

THE DIRTY MAN

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The Dirty Man's blunt-force comedic blend draws attention to concepts and frameworks around happiness, intimacy, life, morality, meaning, purpose, and sex. ASU Psychology seniors, Buch and Penny, surface as a two-year secure, sex-free couple. A planned romantic camping trip with friends to Appalachia goes awry, and an 830-year-old shaman accidentally curses and shapes Buch into an antihero, the Dirty Man.



Characters

- Gartner: Senior at Appalachian State University (ASU). Wild and loyal. Sharp. Always looking for profit.
- Buch: \`būch\; the Dirty Man. ASU Senior. Sexually repressed yet faithful. Kind and thoughtful.
- Theda: Senior at ASU. Ambitious. Power-hungry. Cunning and manipulative political starlet.
- Penny: Senior at ASU. Intelligent egghead. Altruistic, naïve and obstinate blossoming helping professional.
- Generys: Moon-eyed people puppet. Jumpy, quirky, and witty old female curmudgeon shaman. Speaks a mix of Cherokee and Old Welsh.
- WFMY
Channel 2
News Crew: Pre-recorded news team, Aidan Carlton, Jasper Davis, Donna Dixon and camera crew in Act II.
- Student: Brave and mature hidden in audience female college student in Act II.
- Client 2/
Senator
Rogers: Pre-recorded or miked backstage powerful female client and politician.
- Ensemble: ASU administration, artists, college students, professors, sponsors in Act I, pre-recorded clients and victims, and aide in Act II.

Notes: As a dark-blue, romantic comedy moral dilemma, the Dirty Man tussles with some of philosophies' timely and timeless questions around the nature of the human animal and its perils and passions of existence. Be warned and prepared!

In the words of an esteemed colleague, "Everybody be fuckin'!" How do we make sense of humans as sophisticated animals?

Each scene begins with a thought from Eastern or Western philosophy recorded with the voices of people from all ages and backgrounds and played before the scene begins.

The Dirty Man is meant for mature audiences. Sexually explicit material appears and beckons audience interaction. Directors and thespians pay attention to this interaction for the protection of minors.

Finally, cybercrime and revenge porn strike as real issues globally that should be taken seriously.

My vision of characters flows in this extended description, not yours. Casting directors, directors, and thespians, make it your own.

Characters (Optional extended descriptions)

Gartner: Gartner Marc Johnson. Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in Accounting (BSBA) major with astute entrepreneur focus at Appalachian State University. Gartner pledged Pi Kappa Alpha Iota Psi chapter his freshmen year. Third generation legacy. Voted unanimously External VP. Senior. Charming and gregarious. Bright and keen. Transparently selfish. Authentic intimacy is possible; however, women serve as sexual conduits.

Gartner grew up with Buch in the suburbs of Charlotte, North Carolina. Buch's friendship maintains a primary motive driving many decisions large and small. Buch inspires Gartner to be a better version of himself, a better person. At the same time, Gartner delights in his persuasive powers.

Theda is hot, and it is only a matter of time. Bitch, please. I got this. She doesn't stand a chance. The relentless combination of charm, sex appeal, power plays, and friend connections will drive this baby to home plate.

Buch: Gregory Butch "Buch" Piper (Third grade teacher botched name pronunciation, and it stuck). Bachelor of Science in Psychology at Appalachian State University. Pi Kappa Alpha Iota Psi chapter pledge freshman year due to influence from Gartner. Health and Safety officer. Senior. Buch has recently decided to complete both concentrations of human services and sustainability thereby extending his graduation time

one more semester. He craves Appalachia natural habitat protection and usage while aspiring to create a solid foundation for more possibilities.

Intelligence and equity; driven and focused; pliant and tolerant. Buch enjoys social science and the action and thought of helping others. He maintains the wherewithal for awareness of positive feelings and personal affects. Buch acknowledges his fortunate childhood as an upper-middle class US Citizen and has consciously sought experiences with those less fortunate. He has contemplated Peace corps after graduation for his first venture into the real world as an adult. Penny and Buch have pondered marrying then joining as a couple. Appalachia enchants him like a siren to an ancient Aegean Sea captain. The mountainous woods cast a melodious spell and will forever serve as both a dangerous and comforting reprieve for the Dirty Man.

Buch loves Gartner though he sometimes finds him mentally exhausting. He enjoys Gartner's edgy, reckless side while at the same time sustaining a high boundary fence. Intimacy in authentic relationship elevates as a top priority for Buch. But he is a human heterosexual male and sometimes fits the stereotype. The inward battle evolves and heightens in its intensity.

Penny is the one. Buch baffles at the easiness of their relationship. *Everything just flows. Except this whole sex hang-up. Really, what's the big deal?* Buch hasn't found any evidence to support sex starvation in a strong, long-term relationship. It is a bit concerning but not worth mentioning yet.

