, Ralph, a drug dealer, for help. Ralph says he can't help, but he knows of another dealer who has been taking all of his customers, who has a stash of cocaine in this safe that can only be opened by his thumb print. So if you could do something to take care of this guy for me, and if you could figure out how to open up the safe—the money is as good as yours. So Sylvia hires a hit-man to rub out the dealer and get the thumb.

Maybe this could be told from the point of view of the soon-to-be-dead dealer who has gone to see his psychic consultant and palm reader, because he's been having dreams about his own death.]

ACT I—SCENE 4

JOE

(storming into the apartment in a panic, the briefcase in his hand)
We've got to go. I've got the wrong book. I was on the subway, I'm almost there, I get off at the stop, I check just to make sure the thumb's still there and it's gone. I've got the wrong book. What are the chances of that? How can this happen? Two people on the subway with Emerson? We've gotta . . . I'll untie you and then we've got to get out of here, cause she's gonna figure out she's got the wrong thumb, and then she's gonna come back here, and the right thumb is, who knows where, riding the subway somewhere in the night.

Now you're not going to start screaming if I untie your mouth, are you?

(SHE shakes her head, no.)

JOE (continued)

(untying her)
Good. Okay. There we go.

AGNES

I quit.

JOE

What?

AGNES

I quit. I don't want to be your housekeeper anymore.

JOE

You can't quit.

AGNES

I have never in my life before been treated with such disrespect.

JOE

You know . . . you know, this is not the time.

AGNES

No, no I think this is the time. I think this is exactly the time. I've been, I've been tied up in that chair, and that has given me time to think very clearly.

JOE

Do you understand what's going on here?

AGNES

And I have come to the distinct conclusion that I don't want to work for you anymore.

JOE

Agnes, listen to me. I have lost the thumb. There is a thumb riding around in the night. And there is a very very angry lady who is gonna be coming back here, and I would not be surprised if she would not hesitate to use force to express her disapproval.

AGNES

That is not my problem.

JOE

And there are two dead bodies. Without thumbs. Which is quite incriminating if you stop to think about it. And, no—I'm sorry but this is your problem. This is very much your problem. I'm not going to—after the things you saw, if you think I'm going to let you just wait around here while—you are coming with me, whether you like it or not.

AGNES

How do I know that your intentions are honorable?

JOE

What?

AGNES

I'm not going to go out with you unless I know your intentions are honorable.

JOE

What! Agnes, I'm not asking you *out*. We are running from someone who will likely see to it that we're killed if she finds us.

AGNES

All the same. I have my principles.

JOE

I cannot believe I am having this conversation.

AGNES

You have insulted me, treated me very badly when I proposed to you. Then you tied me in a chair, gagged me—forced me to watch some very disturbing things—and *you* can't believe *you're* having this conversation! Why should I trust you?

JOE

This is not an issue of whether you trust me or not.

AGNES

I can't go out with a person I can't trust.

JOE

You . . . No, I am not going to argue about this.

AGNES

I can't work for a person I don't trust.

JOE

She'll search the place, so, we can leave this body, but the other one will have to go.

AGNES

Are you listening to me? I'm told you I'm quitting.

JOE

No, you're not.

AGNES

Watch me.

(She starts for the door.)

Don't worry. I'll be sure to call the police.

JOE

Agnes, you are not quitting. Wait a minute and listen to me here. Try to be reasonable for once. Are you stopped? Are you going to listen to me? All right. Cause you need to hear this—it's not as easy as you may think to find a housekeeper. Much less one of your quality—and even if it was. I need you here. Okay, you got that? Who else would cook like you? Hmm? I couldn't get along without you, okay?

AGNES

Yeah.

JOE

I mean, I haven't treated you bad, have I?

AGNES

You . . . no.

JOE

I mean today was an exception, and it will remain an exception. Because we were in exceptional circumstances, but that doesn't mean that it's usually this way, or that it will usually be this way. Okay?

AGNES

Yeah, okay.

JOE

I mean, I admit that you have a right to be upset that I tied you up in the chair, but I didn't hurt you, right? And I could have hurt you. But I didn't. And I only tied you up cause

you were getting hysterical, and I couldn't have that, you know. Not with her coming over. I couldn't have that. You can see that, can't you?

(JOE's phone RINGS. HE looks at it.)

JOE (continued)

That's her. We've got to get out of here.

That's her on the phone. Do you not understand the situation we are in?

AGNES

I don't go out with men whose intentions aren't honorable.

JOE

Will you stop saying that. It's irrelevant. It's entirely irrelevant. Do you understand that it's irrelevant.

AGNES

It's not irrelevant to me.

JOE

Okay, okay fine. My intentions are to get out of here and try and go find that thumb. And I'm taking you with me, and I'm not leaving you out of my sight because you have seen entirely too much, and I have no doubt in my mind that you would go telling it to the first person you saw. Which would be dangerous, not only for me—not only for me, do you hear that—but for you as well.

(The phone begins to RING again.)

AGNES

You're a criminal.

JOE

Yes. I am.

AGNES

And you didn't even eat your dinner.

(SHE starts to cry.)

JOE

Oh, you're not gonna start crying, are you?

AGNES

(crying)

I worked all day long to make you a nice dinner. I slaved over it, and you don't even have the consideration to eat it.

JOE

Come on, darling, you know I hate it when you cry.

AGNES

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It's just that—I've had a hard day.

JOE

I'm gonna just get the body packed up, okay. You just pull yourself together, I'll be right back.

(JOE goes into the other room.)

AGNES

(still crying)

I suppose this is what comes from being too forward. My mother always told me that I should let the guy make the first move.

(We hear a CRASHING sound from the other room.)

AGNES (continued)

And I tried; I really did. But I didn't think that any harm would come if—I mean this is the modern age. I mean this is the *postmodern* age for goodness sakes. But I should have known better, and I shouldn't have proposed to you, and then none of this ever would have happened. I should have just kept on listening to your CD's and watching your television shows and loving the you that never was.

(JOE returns with a large suitcase, leaves again, to retrieve the body.)

AGNES (continued)

(SHE opens the copy of Emerson he has brought in and looks in the front cover.) But you know what—even though now I know what kind of person you are, I still can't get over the picture of you that I have in my head—thinking that there must be some good reason that you've done all this—that you can't really help it, or that it had to be done, and I feel—if only we were together, things would be different, you know. No more dead bodies. No more bloody thumbs. And you'd come home on time cause you'd want to come home, because I'd be here to come home to.

(JOE drags the other body into the living room. AGNES screams.)

AGNES (continued)

Sorry, sorry. I won't scream any more. I didn't mean to scream. I just can't get used to you dragging bodies around.

JOE

There's a shovel in the maintenance closet in the basement. I want you to go down and get it.