Theda:

Rita Theda Blythe. Bachelor of Science in Political Science, Pre-professional Legal Studies at Appalachian State University. Chi Omega pledge freshman year. Senior. Theda has applied at multiple significant law schools including Berkeley, Georgetown, Harvard, and Stanford. She maintains a short list due to no time for second best. Theda seeks political office—mayor, senator, president in that order.

Theda seeks power and prestige and will stop at nothing to achieve it. Brainy and beautiful. Relentless and sly. Catty and Manipulative. Somewhat closeted bi-sexual. Sex prioritizes as a tool first followed closely by a pleasurable catalyst for many agendas with lasting second and third order effects that only work to her advantage.

Theda grew up with Penny. They lived on the same block and were the only girls around for miles. Geography forced their friendship. As a result, they were on and off throughout their childhood education. *Penny is weak and will never amount to much of anything—besides helping voters and occasional orphans.* Still, she keeps Theda grounded. Theda appreciates the gravity. There might be a little friendship involved.

Gartner serves to an end like the other 40+ men Theda has dated at ASU. She met him through a haphazard link-up with Penny at the Timber Town laundry mat. And of course, Buch. *He will do for now*. No sex yet; still analyzing the angle, rewards, and risks.

Penny: Penny Lynn Kennedy. Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a concentration in social science at Appalachian State University. Chi Omega pledge freshman year. Senior. Aspires to continue her education to Doctor of Psychology to become a school counselor. Flexible yet arduous worker. An ardent, penetrating mind combined with an infectious smile and an enthusiastic heart and passion for people.

Penny and Buch met in a clinical psychology lab and have been dating since sophomore year. Penny loves Buch. She particularly enjoys his drive for helping others and his selfless push towards understanding all people—especially those less fortunate or from traumatic backgrounds and circumstances. She remains annoyed at his push to have sex and suspects he gets a little too wild a fraternity parties though avoids catastrophizing. She trusts him while doubting sometimes if he has the capacity to wait.

Penny's decision to wait for sex comes from her academic focus and pursuits alongside a belief that sex hyper-influences decisions in relationships and might serve as a multi-layered biased filter. *Buch, it is a better choice to abstain from sexual activity while fostering comfort and knowledge of self and the other first without the stimuli and impacts of sexual chemical cocktails.*

Generys: Moon-Eyed People puppet.¹ Old female curmudgeon shaman Who finds herself torn between the peace of solitude with cave ecosystems and warding off burgeoning Appalachia, her home. Compassion and prudence drive Gen's shrewd, forthright mindset. She is emotional and quick-witted. Jumpy and trigger happy.

Inhabits the cave systems but will venture out to forage for specific ingredients. Rarely goes out during the day due to poor vision. Learned and retained old English, Cherokee, and Welsh—speaks a strange combination of all but primarily Welsh. White, pale, long greasy and stringy blonde-gray hair. Huge, circular pale blue eyes with pupils staying in a perpetual dilated state. Round, tender face with a stark contrast in age to the rest of her body and mannerisms. Minor facial weathered and aging—830 years old appearing in her late thirties or early 40s. Gen's obese body, broken-stuttered alto mumbling and speaking, and non-verbal

¹ Adapted from legends around the Moon-Eyed People forming mystery and theory difficult to resolve, accessed December 21, 2024 at <https://appalachianmemories.org/2024/09/26/the-moon-eyed-people-of-chokeee-legend-mysteries-of-the-smoky-mountains/>.

cues alongside a lack of agility and dexterity contradicts her young face—magically functioning appearing 830 years old everywhere else. She has been her closest companion for hundreds of years and outside dialogue attests to her endearing qualities and adoration for her own brilliance.

Hydrastis llyfin, ginseng, a pipsessawa am ddyddiau! Byddwch yn mynd ymsefydlwyr blino (spit)! Yn felltith i chi a yeeee! (Smooth hydrastis, ginseng, and pipsessaw for days! Go away annoying settlers (spit)! Curse you!)

Generys' is the only living descendant of albino-like prehistoric peoples tracing heritage to Madoc, Prince of Wales. Voiced by a deep-toned woman, or a scratchy voiced man.

Setting: Pi Kappa Alpha Iota Psi Chapter Fraternity house.
At Rise: Major annual party that has taken months to plan. Sponsors. Artists. Professors. Administration. Students. Music. Beer. Chaos.

BLUE HAWAIIAN, APRIL 2024²

“IT IS WELL SAID, THEN, THAT IT IS BY DOING JUST ACTS THAT THE JUST *PERSON* IS PRODUCED, AND BY DOING TEMPERATE ACTS THE TEMPERATE *PERSON*; WITHOUT DOING THESE NO ONE WOULD HAVE EVEN A PROSPECT OF BECOMING GOOD” (CHANGE IN ITALICS, MINE). — ARISTOTLE, THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

(Red Solo Cups and Coors light from kegs are staged and operated. 100% high energy. Lights. Sound. Massive crowd dances. Shouts. Beer guzzling. Elevated DJ. Daisy Dukes. Hoses.

The audience walks into an anticipated annual party occurring all around them. Attendees offer beer encouraging party vibes.

Outside with hardwood trees backdrop and Pi Kappa Alpha frat house in the background. Allow time to create a massive annual party environment. People dancing and laughing onstage. People moving on and off the stage in all directions. Attempt to have enough extras for breaking the fourth wall if there is one. Perhaps a healthy spurt from multiple firehoses. Blue Hawaiian climate minutes into party kickoff. Audience parties. Eventually on-stage shines Gartner and Buch ending and beginning to shotgun a beer. The epigraph kicks off the show—be open and flexible to time for maximum feel.

Buch and Gartner have already been drinking as their lines reflect.)

GARTNER

What do you think?

(Laughing and yelling helping Buch get ready for his Coors Light shotgun)

BUCH

I think you are a maniac. Really? Cindy Thomas? Come on, man! She homeschooled and she's from *Luberton*.³ She probably pays for college with lube and prostitution.

² Adapted from the Pi Kappa Alpha Blue Hawaiian party at Appalachian State University, accessed December 21, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/appstatepikes/p/C5T-AcopQAD/?img_index=1.

³ North Carolina native inside joke referencing Lumberton, North Carolina.

(laughing and yelling while prepping beer)

GARTNER

What?! She's primed and ready! Yeah...Ok. I'm done. That might be true. Verdict still out!

(Feeling buzz. Maintain yelling over music. Banter with facial and tonal play)

BUCH

I suppose so! Thanks for helping put this craziness together. I think it is better than last year's already. More hot professors and subtle undergirding sexual tension.

(maintain yelling over music)

GARTNER

You think?! That's exactly what we were going for! I didn't do much honestly—mostly Collin's evil genius! Red Bull sponsors! The fucking Bucking Camel Company! Unreal! Coaxing all of them in with relevant crumbs, baby! That man is destined for greatness!

BUCH

True. But I know you worked behind the scenes, asshole! Thanks sincerely. I needed to unwind a little. You help me keep it *light and fluffy*. This whole additional semester or year thing has me rattled.

(Gartner is distracted with women-gazing; Buch grabs his face for eye contact at thanks line)

GARTNER

Always! Cheers!

(punctures Buch's beer with key)

Drink, mothafucka!

(The crowd surges around Buch yelling "Drink!" repeatedly cheering him on until complete.)

Two beautiful women coach Buch from both sides.

Penny and Theda begin their approach through the audience.)

Ahhhh! You're so weak!

(Buch sprays remaining beer.)

BUCH

(playful sleuth impersonation) Yeah...once again, the impeccable quality of your

reminders!

(coughing and laughing while being consoled by the two beautiful women; Buch looks at both women while replying.

Penny and Theda make it to Buch just in time for the spray and dialogue.

Buch notices Penny immediately following the comment.)

BUCH

(buzzed and clueless to perception) Penny! Hi! You made it!

(The two beautiful women look on and laugh. Buch is laughing while genuinely happy and surprised continuing activity.

Penny hears retort but doesn't acknowledge, turns around and slowly works her way through crowd the way she came. Keep walking until out.)

THEDA

Haahaha! Did you do it this time?! You dirty, dirty man!

(A nod to the two women. Gartner and everyone around Buch continue to laugh oblivious to the problem. Buch's concern surfaces. Theda shakes her head, blows Gartner a flirtatious kiss, turns and follows Penny.)

Party extras in the audience leave as directed. Ominous. Scene 1 cranks fast-paced EDM for party then strategic silence—highest of energies onstage and in audience, then instant awkward nerve-racking silence.

Help the audience feel the conflict and change.)

(Lights out. Sound out.)

CHOKING ON HELLO⁴

“WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND IS NOT WHAT IS ENGRAVED IN STONE MONUMENTS, BUT WHAT

⁴ Stephen Stills and Crosby, Stills, and Nash, “Helplessly Hoping,” May 29, 1969.

IS WOVEN INTO THE LIVES OF OTHERS.” –PERICLES

(Buch and Gartner’s apartment one side of stage; Penny and Theda’s apartment on the other side.)

Buch and Gartner nurse a hangover throughout the scene. Buch seeks to make amends with Penny. Penny and Theda battle normal Saturday chores with flipping through feeds and watching reality TV.

Lighting establishes clarity for the separate apartment dialogues.)

BUCH

(hungover) I hurt. All over.
(Stretched out over the sofa)

GARTNER

(equally hungover) Yes. You speak truth.
(Strange positioning on the loveseat)

PENNY

(calm frustration) I am so through undergrad.
(Dressed comfortably drinking coffee thumbing through cell)

THEDA

(wryly probing) Through with *college or your man?*
(Clicking through television channels)

GARTNER

(moaning) Oh, great and wonderful gods, I call on you. Give me Starbucks. Now!
(Snaps fingers)

BUCH

I wish. So badly. I wish.