AGNES

That's not a new one, is it? I mean that's the same one as before, right?

JOE

If the door's locked just . . . Yes it's the same one. If the door's . . . no, on second thought, I'll get the shovel. You stay with the body.

(The phone RINGS again.)

AGNES

Are you going to answer that?

JOE

No, we'll have to go together. She could be anywhere. She could be on her way over here.

(HE's attempting to stuff the body in the suitcase.)

We've got to hurry, come on. You get his legs.

AGNES

Will we be back home by twelve?

JOE

What, do you turn into a pumpkin or something?

AGNES

You don't have to make fun of me. I just want to know if . . .

JOE

Sure. Well be home by twelve. Now just get his legs.

AGNES

Alright.

(AGNES does indeed try to get the legs in the suitcase. The buzzer RINGS. JOE freezes. RINGS again. RINGS incessantly. Then stops. JOE leaps toward the door and checks the locks. HE puts a chair in front of the door and sits on it.)

JOE

That's her. That's her. Somebody let her in.

(The suitcase is not going to work. JOE throws a blanket over the body and then sits back down in the chair in front of the door.)

(There is a KNOCK at the door. JOE screams. A moment of silence. Another KNOCK.)

SYLVIA

I know you're in there. I can hear you.

(Silence. AGNES conceals the body by rolling it under the table where the tablecloth hides it.)

SYLVIA (continued)

I can break down this door.

AGNES

Coming.

JOE

(whispered)
What are you doing?

AGNES

(whispering back)
She knows we're in here.

JOE

She's going to kill us.

AGNES

No she won't. Let me handle it.
(to the door)
I'll be there in just a minute.
(to JOE)
Get away from the door.

JOE

(moving away from the door)
Preserve us.

AGNES

(still to JOE)
And don't look so scared. You kill people for goodness sakes.

(AGNES opens the door just a crack. The chain latch holds. A HAND with a gun comes through.)

AGNES (continued)

Hi, can I help you?

(The HAND swings the gun back and forth, as JOE ducks.)

AGNES (continued)
I'm so glad you stopped by.

SYLVIA
It's the wrong thumb.

AGNES
If you just remove your hand I can open the . . .

SYLVIA
Who are you?

AGNES
I'm, uh, Joe's partner.

SYLVIA
Yeah?

JOE
She . . .yes, yes it is. In crime, not . . . My partner in crime.

(SYLVIA removes her hand. AGNES unlatches the lock and lets her in.
SYLVIA comes in and point the gun at JOE.)

SYLVIA
(to JOE)
It's the wrong thumb.

AGNES
We know, we know—just about as soon as you left we realized there must have been a terrible mistake. See we had two thumbs to get today. The one for you, of course, and another one for a uh, client who wanted it as . . . like a thumb to send if you've kidnapped someone and cut off their thumb?

SYLVIA
(still to JOE)
Two thumbs?

AGNES
And Joe, you know, always puts his thumbs in books. I keep telling him he's got to get a better way, but you know what he's like.

SYLVIA
Are you making this up?

AGNES

No, no, no, no, no. But you see how it happened. We got the books switched. And you got the wrong thumb. Because, see, you got the James Joyce when you were supposed to get the Emerson.

(referring to the book)

SYLVIA

(indicating the book)

That one?

AGNES

But not this one, unfortunately. Another one.

SYLVIA

I want my money.

JOE

Sure. That's not a problem. I can get that back to you. That's not a problem at all.

AGNES

No, wait a minute, Joe.

JOE

We'd be happy to return your money.

AGNES

Wait a minute. Would you rather have your money back or get the right thumb back?

SYLVIA

What do you mean.

AGNES

Because I'm sure we can get the right thumb back. I trust that you brought with you the thumb that you have.

SYLVIA

Yeah.

AGNES

It's still in it's original packaging.

(looking again at the inside cover of the Emerson book)

We'll just go to our other client and exchange.

SYLVIA

How do I know you're not trying to double-cross me.

JOE

Double-cross you.

AGNES

Wherever did you get that idea?

JOE

I'm offended that you'd even mention it. But if you don't trust us, I can just return your money and . . .

AGNES

Absolutely not. Let's not have any more nonsense about returning money. What this lady wants is the correct thumb, and we are going . . .

SYLVIA

Who's got the other thumb.

AGNES

Katherine Marshall.

JOE

We always keep our employers' names confidential.

(to AGNES)

What?

SYLVIA

Katherine Marshall?

AGNES

Yes.

SYLVIA

Katherine Marshall?!

AGNES

Do we have a deal?

SYLVIA

For a . . . How soon can you get it?

AGNES

Oh, um—by end of day tomorrow I should think. We'll call you as soon as we've got it.

(Long. Long. Pause.)

SYLVIA

Okay then. I expect a call.

(SYLVIA put away her gun and leaves.)

JOE

It's a pleasure doing business with you.

(to AGNES)

How did you do that?

AGNES

I saw the name in the book. It was the first thing I thought of.

JOE

That was incredible. Do you realize that?

AGNES

I just . . .

JOE

No. That was astonishing. Do you realize that you may very well have saved our lives?

AGNES

I just did what I thought you would do.

JOE

“We had two thumbs to get today,” that was amazing.

AGNES

It just seemed like a logical explanation.

JOE

And then when you said that we weren't gonna give the money back—I thought I was going to have a heart attack.

AGNES

So are we going to get that thumb?

JOE

What do you mean?

AGNES

Are we going to get the thumb?

JOE

How? It could be anywhere in America by now.

AGNES

We could at least try to find Katherine Marshall.

JOE

You mean you didn't make that up?

AGNES

Look.

(SHE shows him the inside cover of the books)

JOE

Professor Katherine Marshall, Literature Department, New York University. You're amazing.

AGNES

Come on, let's go.

JOE

No, we'd have to go to her house. That would be too suspicious. Better to try at the University tomorrow.

AGNES

Can I go with you?

JOE

You know, I'm feeling kind of hungry. You got something I could eat?

AGNES

You want some wine too?

JOE

Yeah. You know, I think I do.

AGNES

We only have white.

JOE

Oh, yeah. Tell you what, I'll run down and get a bottle while you warm us some food, how's that?

AGNES

It won't be as good as the first time, warmed up.

JOE

(at the door)

"We had to get two thumbs today." Don't worry about it. It'll be fine.

(HE leaves. AGNES goes to the kitchen.)

ACT I—SCENE 5

(RUSSELL'S office, late at night. Security lighting provides a dim glow. We hear noise outside the office door. The door handle jostles and the door opens, admitting TRAVIS, lock-picking tools in hand. HE quickly scans the room for security cameras, and then removes from his backpack three cans of silly string, a can of tuna, a can opener and an unidentified small package.

HE proceeds to spray the office with one of the cans of silly string. Then HE picks up the can of tuna and the can opener, but freezes when he hears noise outside the window. HE listens. There is definitely someone outside. HE turns for the door, but when he sees KATHERINE prying open the window he ducks behind the desk.

KATHERINE crawls through the window and into the office. SHE is wearing a flashlight on her forehead and carries a crowbar and her copy of Emerson. SHE lays the crowbar and Emerson on the desk, before noticing the silly string. SHE notices the silly string. Is she alone? SHE looks around the room. SHE looks behind the desk, but as she looks, TRAVIS crawls to the other side of the desk. They circle the desk, TRAVIS always just barely managing to keep out of sight.

Finally, convinced SHE is alone, SHE opens the file drawer in Russell's desk and proceeds to search through papers, reading bits and pieces of each.)

KATHERINE (continued)

Aristotle defines . . . no. Plato's theory of forms. Come on, come on. "Everything is a cog, pulley, cord, spring, in this vast machine." No. It's gotta be . . . Socratic dialogues . . . "Ezourveidam"—what? No. 'It needs twenty years to lead man from the plant state in which . . . need eternity to learn something about his soul. It takes an instant to kill him.'

(TRAVIS recognizes that SHE is reading from his paper.)

KATHERINE (continued)

' . . . ignorant of how I was formed . . . parrot at whom other parrots chattered. . . . conceived that something exists for all eternity; since there are beings who exist to-day . . . ' This is it. This is it. "I conceived that something exists . . . "

(KATHERINE, satisfied that she has the correct paper, takes the paper with her, and heads back to the window.

TRAVIS, entirely confused as to why someone would break into an office to steal his paper, decides to take action, and comes out of hiding.)

TRAVIS

Wait.

(KATHERINE screams.)

TRAVIS (continued)

Wait.

KATHERINE

Don't move, I have a flashlight.

(And then they recognize each other.)

TRAVIS

Professor Marshall?!

KATHERINE

(simultaneously)

Travis?! What are you doing here?

TRAVIS

I . . . Why do you have my paper?

KATHERINE

Your paper!

TRAVIS

Yeah!

KATHERINE

I am . . . borrowing it. And you . . . you—

(referring to the silly string)

Did you . . . ?

TRAVIS

What are you doing with . . . ?

KATHERINE

You wrote this?

TRAVIS

Yeah—he gave me a D. I could lose my scholarship. And it was a good paper too.

KATHERINE

I know.

TRAVIS

Yeah? Wow. Thanks.

How do you know.

KATHERINE

He told me.

TRAVIS

He thought it was good? He gave me a D!

KATHERINE

Wait—why are you here?

TRAVIS

Revenge.

KATHERINE

What are . . . you going to do?

(Pause.)

TRAVIS

(picking up the book, then setting it back down)
Emerson, huh?

KATHERINE

What are . . . ?

TRAVIS

Silly string. A can of tuna I was gonna smear around, leave a note about something being fishy with his grading system.
Wait—*why* do *you* have my paper?

KATHERINE

That's just sick.

TRAVIS

What're you doing with my paper?

(Long pause. Then, KATHERINE bolts for the window, but TRAVIS is quicker and catches her, grabbing the paper out of her hands.)

KATHERINE

Alright, I need to buy a cabin.

TRAVIS

What?

KATHERINE

I need to buy a . . .

TRAVIS

What does this have to do with my paper?

KATHERINE

I know this may be hard for you to understand, but there are certain points in your life . . . when it just becomes extremely clear . . . And that is the case with this, this cabin. I know, I don't know how I know, but I know that this is the step I have to take. And, um. In your paper . . . I don't know quite how to say this, but, um . . . because I don't want you to think ill of him, but in your paper, I think, my husband thinks he has found the inspiration for another book.

TRAVIS

I don't understand.

KATHERINE

He wants to use your paper to write his next book.

TRAVIS

He wants to steal my paper?!

KATHERINE

No, no. I mean, the truth belongs to everyone, right.

TRAVIS

He wants to use my paper, which he gave me a D on, and write a book from it.

KATHERINE

It inspired him, yes.

TRAVIS

Well, he's not going to do that.

KATHERINE

Try not to look at it in a negative light.

TRAVIS

No. I'm going to take this, and make sure he never gets another copy of it.

KATHERINE

No. Please. You don't understand. I need your paper. Please. Give it to me, please. I'll never get him to agree to the cabin if I don't have your paper.

TRAVIS

Why should I care?

(Pause.)

TRAVIS (continued)

Well, I think I'll just be leaving.

KATHERINE

No, wait. What do you want? I don't have any money.

TRAVIS

What do you have?

(Pause.)

Wait. I want the grade on this that I deserve.

KATHERINE

You want me to change my husband's grade book?! That's illegal.

(Pause.)

But it's unethical.

TRAVIS

Was it ethical for him to give me a D?

Do we have a deal?

(HE turns to leave.)

KATHERINE

I'll report you for breaking in if you don't give it to me.

(TRAVIS looks at her, looks at the crowbar.)

TRAVIS

Did you remember to disable the security camera on that outside corner of the building when you came in?

(Pause. HE turns to leave again.)

KATHERINE

No, wait.

I'll tell him I won't give him the paper unless he signs for the loan and . . . changes your grade.

TRAVIS

Promise?

(SHE nods.)

TRAVIS

Alright then.

(HE hands over the paper. Then HE picks up the can of tuna and the can opener.)

KATHERINE

No, don't. Not the tuna.
It would destroy him.
Please.

(Pause.)

TRAVIS

All right.

(HE puts down the tuna and picks up the cans of silly string.)

TRAVIS (continued)

You wanna help?

(Pause.)

KATHERINE

Okay.
(SHE takes the can of silly string and they both start to spray as the lights fade.)

KATHERINE (continued)

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately . . .”

ACT II—SCENE 1

SAUL

Chapter Two. The Second Body.

[SUGGESTED STORY: The Story of the Second Body: When Sylvia hires Joe, the hitman, she tells him her whole story, how she needs the thumb to get the drugs. Joe decides to take the job, but also decides to double-cross her. This means he needs another thumb. Not wanting to kill somebody without a good reason, he decides to stop by the morgue and surreptitiously slip out a body. This could be told from the point of view of two people working at the morgue when Joe slips the body out. They notice the body is missing but have no idea how it happened. Perhaps the workers are both horror movie fans and immediately suspect all kinds of horrifying situations. Perhaps someone comes in to see if they can identify that particular body; and, not wanting to admit that they've lost it, one of the workers impersonates a body.]

ACT II—SCENE 2

(RUSSELL'S office, the morning after it has been vandalized. There is silly string everywhere and the furniture is moved around a little bit. RUSSELL unlocks the door to his office and enters.)