PENNY

(laughing) Maybe both. I just don’t get it. I don’t get the draw.

THEDA

Reference yesterday? Hmmm? Daisy dukes? Cedar siding? Free lager on a hot day?
(moves to playfully push Penny). What my dear is not to like about authentic southern college Americana? NASCAR. Apple pie. Hot dogs. Red Solo cups. Fraternities. Sororities...

BUCH

(concerned) Fuck. Fuck. Fuck! Dude. Did I fuck up bigtime with Pen?

GARTNER

Nawww man. You're good! You didn't do anything! Unfortunately. Shut up. I need coffee before you start bitching about another almost amazing time. You could have had a threesome.

PENNY

(chuckling) Yeah. Thanks. I guess I get that.

THEDA

Then what's the fuss?

GARTNER

Just relax, man. Give it time. The Blue Hawaiian sun will set over the horizon. And tomorrow will be a new day, my friend. How much coffee should I make, you lazy, depressed bastard.

(Getting up to make coffee)

BUCH

(fixated) Yeah. I don't know, man. You see that look on her face? It was as if I just punched her solar plex or shot her family dog. What did I do? Really?

PENNY

(pushing back) Except the cheap American beer thang...seriously. I don't get that Buch and I have been dating for over two years now. Right?

THEDA

Yeah...

GARTNER

How much COFFEE?!

BUCH

I'll drink four to six.

PENNY

(rattles off rapid one-line descriptions getting lost in thought) He is such a caring person. Charming. Clean. Clever. Compassionate. Confident. Courageous. Creative. Enthusiastic. Self-aware. Other-aware. Thoughtful. Fun. Endearing. Smart. Frugal. Healthy. Effective communicator. Good-looking. Loyal. Honest. Solid character, morals, and values...

THEDA

...

GARTNER

Full pot it is...Just relax, man. Time heals all shit. Besides. If I had it my way, you'd have a lot more to apologize for. You were having fun and blowing off some non-sexual

steam unfortunately at the most anticipated party of the Pike fiscal and calendar year.
(*Works to start a full pot*)

BUCH

(*dismissing Gartner's words*) Thanks for the coffee...I think this could be it. I might've really fucked this up finally.

PENNY

I mean we are practically getting married. Almost guaranteed—he is my soul mate.
(*Convincing herself.*)

THEDA

(*patronizing*) Love, twu love...⁵

GARTNER

Dude. Relax! I'm telling you. You are stressing for no reason. None. No reason at all. Nada. Zilch. Give it the fuck up, man! If anything, this shit is on Penny.
(*Throws a wadded pair of dirty socks at Buch's face. This begins dirty clothes war continuing throughout next four dialogues.*)

BUCH

Whatever dude! I just love her, man! She is incredible. Pen is the one—it is that serious!

PENNY

And, he *said* he would wait for me.

THEDA

Wait for you? To do what?

GARTNER

Here we fucking go again! You don't love her, man! You love the idea of her! And her ass.

BUCH

I fucking do love her!

THEDA

(*laborious dot connection*) Oh wow. Really? This again?!

PENNY

...I think the college draw...all of it...the fraternity parties...the sorority girls in tight shorts...the *university discourse*...

BUCH

I'm marrying her in a year, motherfucker!

⁵ The Princess Bride, September 25, 1987.

(continuing clothes war)

GARTNER

Ahhh. Of course! All planned and paid for with invitations sent...Have you even proposed with a ring?

PENNY

I think he could actually give into the discourse, the pressure...And G-money doesn't help.

THEDA

Unreal. I thought we were past this.

BUCH

Not yet. But it is happening. I feel it.

(Throws down nasty underwear)

GARTNER

(Arms wide open) Here, man. All here. *(motions to head)*. You fucking love the idea of her and love the thought of actually fucking her after two years of relationship bullshit. That's the only thing you love.

PENNY

(both hands over face) I don't know what to do. You think...you think maybe I was wrong? No. I can't be.

THEDA

(frustrated) About what part?! All of it? As I've tried to convince you for four years, you are supposed to have a good time at college because you cannot go back! Live! But, no, you study and date one person with ideals and values so fucking high you can't ever achieve an ounce of peace or relaxation. You're a bundle of constant nerves! And I can't believe Buch tolerates you! For two years! It's just a matter of time before this whole wait until marriage thing blows up in your face! Do you think you'll be fucking more than once every two years when you finally marry him?! You know him by now! Look at what you've rattled off! Give it up before you lose him if you love him that much!

BUCH

Whatever, man. You're wrong. It's way beyond just sex. We connect in unreal ways.

(goes to coffee pot and pours a cup)

GARTNER

Dude. You could've had Misty Mountains and Wanda Waterfall *at the same time* yesterday. Just like Nabers last week. And Cartwright the week before. They are on a threesome binge, and they were begging for you yesterday. Sought *you* out. But no. *I'm waiting for Penny. She's the one. We're going to get married and live happily ever after!* If that were true, bro, she would've already been spreading the honey all over your cock.