RUSSELL

Oh, my. Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. Oh, my goodness. What is . . . Oh my goodness. This . . . stuff, all . . . oh. Oh, oh, oh, no. This is all wrong. This is . . .

(HE begins to readjust the furniture, measuring the spaces between things.)

Sixty-five degree angle. Who . . . ? No, no, no, no, no, no, no. This cannot . . . this cannot be happening to me. Or rather, this can not have happened to me. I will not stand for . . . Oh my goodness. Everything is off. I will not . . . Revenge will be enacted. This is askew. Everything, the whole concept—the whole design is off. I'm gonna lose a whole day's work. Phone, phone, phone . . . This is absolutely unacceptable.

(HE dials. Finds the book on his desk.)

What's this? Katherine, Katherine, how many times do I have to tell you? Hello, campus security. I uh . . .

(HE has opened the book and seen the finger.)

Never mind.

(HE hangs up the phone. Slams the book shut. Tentatively he opens the book again, then slams it shut. Opens it again.)

Oh my goodness. What have we got here? Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Oh, my.

(Picks up the phone and dials.)

Come on, come on, come on, pick up. Come on. Oh! Voice mail. Where are you? This is . . .

(Recording a voice mail message)

Hi, Katherine. This is Russell. Um, could you come over here for a minute. I don't know if these lines are tapped so . . . Ha, ha, joke. Um, I, well, I just think you need to come over here for a minute. I see you left one of your transcendentalist books in my office, and um, well I was just leafing through it and found um, a passage I'd like to discuss with you so, um, yeah. I'll see you soon. Bye.

(Pause. He stands with the book. There is a KNOCK at the door. RUSSELL starts violently and then hides the book.)

Just a minute!

(But KATHERINE doesn't wait for the door to be answered. SHE walks in just as RUSSELL has finished hiding the book under the couch.)

RUSSELL (continued)

Oh, honey, hi. That was quick.

KATHERINE

Russell, what has happened to your office?

RUSSELL

You got my message?

KATHERINE

It looks awful in here.

RUSSELL

Did you get my message?

KATHERINE

What message?

RUSSELL

Just a minute ago. On the phone.

KATHERINE

No, I didn't. What's been going on here? Did you have some kind of party?

RUSSELL

No I didn't have some kind of party. I came in here this morning—I have been having a very stressful morning—I unlocked my door, I opened my door, and I was greeted by this. Although I have fixed some of it. My furniture was all . . . I don't think that a single piece was in place. None of it. And then this stuff all over the place.

KATHERINE

Who could have done it?

RUSSELL

Who indeed. My question exactly. I said to myself, who could have done this. And then, this is the interesting thing, and then I happened to run across something very interesting on my desk.

KATHERINE

Did you call someone about it?

RUSSELL

I was dialing campus security when I caught sight of a book that seems to have been left in my office by another transcendentalist, not unlike yourself. That's when I gave you the call. But apparently you didn't get my message.

KATHERINE

Is that a crime?

RUSSELL

Oh, no. Oh, no not at all. I don't suppose *that's* a crime. No.

KATHERINE

Russell, you seem stressed. Are you okay?

RUSSELL

Do I? Do I seem stressed? Well now that's an interesting thing to say. Why ever should I be stressed?

KATHERINE

Are you okay?

RUSSELL

Oh, I'm sure I've never felt better in my life. Tip-top. Ship-shape.

KATHERINE

It's probably just a new janitor or something.

RUSSELL

Reading Emerson?!

KATHERINE

What?

RUSSELL

Yes. I suppose the whole world reads Emerson.

KATHERINE

No, no, no. I mean the office.

RUSSELL

Yes, not to mention the office. That would have been bad enough.

KATHERINE

Russell, what are you talking about?

RUSSELL

Oh, no. I suppose the office is what I should really be upset about, isn't it.

KATHERINE

That's not what you're upset about?

RUSSELL

I suppose that's the biggest, the most severe crime against humanity that has happened for a great long while. Vandalism is . . . oh, let me assure you, I agree that it's quite despicable.

KATHERINE

What, did someone steal something?

RUSSELL

Well, I suppose that's one way of putting it. Someone is certainly missing something. Without a doubt. I suppose you could . . .

KATHERINE

Something pretty valuable?

RUSSELL

Call it what you will . . . Valuable? Well, I'm not so sure of it's resale value, but yeah I would venture to say that it's pretty valuable to someone.

KATHERINE

And I suppose you'd be pretty eager if someone could tell you how you could get it back.

RUSSELL

I suppose that this person would be pretty happy to get . . . what? What are you talking about?

KATHERINE

Russell, I don't think you understand how much this cabin means to me.

RUSSELL

I guess I don't!

KATHERINE

I can understand that you're upset, but I had to do something to show you how much I need this cabin.

RUSSELL

Yes. I understand this. But don't you think this is perhaps a bit extreme?

KATHERINE

You'll get it back. I'll just need you to do a couple of things first.

RUSSELL

No. No. I take that back. I don't understand this. I don't understand this at all. Are you threatening me?

KATHERINE

Russell, sign for the cabin, give your student the kind of grade he deserves, and you'll get it back.

RUSSELL

(holding up his thumbs)

I'm not missing mine. Don't ask me who is, I'm sure I don't know, but these are not missing.

KATHERINE

What are you doing? What are you talking about?

RUSSELL

Your friend Emerson?

KATHERINE

I don't know what you're talking about.

RUSSELL

(retrieving the book)

Emerson. Emerson. This is your copy of Emerson, is it not?

KATHERINE

I don't see what . . .

RUSSELL

Your friend Emerson. In my office.

KATHERINE

Under the couch?

RUSSELL

Well, I didn't think you'd want me to just broadcast it to whoever came into the room. Hello. My wife is a maniac. Yeah, why don't you read some Emerson while you're waiting. Be sure to keep a finger in it so you don't lose your spot.

KATHERINE

Russell, Russell, Russell, what's going on here?

RUSSELL

You tell me. I mean I was just flipping through this book. I mean, maybe I'm, call me old fashioned. But I was a little, just a little, shocked by the contents of this book. Katherine, please. Could you leave the chair where it is?

KATHERINE

Sorry.

RUSSELL

You know how much that bothers me.

KATHERINE

I'm sorry.

RUSSELL

And this is not a time when I need anything more bothering me.

KATHERINE

I said I was sorry.

RUSSELL

I was just saying . . .

KATHERINE

I don't see what you're so upset about.

RUSSELL

Well, sure. Maybe it doesn't make sense to you. Maybe it doesn't make sense to anyone else. But to me it matters where my furniture is. I was conducting an experiment, and despite what you may think . . .

KATHERINE

And Emerson messes up your furniture.