But. It. Ain't. Gonna. Happen. Girl is too wrapped up in a delusional couples' utopia. I'm telling you, bro. The sooner you give up, the sooner you git livin'.

(walks to pot during monologue and pours a cup at the end)

PENNY

Overwhelming evidence shows sexual activity clouds choice and intimate knowledge of the other.

THEDA

...

BUCH

(drinking coffee) We'll have sex when the time is right. Sex is not the apex of a relationship; it is a one-part expression at best. And an animal instinct at least...I need to call her.

GARTNER

Ahhhh. Right. Yeah. You're an animal in the bathroom every fucking day. That's your college sexual activity summed up nicely. Repressed bathroom lovin'.

(gesturing masturbation)

PENNY

I can't do this. I need to find out if something happened with those bimbos.

(beginning to fold small pile of clean clothes)

THEDA

You really need an answer to the obvious?

BUCH

That's it. I just need to call and reassure her that I got fucked up and jacked off in the bathroom. Communicate.

(searching for cell)

GARTNER

(drenched with sarcasm) Yes. 100%. Why didn't I think of that. Full transparency. Openly tell her of your outlandish drunken sexual escapades—hooking up with Rosie Palms.

(continuing to gesture masturbation)

PENNY

I shouldn't assume. I should just tell him my frustrations and ask him what happened. Where is my damn cell?

(finishing folding pile and searching for cell)

THEDA

(sarcastic jolt) I think you left it next to your brain in the toilet. Or maybe it's on your dresser by the *101 Ways to be Duped* book.

BUCH

(finds cell) Dude. I'm calling Pen.

GARTNER

Have at it, man. I'm gonna take a shower, listen to Crosby, Stills, & Nash on repeat, and wash off Blue Hawaiian cruelty and ignorance.

(exits stage)

PENNY

(finds cell) I'm calling him now.

THEDA

Obviously, I can't stop you.

(focuses on reality TV)

BUCH

(calls Penny; subtle stutter) H-Hello? Penny?

PENNY

(answers cell) Buch! Hello. I was just calling you.

THEDA

Tell him you caught him on camera with the wonder twins.

BUCH

(awkward) Hey. Uh. Do you have a minute?

PENNY

Uh. Yeah. I said I was just calling you.

BUCH

Oh yeah. Right/. How are you?

PENNY

/How are you? Hungover, I guess.

BUCH

Uh. Yeah. A little. Nothing some coffee can't take care of.

(working on cup two)

PENNY

(nervous small talk building courage follows) You go to Starbucks?

BUCH

(chuckles) No. Can't afford it. Gartner tried some magic calling upon the gods. Unfortunately, it didn't work.

PENNY

G not a magician? Are you kidding me? Surely, he would be able to conjure something.

BUCH

Yeah. Who would've thought, right? So disappointing, that guy. He *was* nice enough to make some shit brew though.

PENNY

Ahhhh. Perfect. Instant?

BUCH

No. Oh no. It's not that bad. *(chuckles)* We're not on a thru-hike.

PENNY

Right...he used your French press?

BUCH

No. We needed some faster variety. Bulk too. *(laughing)* Both of us need it. I picked up a cheap coffee pot a couple of weeks ago from Walmart. Finally bit the bullet.

PENNY

Oh. Ok. *(chuckles)* That's coffee commitment.

BUCH

(chuckles) Yeah. I should've did it a long time ago. Saves a lot. I need cheap caffeine to help get me through this extended senior year.

PENNY

Right. You've taken on a lot extra.

BUCH

(chuckles) Yeah...it will be worth it though...

PENNY

Yeah...I think you are right. I am thankful you are that dedicated.

BUCH

Looking back...I should have made the double concentration decision earlier and cut out more bullshit courses.

PENNY

Maybe you're right. But what is the point in dwelling in the past? Can't go back and change it. Just learn from it and move forward.

BUCH

Absolutely...I learned from it all—however drawn out it was. And expensive.

PENNY

(laughing) Right. Yes. It costs...and you probably weren't ready a couple of years ago.

BUCH

Definitely not. It's funny how life is like that. What appears so obvious now.

PENNY

Yes. Don't beat yourself up. We are completely blind to the best choices sometimes.

BUCH

(chuckles) Totally. I got there eventually!

PENNY

(pause then both talk) Yeah./ Listen.

BUCH

(pause then both talk) /Hey. Uh...I owe you an apology.
(quick to spit it out)

PENNY

Ok...What are you apologizing for?

THEDA

Called it.

BUCH

When I saw you yesterday at Blue Hawaiian...

PENNY

Yes.

BUCH

When I saw you, I should've stopped whatever I was doing and kissed you hello.

PENNY

Hmmm hmm.

BUCH

I just got wrapped up in the Blue Hawaiian high energy, the guys, EDM,...you know. But

I was wrong. I should have stopped because you arrived, and I didn't.

PENNY

Is that the *only thing* you were wrapped up in?

BUCH

What do you mean?

(Gartner comes out in towel around waist.)

THEDA

Whoomp, there it is.⁶

PENNY

I mean those floozies hanging all over you...did you hook up with them?

BUCH

No. Nope. That's exactly why I called you now. I didn't want you to think that. I know it looked bad.

GARTNER

(loud) What he means to say is that he woke up regretting exchanging Pike-house throuple thralls for paddling the pink canoe!

(pours another cup of coffee and exits stage again)

PENNY

I wasn't talking to you, Gartner! Wait...what?

(confused by Gartner's last line and error)

BUCH

Dude. Really? I'm sorry, Pen. No. I dropped the ball. When I saw you, I was surprised and caught up in the moment. But nothing happened with those girls or any others. That's it.

(embarrassed)

PENNY

Ok. I believe you. And I forgive you.

THEDA

Naïve bitch.

(Penny rolls her eyes.)

BUCH

Awesome! Thank you. I feel like a dick. And I really owe us some quality time

⁶ Tag Team, "Whoomp, There It Is," May 1993.

overall...uh...what are you doing next weekend?

PENNY

Just standard stuff. But I'm pretty caught up. Why? What are you thinking?

BUCH

I don't know...we haven't been to the woods in a while. Hiking and camping? The weather's been nice in the mountains.

(Gartner walks out with coffee fully clothed.)

PENNY

Yeah. That sounds nice. I've been wanting to take you to Fort Mountain after that summer trip with my family.

BUCH

Fort Mountain, yeah. That sounds good. Never been. That's close to the APC trailhead, right?

GARTNER

Fort Mountain trip. Southern APC. Is Theda in?

PENNY

What are you doing next weekend?

(calls to Theda)?

THEDA

Apparently fighting off mosquitos and Gartner.

PENNY

Yeah, she's in. Sounds like a double date.

BUCH

Ok cool! Glad we talked. I was worried I seriously fucked up. Thank you for forgiving me. Want to do lunch or dinner tomorrow? It's going to take me a minute to recover.

PENNY

Lunch sounds nice. Our spot in the cafeteria?

BUCH

Perfect. Love you.

PENNY

Love you too. Bye.

BUCH

Bye.

GARTNER

Well. That's done. Next apology call, Wanda and Misty.
(looking in contacts)

BUCH

Yeah, I don't think so. Arrrgghhh!
(grabs cell, tosses it at sofa, then immediately grabs head for hangover)

THEDA

Sounds fun. I need to get out of town. *I also need* to do some shopping at Regear before we go. Want to go with me? It doesn't have to be today.

PENNY

I'm good, I think. But I don't mind going with you after I finish laundry and tidying up my bedroom—if you want. Or after today. Just let me know.

GARTNER

Dude! Really?! I need more sleep.
(plops on sofa around cell location)

BUCH

(drinks coffee and chokes while talking) Damn was I nervous at *hello*. But that turned out well...I think I can do this marriage thing.
(proud of himself)

PENNY

I'm proud of us! We handled that conflict well—worked through assumptions and perceptions while achieving reconciliation. /He felt understood. I felt understood.
(talking with herself)

THEDA

/Whatever. I still think you are clueless.

BUCH

I...am going to get clean.
(pours another cup of coffee and exits stage to shower)

GARTNER

(laughing) Yeah...you go do that. Remember, the bathroom door doesn't lock.
(gesturing masturbation)

(Lights down.)

WALT DISNEY

“AND NOW, SAID SOCRATES, I WILL ASK ABOUT LOVE:—IS LOVE OF SOMETHING OR OF

NOTHING?" — PLATO, SYMPOSIUM

(Scene opens focused on a typical university cafeteria corner table. Penny and Buch converse while eating lunch seated. A self-contained candle and a butane torch lighter lie on the floor discreetly by Buch. A small vase with a red rose lies on the floor subtly by Penny. Both have backpacks on the floor concealing the candle, lighter, and rose. Cafeteria music plays in background.)

Buch and Penny struggle with individual aspirations and worries.)

PENNY

Yes, but they used 72,000 participants from 41 countries!⁷

BUCH

I get it. I just think the researchers were more biased on their pathways analysis than what they realize, that's all. I still think it's the best form of psychology for an intervention.

PENNY

...like they are locked on an image of people from somewhere other than where they are from?

BUCH

Exactly. Easy to do for any of us.

PENNY

Yeah. I agree it's important to remember that for research....what do you think about the group therapy comparisons in the West and the East?

BUCH

...seems to be more natural from two-thirds world countries. And therefore, more productive.

PENNY

Yes! That's where I'm leaning too. In fact, I'm beginning to be more and more interested in group modalities rooted in worldviews. It just clicks.

BUCH

You thinking more in-depth study? Maybe a focus area?

PENNY

Yeah, maybe. I have to get through the pending master's program first—might consider it as a thesis option. And if I like it, even more in doctoral work.