RUSSELL

Emerson? No. No. I find Emerson on my desk and start flipping through it. Hmm, lets see what it is that has so captivated my wife's attention—understanding, trying to understand . . . Hmm. What have we got here. Emerson, Emerson, Emerson, and Oh, A HUMAN THUMB. How interesting. I wonder why that's here.

KATHERINE

Russell, you're not having another breakdown, are you?

RUSSELL

Well, it would certainly seem like this would be an appropriate time to have one, wouldn't it. What with my wife cutting off thumbs and all.

KATHERINE

Russell, that is sick. What do you think you're saying?

RUSSELL

Oh, I'm sick! Of course. I must be the one who's sick. I didn't cut off someone's thumb.

KATHERINE

Russell, Russell. Here, give me the book, give me the book and sit down. Come on, sit down, Russell.

(SHE has taken the book from him, and moves a chair for him to sit.)

RUSSELL
DON'T MOVE THAT.

KATHERINE
Calm down. Calm down.

RUSSELL
PUT IT BACK.

KATHERINE
Calm down. Calm down. I'll put it back, just calm down and sit down.

RUSSELL
(coming to the chair)
No, look. Let me do it. You see those four indentations in the carpet? That is where the chair sits. There and no where else.

KATHERINE
Okay. Okay. I see. Now sit down, honey. Come on, sit down and take a deep breath. I don't want you to have another breakdown.

RUSSELL
Oh, sure. Now you're worried about me.

KATHERINE
Shh. Shh.

RUSSELL
After leaving a bloody finger in my office.

KATHERINE
Take a deep breath. Nobody has put a finger anywhere. You're gonna be okay.

RUSSELL
No? No? How about reading to me from about, oh, page 64.

KATHERINE
Shh. Russell, it's gonna be okay.

RUSSELL
Or try a passage a little later, maybe page 83?

(There is a KNOCK at the door. RUSSELL leaps from the chair and hides behind the couch.)

KATHERINE

Honey!

(Pause. More KNOCKING.)

KATHERINE (continued)

I'm gonna go answer the door.

RUSSELL

Don't open the door.

KATHERINE

I would suggest that you might want to sit down in a chair.

RUSSELL

Katherine, I beg of you.

KATHERINE

It would look a little more normal.

(RUSSELL moves back to the chair. More KNOCKING.)

RUSSELL

I do not want to be implicated in any of your various and sundry affairs.

KATHERINE

Come on in!

(SYLVIA opens the door and enters.)

SYLVIA

Katherine!

KATHERINE

Sylvia. Hello.

SYLVIA

(referring to the book in KATHERINE's hand)
Emerson, huh?

(RUSSELL yelps and then coughs to try to cover it up.)

KATHERINE

(to RUSSELL)
Honey, you alright?
(to SYLVIA)

Yeah. I just started reading him recently.

SYLVIA

I hear there's some good stuff in there.

KATHERINE

Oh, absolutely.

RUSSELL

SO . . . how are things in the drama department?

SYLVIA

Not bad. You know. Not bad.

(to Katherine)

Does he know about it?

KATHERINE

What do you mean?

SYLVIA

Look, you can cut the . . . I know all about it. And it's okay. I'm not gonna pass blame on you or anything like that. I just wanna know if everything's out in the open between the two of you, so I can feel free to speak freely.

KATHERINE

What are you talking about?

SYLVIA

Yeah, go ahead. Play like you don't know. But I just wanted to tell you—you weren't in your office so I came over here—but I wanted to make sure you knew that you've got the, uh wrong book.

KATHERINE

This book?

SYLVIA

Yeah. Emerson. That was the one I was supposed to get and you were supposed to get, um, Joyce, I think.

KATHERINE

James Joyce?

SYLVIA

Yeah, that's right.

KATHERINE

He wasn't a transcendentalist.

SYLVIA

What? No. You haven't sent it yet, have you?

KATHERINE

Sent what?

SYLVIA

You know, the—does he know?

KATHERINE

I don't . . . Russell, do you know what Sylvia's talking about?

RUSSELL

I don't know anything.

KATHERINE

He doesn't know anything.

SYLVIA

Sorry, Russell. Girl talk.

(to Katherine)

They gave you the wrong one. The wrong, you know, book. You got the one I was supposed to get. And he's bringing over the other one to switch, but I just needed to know that you still got it.

KATHERINE

I'm sorry Sylvia, I'm really at a loss.

SYLVIA

You sent it?

KATHERINE

I'm afraid I don't have a clue what you're talking about.

SYLVIA

The "book".

KATHERINE

Yes.

SYLVIA

It was the wrong one. By mistake.

Emerson? KATHERINE

Yeah. SYLVIA

I own this. KATHERINE

Yes, but it got switched. SYLVIA

I don't . . . KATHERINE

Look, he's gonna bring you the other one, okay! SYLVIA

I . . . KATHERINE

Fine. Fine. All I'm saying is, I guess, can I borrow that book? SYLVIA

You wanna borrow Emerson? KATHERINE

Katherine. RUSSELL

I'll give it back, you know. I mean, that wouldn't be a problem. SYLVIA

Katherine. RUSSELL

Well, okay. KATHERINE

(jumping across the room and grabbing the book)
 NO. You can't borrow it because . . . I was in the middle of reading it. RUSSELL

I'm sorry. He's had a hard day.
 (to Russell) KATHERINE

Russell, give her the book.

RUSSELL

No. I'm right in the middle of a very interesting, very engaging section.

KATHERINE

Someone broke into his office last night.

SYLVIA

His office?

RUSSELL

I couldn't bear to . . . I'm sure they have another copy in the library.

KATHERINE

Give her the book, Russell.

RUSSELL

I made notes in the margin of this one. I think it's becoming an addiction for me. Emerson and . . .

KATHERINE

(to Sylvia)

I'm really sorry about this, I think he might be going into another, you know, it's not that different from when . . . This is similar to how he acted before his last nervous breakdown.

SYLVIA

Yeah?

KATHERINE

I know it's ridiculous, but could you just humor him and check it out from the library or something?

RUSSELL

Transcendentalism is like a whole new window on the world.

SYLVIA

Which one of you got the book, was it him or you?

KATHERINE

It's my book, I'm just saying that since he's in the state he is, if you could just find a copy somewhere else.

RUSSELL

You know, In Spring I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods.

SYLVIA

I need the print. That's why I have to have that one. I had another one, but it didn't work. They switched them.

KATHERINE

Surely you could find the same edition.

RUSSELL

To drink from the marrow-bone of life and thereby when I come to die, to find that I had really lived.

SYLVIA

You're not gonna give it to me?

KATHERINE

Russell, Russell. Come on, won't you be reasonable?

RUSSELL

"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

KATHERINE

I'm sorry, I . . .