⁷ Allen Carr, Katie Cullen, Cora Keeney, Ciaran Cuning, Olwyn Mooney, Ellen Chinseallaigh, & Annie O'Dowd, "Effectiveness of Positive Psychology Interventions: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 16(6), 749–769, (September 10, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1818807>.

BUCH

Sure. Have you heard from any Master's programs? And still leaning staying here, or...

PENNY

No word yet. Yeah, I think so. Honestly, it's easier to stay all the way around. And cheaper. Decent program. Thesis possibilities.

BUCH

I get it. But, what about Berkley or Standford? Harvard or Michigan? You have a great shot at all of them.

PENNY

I know. But...

BUCH

But...

PENNY

What about...what about us?

BUCH

What *about us*? We'd be fine. It's a couple of years tops.

PENNY

I know we would. But I don't know if I want that.

BUCH

What do you mean?

PENNY

I don't think I want to be separated from you. In fact, I know I don't—*if I have a choice*.

BUCH

Yeah. I get it. I'm honestly torn. I don't want to be separated from you, but I also want what's best for you. And if you can attend one of the best Psychology Masters programs in the country, that would absolutely set you up for success in a PhD program.

PENNY

I know. But...I talked with Dr. Curtin last week about it.

BUCH

Yeah?

PENNY

Yeah. She helped me see that there are many factors to consider when choosing a grad school. And prestige is only one of them.

Ok. That makes sense, I guess.

BUCH

One point that resonated with me was CVs.

PENNY

CVs?

BUCH

Yeah. Basically, it doesn't matter.

PENNY

What doesn't matter?

BUCH

When you survey reputable school professor's curriculum vitae, you notice that it doesn't really matter where they went to grad school—for teaching purposes.

PENNY

Ok, what matters?

BUCH

It seems to be more of their academic involvement.

PENNY

You mean publications?

BUCH

Yeah—research and publications.

PENNY

Ok. And maybe a little of who you know? Networking?

BUCH

Yeah, she did mention reputation. Which, I guess can be a part of networking.

PENNY

Yeah, that makes sense. So, you are giving up on the other schools if you get accepted?

BUCH

Yeah, I think so.

PENNY

Wow. Ok. That's news.

BUCH

PENNY

Yeah. I hope it doesn't freak you out.

BUCH

No, not at all. I'm glad it's clear. I'm glad you're staying! It works out really well. I'll be here an additional semester at least to complete the double concentration major.

PENNY

Yeah. So...that's that.

(and maybe not)

BUCH

I guess so. Cool.

PENNY

...

BUCH

...

(awkward noticeable lull in conversation filled by cafeteria music)

PENNY

(chuckling) 7-minute lull.

BUCH

(laughing) Yeah.

BUCH

(childish laugh) /Penny for your thoughts...

PENNY

/What are you thinking about...

BUCH

(slight giggle)/marrying...

PENNY

(laughing)/your grad school...

PENNY

Oh my! You first.

BUCH

(awkward chuckle and deep breath) I hope *this* doesn't freak you out...but since we are on the topic...

PENNY

...

BUCH

Are you still thinking about marrying right after graduation. Or do you want to wait longer? Just checking in...

PENNY

Are you proposing to me?

BUCH

Well...I mean we've talked about it a lot...I just wanted to see where you were in your thinking...I...I don't have a ring yet...and...

PENNY

(attempting to convince both parties) That doesn't matter! It's old-school. More traditional.

(playfully pushes Buch's shoulder)

BUCH

Yeah, but...It's still kind of important.

PENNY

(Why is this so hard?) Sure. I agree. Well...yes...that's kind of what I mean by staying here.

BUCH

(sighs relieved) Awesome. Yeah. I'm all about that too. Did you say something about my grad school?

PENNY

Yeah. Are you leaning towards this program or another? I know you haven't applied yet because you added the human services concentration. That's six more classes, right?

BUCH

(strangely content to talk about something else) Yeah. Six is about right. That's why I don't know if it will be one or two semesters. I'm not sure if I want to end with an 18-hour robust load. Know what I mean? But I really think it's worth it.

PENNY

Yeah. That's a lot at the finish line. But you can do it if you push it.

BUCH

Yeah. I know I'd be fine. I just don't know if I want to commit to that.

PENNY

(have we been talking about school?)...yeah. Makes sense.

BUCH

As far as my grad school. I'm not sure. I mean, you'll be halfway through. I might start here. Or I might wait and go somewhere else.

PENNY

(confused expectations) Oh. Ok. I assumed you would start right away too—we'd be doing it together.

BUCH

Yeah. Maybe...I guess I just want to focus on completing the undergrad first. I'll continue to mull it over and keep you updated. I have plenty of time now.

PENNY

(overthinking) Makes sense, I guess...*Is that all?*
(Theda's voice reverberates in her head.)

BUCH

(perplexed) What do you mean?

PENNY

(wrestling with communicating thoughts) I mean...are you thinking about anything else? Any other factors?