SYLVIA

Can I try to get it from him?

KATHERINE

Go ahead. I'm sorry. He's not usually . . .

SYLVIA

Russell, give me the book.

RUSSELL

The fresh Rhodora is in the woods.

SYLVIA

I will pinch your ear if you don't hand it over.

KATHERINE

Honey, please.

(SYLVIA and RUSSELL struggle for control of the book.)

RUSSELL

No. No. Russell want book. Naughty. Naughty. Naughty. Bad girl.

SYLVIA
Share. SHARE.

KATHERINE
Honey . . .

RUSSELL
No. Russell's book. Russell want book.

KATHERINE
Sylvia, I'm sorry. Just let him have the book. I'm sorry. I'm sorry you had to see this.

SYLVIA
I'll come back later.

KATHERINE
I'm sorry he's like this.

SYLVIA
You'll try and get it from him?

KATHERINE
Absolutely. I'm really sorry.

SYLVIA
I'll be back.

KATHERINE
Alright. Thank you for understanding.

SYLVIA
Yeah. But make sure he doesn't do anything with it.

KATHERINE
Alright. I will. Have a good day.

SYLVIA
Okay. I'll stop by later.

KATHERINE
Alright. I'll see you then.

SYLVIA
Bye.

KATHERINE

Bye.

(SHE shuts the door behind SYLVIA. A moment of silence.)

RUSSELL

Has the whole academic world gone insane?

KATHERINE

What has gotten into you?

RUSSELL

Have I been so cloistered in my office that I have missed seeing the rest of the world go insane?

KATHERINE

You were babbling incoherently.

RUSSELL

Katherine, I want you to come over here.

KATHERINE

I don't think I could deal with another mental breakdown, Russell.

RUSSELL

Come over here.

KATHERINE

I do not want to have to go through that again.

RUSSELL

(holding the book open)

I want you to look at this.

KATHERINE

You were behaving like a two year old. Do you know how hard that is for me?

RUSSELL

Look at this.

KATHERINE

What, Russell? What is it?

RUSSELL

Look.

KATHERINE

(seeing the thumb)
What have you done to my book!

RUSSELL

That's a human thumb.

KATHERINE

That's not funny. What are you going to do next? Huh.

RUSSELL

(overlapping)
No. I didn't think so either.

KATHERINE

Where did you get that, that's gross.

RUSSELL

It's your book. I don't know where it came from.

KATHERINE

Honey, there is a time and a place for practical jokes and this is not the time or the place.

RUSSELL

(overlapping)
Practical jokes? This is . . . Touch it. Touch it.

KATHERINE

Besides which I'm not at all happy about your cutting up my book.

RUSSELL

Me cutting up your . . . Touch it. Come on.

KATHERINE

No, I'm not going to touch . . . I know you may not care a hill of beans about transcendentalism but that does not give you the liberty to . . . Let go of my hand. Unhand me please. Russell!

(RUSSELL has grabbed hold of her hand and is forcing her to touch the finger.)

RUSSELL

Just . . . there.

KATHERINE

It's alive.

RUSSELL
It's not alive.

KATHERINE
I mean it's real.

RUSSELL
I know it's real. Why do you think I was so . . . ?

KATHERINE
How did you get that?

RUSSELL
It's your book. It's not your thumb?

KATHERINE
No! I—why would you think it was mine?

RUSSELL
It's your book.

KATHERINE
You mean, you were accusing me of cutting off someone's thumb? I'm your wife!

RUSSELL
Didn't you just try to accuse me?

KATHERINE
I'm your wife—and you don't trust me enough to know I wouldn't go around cutting off people's thumbs!

RUSSELL
What am I supposed to think? I come into my office, there is your book . . .

KATHERINE
What are you supposed to think! Wait a minute.

RUSSELL
And then Sylvia comes in. Starts talking about it.

KATHERINE
You think she was talking about the—this?

RUSSELL
Something is going on.

KATHERINE

She wanted the thumb?

RUSSELL

That's sure what it sounded like.

KATHERINE

Why would she want a thumb.

RUSSELL

Don't ask me. Do you think I know?

KATHERINE

Well, maybe we should give it to her.

RUSSELL

Absolutely not. Katherine, we are not giving her this thumb.

KATHERINE

I don't want it.

RUSSELL

Neither do I, but that's besides the point.

KATHERINE

She seems to want it.

RUSSELL

No. No. You are not going to talk me into this.

KATHERINE

Well, why shouldn't we give it to her?

RUSSELL

I refuse, I adamantly refuse to be involved in giving anyone a thumb. I can think of no upright and moral reason why anyone would need a thumb and I refuse to be aiding and abetting criminal activity.

KATHERINE

But how did it get in your office?

RUSSELL

How did it get in your book?

KATHERINE

This is very disturbing.

RUSSELL

We're not forgetting, are we, that someone did break in this office last night?

KATHERINE

Oh, but that's not connected.

RUSSELL

No? It seems to me that it very well might be.

KATHERINE

No, it wasn't.

RUSSELL

Although, how Sylvia knew it was here . . .

KATHERINE

Wait a minute.

RUSSELL

What.

KATHERINE

This is . . . Russell. I think I might know who did this.

RUSSELL

Yes?

KATHERINE

It's a long story. Will you listen without . . . will you listen the whole way though without interrupting me?

RUSSELL

I don't . . .

KATHERINE

Please. Give me that assurance at least. It's not going to be pleasant to tell this to you in any case.

RUSSELL

You know who did it?

KATHERINE

I might. I might. Will you . . .

RUSSELL

Yes. Yes.

KATHERINE

Well—boy I don't know how to say this. I, uh, broke into your office last night.

RUSSELL

Honey!

KATHERINE

No, no. Listen. You remember that student's paper you told me about? Well, you weren't understanding my need for a cabin, and I thought that maybe, if I could find that paper . . .

RUSSELL

You were going to bribe me?

KATHERINE

Well, actually I am going to bribe you. I have the paper, and you won't get it back until . . .

RUSSELL

This is ridiculous. I can't believe I'm hearing this.

KATHERINE

But that's beside the point.

RUSSELL

No it's not.

KATHERINE

You promised to listen.

RUSSELL

I didn't know that you were embezzling.

KATHERINE

ANYWAY. I wasn't the only one who broke in last night. Someone else was here too.

RUSSELL

Someone else.

KATHERINE

Yes.

RUSSELL

In my office.

Yes. KATHERINE

Okay? RUSSELL

Travis. KATHERINE

Pardon me? RUSSELL

KATHERINE
It was Travis, your student. The one who wrote the paper. He was coming to trash your office because you'd given him a bad grade. Speaking of which, I cannot see how you can live with yourself knowing that you are doing something as unethical and unfair as . . .

RUSSELL
Don't get off the subject. He came in and . . .

KATHERINE
Well, I convinced him to not do as much as he had planned—honey, he was going to smear tuna fish all over your office.

RUSSELL
That's repulsive.

KATHERINE
Although I can understand that he felt that some sort of revenge was in order.

RUSSELL
Dear, the thumb?

KATHERINE
Well, I had brought my book with me. I must of forgot it. But he mentioned it, I remember. I didn't see anything, but maybe . . . He had a small package with him. We left at the same time, but he might have come back.

RUSSELL
And put the finger in the book.

KATHERINE
That's what I am suggesting. Yes.

RUSSELL

Because of the grade.

KATHERINE

He did say he may lose his scholarship.

RUSSELL

And this would be a . . . threat?

KATHERINE

Maybe.

(Pause.)

RUSSELL

Do you think it's some sort of *death* threat?

KATHERINE

I don't know. I don't know. And why would Sylvia . . .

RUSSELL

Maybe she witnessed him, cutting of the . . .

KATHERINE

And who's thumb is it?

RUSSELL

I don't know! You brought the book with you last night?

KATHERINE

Uh-huh.

RUSSELL

And there was no thumb in it?

KATHERINE

Russell! No. I read it on the subway.

RUSSELL

And Travis was here.

KATHERINE

Yes.

RUSSELL

Saying he wanted revenge?

KATHERINE
Uh-huh.

RUSSELL
Honey, do you know that I love you?

KATHERINE
I love you too.

(THEY embrace.)

RUSSELL
Sometimes it just takes things like this to bring us together.

KATHERINE
What should we do?

(Pause.)

RUSSELL
Where did you say that cabin was?

KATHERINE
It's upstate. In the Catskills. About three hours.

RUSSELL
You know, I think it might be good to get away for awhile.

KATHERINE
I love you.

RUSSELL
We'll be like two nymphs in the woods.

KATHERINE
Druids.

RUSSELL
Fauns.

(They move to embrace again and KATHERINE moves a chair.)

RUSSELL (continued)
Don't move that.

KATHERINE

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

(SHE puts it back and they embrace.)

ACT II—SCENE 3

[In this scene we discover that the play we have been watching is more closely connected to the story SAUL is writing than has hitherto been apparent. This scene is still improvised but it should meld with the first scene of the play, eventually relying almost entirely on the lines from the first scene. Keep in mind, however, that SAUL is still in the writing process. It's not quite the finished scene. Quite likely he spends some time re-writing (replaying portions of the story he is telling with some changes) in each of his scenes, but this should be especially evident in this scene.]

SAUL

Chapter Three. The Hitman.

[SUGGESTED STORY: The Story of the Hitman. Joe has obtained his two bodies, and must now get them to his apartment. Not having a car, he takes them home on the subway. At home his housekeeper, Agnes proposes marriage . . . etc. In this scene do not play all the way though the first scene unless the story is compressed and sped up considerably.]

ACT II—SCENE 4

(RUSSELL's office. Cardboard boxes are sitting around. RUSSELL is in the middle of packing up his books to move to the cabin. As the lights come up the room is empty. KATHERINE enters.)

KATHERINE

Russell? Russell? Where can . . .
(SHE leaves.)

(Pause. SYLVIA enters. SHE looks around. Begins to look through the books. SHE hears someone at the door and hides, perhaps in a packing box. RUSSELL enters.)

RUSSELL

Katherine, I . . . Never mind. I thought . . . Maybe she went back to her office.

(HE carries a stack of books over to the box where SYLVIA is hiding, then thinks better of it and sets them down.)

RUSSELL (continued)

No.

(HE exits the room. SYLVIA begins to get out of the box, then hears someone at the door and returns to her hiding position. JOE and AGNES enter. AGNES is hanging on JOE. During the time we have not seen them, they have gotten engaged.)

AGNES

You sure this is the right one?

JOE

It said Professor Marshall on the door.

AGNES

The book says Literature Department.

JOE

Well, look. Books. Literature.

AGNES

This said Philosophy.

JOE

It also said Professor Marshall. Are they gonna have two Professor Marshalls? You look over there, I'll look over here.

AGNES

Okay, I . . .

(AGNES heads to the box SYLVIA is in, but stops because there's a KNOCK on the door.)

JOE

Hide.

(THEY hide. TRAVIS enters.)

TRAVIS

Hello? Anybody here?

(HE picks up a book, reads the back cover, then sets it back down and exits. JOE and AGNES emerge from their hiding places and start to look, but before AGNES gets to the box SYLVIA is in they hear a noise at the door and run back to their hiding places, just barely getting there when KATHERINE opens the door.)

KATHERINE

(bringing with her a pile of books)

Honey, I . . . I could have sworn I heard him in here. Hmm.

(SHE sets down the books and exits. JOE and AGNES emerge from hiding and begin to look. AGNES opens the box that SYLVIA is in and screams loudly and without stopping for a good long while.)

AGNES

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

RUSSELL

(rushing in)

Katherine, are you alright?

TRAVIS

(rushing in)

Professor Marshall, are you . . .

KATHERINE

(rushing in)

Honey, are you . . .

(Only now does AGNES stop screaming.)

AGNES

AGNES

You sat by him on the subway.

JOE

I, uh . . .

(HE looks at SYLVIA and realizes he can't say that they accidentally switched books.)

You remember that job you hired me for? Well, I gave you the wrong one by mistake, and just came here to switch.

RUSSELL

You know him?

KATHERINE

No. I . . . What job?

JOE

I . . . The one you hired me for.

(Pause.)

AGNES

Where's the finger?

TRAVIS

The finger?

AGNES

The thumb. Where's the thumb?

TRAVIS

Thumb?

RUSSELL

Ah, yes. The thumb. Travis?

TRAVIS

What?

RUSSELL

The thumb?

AGNES

Where is it?

RUSSELL

(to Travis)
This lady would like to know where the thumb is. Perhaps you could enlighten her?

(TRAVIS slaps his face to wake himself up just in case he's dreaming. HE's not.)

TRAVIS

I don't understand.

RUSSELL

No. Neither do I Travis. Neither do I.

KATHERINE

Russell, be careful.

SYLVIA

(at the same time)
Something doesn't seem right here.

TRAVIS

(at the same time)
What are you talking about?

AGNES

(at the same time)
Just tell us where it is.

RUSSELL

I want to know this story.

KATHERINE

(at the same time)
He might be dangerous.

SYLVIA

(at the same time)
Did you hire him or didn't you? And who have you got kidnapped?

TRAVIS

(at the same time)
Would somebody tell me what's going on here?

JOE

(pulling out a gun)
ALL RIGHT EVERYBODY, SHUT UP. I've got a gun and I'm not afraid to use it.
Now who's got the thumb? Hand it over.

(Silence.)

JOE (continued)

I can wait. Cause I am going to get that thumb. Make no doubt about it. I am going to get that thumb.

SYLVIA

It's not worth killing someone.

JOE

(to Sylvia)

What are you doing here? Didn't we say we'd give you a call? I don't appreciate you just showing up uninvited.

RUSSELL

I might say the same thing. I might say the same thing.

JOE

(to Russell)

Shut up.

RUSSELL

Well, I would just like an explanation of what you all are doing in my office.

JOE

I have a gun. When I say shut up I expect you to shut up.

(JOE has moved a piece of furniture for emphasis as he says this. RUSSELL starts to say something, but thinks better of it.)

KATHERINE

Honey, he has a gun.

JOE

Now, is anybody ready to tell me about anything?

RUSSELL

(referring to Travis)

Ask him. He's the one who knows what's going on.

TRAVIS

What? I . . . Don't point that at me. It might go off.

JOE

That's the idea. Now you wanna tell me where the thumb is?

TRAVIS
What thumb?

RUSSELL
The thumb you left in my office.

SYLVIA, AGNES and TRAVIS
What?

TRAVIS
I didn't leave a thumb in your office.

RUSSELL
Don't believe him.

TRAVIS
Don't believe . . . This is ridiculous, I'm getting out of here.

JOE
Stay where you are.

TRAVIS
Would somebody tell me what's going on?

JOE
Nobody's going anywhere until I've got the thumb.

SYLVIA
(referring to TRAVIS)
How did he get it?

TRAVIS
If I get out of this alive I'm going to become a surrealist.

KATHERINE
Russell, maybe you should . . .

(TRAVIS makes a decision and leaps at JOE, JOE fires but misses. TRAVIS grabs the gun and shoots it into the air.)

TRAVIS
WHAT IS GOING ON?

(Silence. TRAVIS grabs SYLVIA and puts the gun to her head.)

TRAVIS (continued)

Talk. Tell me what's going on.

SYLVIA

(referring to KATHERINE)

She hired him to kill someone and cut off their thumb.

KATHERINE

What?

RUSSELL

That's ridiculous!

KATHERINE

I never saw him until right now.

SYLVIA

You did too. You had someone kidnapped.

KATHERINE

Kidnapped!

TRAVIS

Okay. Okay. One at a time. Go.

KATHERINE

But she . . .

TRAVIS

One at a time.

SYLVIA

He's a hitman. She hired him to get a thumb, but he gave her the wrong one, so now he's here to exchange. Ask him.

TRAVIS

A hitman! And you hired someone to kill someone! This is not happening. I am not standing here holding a gun.

KATHERINE

I don't know what she's talking about.

TRAVIS

(referring to KATHERINE)

Okay, now you. What's your story?

KATHERINE

I don't know what she's talking about. I came here last night, well you know that. And I brought Emerson with me. I left it here in the office, and this morning my husband found it with a thumb in it. That's all I know. I don't have anything to do with it.

RUSSELL

And it seems pretty likely, as you were the other one in the office last night, that despite all your pretended innocence, you actually have quite a bit to do with the thumb.

TRAVIS

I don't know anything about it. I never heard about a thumb until I walked in the office just now to find people screaming and people in boxes and someone waving a gun around and all this talk about a thumb.

RUSSELL

Then what were you doing in my office?

TRAVIS

(turning the gun on Russell)
You gave me a D on my paper. Which, then I found out you were planning on plagiarizing.

(SYLVIA, now out of range of the gun, attacks TRAVIS and gets the gun from him.)

SYLVIA

I like this. I like this a lot. You know, I don't mind this at all. I find I can think a lot clearer when I'm in this position. And now I want you to stop telling your little stories and hand over the thumb. Give me Emerson.

TRAVIS

This is not happening.

(RUSSELL has had Emerson on his person, and now he pulls it out, and hands it to SYLVIA.)

SYLVIA

Thank you.
(SHE leaves with the book.)

TRAVIS

What just happened?

JOE

Why did you give that to her?

TRAVIS
What's going on?

AGNES
She's gonna try to break into a safe.

RUSSELL
What?

JOE
That's what she hired me for. To get the thumb. But I gave her the wrong one. Cause she was going to break into a safe. Here's your book.
(Hands Emerson to KATHERINE.)

KATHERINE
How did you get this?

AGNES
Maybe we should call the police.

JOE
I was sitting by you on the subway.

RUSSELL
She doesn't have it.

KATHERINE
What?

RUSSELL
She doesn't have the thumb.

JOE
You just gave it to her.

TRAVIS
It was in the book?

RUSSELL
No, I didn't.

KATHERINE
What do you mean?

RUSSELL
I flushed it down the toilet.

JOE

Do you know how much that thumb was worth?

TRAVIS

You flushed a human thumb down the toilet! I never knew academics could be so exciting.

RUSSELL

I thought it would be best.

AGNES

(to JOE)

It's okay dear. You're going to give up your life of crime now anyway.

KATHERINE

So you really are a hitman?

JOE

Yes.

AGNES

Was. Not anymore. I refuse to marry a hitman.

JOE

We're gonna start a restaurant.

TRAVIS

Professor Marshall, about my paper . . . ?

RUSSELL

Yes. I will give you a better grade.

TRAVIS

Are you really going to write a book off of it?

RUSSELL

Travis, I could not let an opportunity like this pass me by. I know that you are now in a position to turn me in, but I am willing to bargain with you. I'll give you money.

TRAVIS

Could I write the book with you?

(Pause.)

RUSSELL

I hadn't thought of that. Would you be interested in that?

TRAVIS

We could maybe do it like an independent study.

RUSSELL

Yes. Yes. This will be excellent.

KATHERINE

But Russell, we're leaving. We're going to the cabin.

RUSSELL

I'll apply for a sabbatical to work on the book. And we'll all go to the cabin.

KATHERINE

For next semester?

RUSSELL

I think I can get it.

JOE

Did you say you have a cabin that's going to be empty until next semester?

KATHERINE

It's a beautiful little place upstate.

JOE

I know this is terribly bold of us, but is there any chance we could go there for our honeymoon. I was expecting to get a large sum of money that seems to have been flushed down the toilet. I mean, we could still pay, I just . . .

KATHERINE

Of course. Of course. Don't you think, honey?

RUSSELL

I don't see why not.

KATHERINE

I have some pictures of it in my office if you want to come and see.

AGNES

Yeah, that would be great.

(KATHERINE, AGNES and JOE leave. RUSSELL and TRAVIS follow them out.)

RUSSELL

About your paper, Travis. I wanted to talk to you about the part about your theory of individual evolution . . .

TRAVIS

Yes.

(THEY exit. BLACKOUT.)