BUCH

(connection) Oh. Uh...not that I am aware of.

PENNY

(temporarily relieved) Ok. Copacetic.

BUCH

What are you thinking for the rest of the day?

(checks time)

PENNY

Just lounging, I guess. I may go to Regear with Theda if she goes today.

BUCH

Oh, cool. Could you pick up some bug spray when you go?

PENNY

Yeah. I can do that. Do you have money?

BUCH

Oh...uh...yeah...I have a ten.
(reaches for wallet)

PENNY

Cool. I don't get paid until next week.

BUCH

(chuckling) Yeah, me too. Glad it's before we leave for Fort Mountain.

PENNY

Right!

BUCH

Well...I better be going.

PENNY

Where are you headed?

BUCH

Oh. I forgot to tell you I took Charlie's shift tonight. I knew we were meeting for lunch, and I could use the extra cash.

PENNY

Oh. Cool! Yeah, I know what you mean.

BUCH

(chuckling) I'm not going to miss the poor college life.
(grabs backpack)

PENNY

Me neither!
(grabs backpack)

BUCH

Talk with you tonight or tomorrow?

PENNY

(awkward) Yeah! Back to the grind.

BUCH

(chuckles) Yeah. Love you.
(reaches for a peck then begins to exit stage making it a long distance)

PENNY

(chuckles) Love you too.

(Penny receives peck and stands stationary for a moment watching, then begins to exit opposite direction.)

Both Buch and Penny stop at edges of the stage opposite one another.

Choreographed over-the-top romance drenches dialogue.)

PENNY

Buch?

(turns facing Buch remaining stationary)

BUCH

Penny?

(turns facing Penny remaining stationary)

(Romantic music plays. Penny and Buch rush to candle, lighter, and rose placing them on the table. Opposite, Penny lights the candle. Opposite, Buch adjusts the rose in the vase. Penny and Buch lock eyes during this dance.)

(Lights dim)

PENNY

Buch?

BUCH

Penny?

PENNY

Theda said something to me the other day that made so much sense.
(grabs both hands and holds them)

BUCH

(baffled) Really?

PENNY

Yes.

BUCH

Oh.

PENNY

(imitating Theda) She said, "Do you think you'll be fucking more than once every two years when you finally marry him?"

Oh. BUCH

(gathering composure) Yes. PENNY

Yes...what? BUCH

Yes. I want to marry you. More than anything. PENNY

Oh. BUCH

And yes, I think I'll be fucking you more than once every two years when we marry. PENNY

Oh. BUCH

Maybe we start at Fort Mountain? PENNY

Oh. BUCH

... PENNY

... BUCH

Love you. PENNY

Love you, too. BUCH

(Penny releases Buch's hands. Both turn and walk to opposite sides of the stage. Music still playing then goes silent when Penny turns.)

Penny stops, turns, and runs to Buch. Grabs him hurling him around. Penny kisses Buch in a deliciously romantic soft, slow and lingering kiss. When complete, Penny turns and exits. Buch

remains in place as if just landing on Uranus.)

(Lights out.)

MOTHER MOUNTAIN, MYSTERIES, AND MUSHROOMS

VERY LITTLE IS NEEDED TO MAKE A HAPPY LIFE; IT IS ALL WITHIN YOURSELF, IN YOUR WAY OF THINKING. LIFE IS REALLY SIMPLE, BUT WE INSIST ON MAKING IT COMPLICATED.

— MARCUS AURELIUS, MEDITATIONS

(Dusk to dark. Bright waxing gibbous moon. Dim light reveals a heavily wooded area with distant noticeable elevation gains and losses. Nighttime woodland creature noises fill the air. Create space setting remote feel before Generys' entrance; be comfortable in space. Enchant the audience.

Generys enters foraging and meandering through the set searching and picking and packing. Generys speaks with nature. Nature communicates back through Generys' voice, which changes to a distinct voice for each object.

Generys always leaves something of the organism she picks.

Choose how to translate dialogue and express a ethereal tone for the audience while communicating the dialogue.)

GENERYS

(frustrated) Mae fy nghof yn pylu! (My memory fades)

(self-talk) Chwerw. (Bitter.)

Diniwed. (Harmless.)

Eto bradwrus. (Yet treacherous.)

Medylyaw. (Think.)

Tohiyusdi. (Calm)
(Cherokee)

Eathe. (Easy)
(Old English)

(pep talk) Ghigau gwyh. (Brilliant, extraordinary woman.)
(Cherokee and Welsh mix)

Tohiyusdi. (Calm.)

Ghigau gwyh. (Brilliant, extraordinary woman.)

Eathe. (Easy.)

Ghigau hardd. (Beautiful, extraordinary woman.)

Ghigau lleturith. (Magic, extraordinary woman.)

Utiyvhi. (Balance.)

(Cherokee)

Cloriannu. (Balance.)

(pause then spots the mushrooms; excitement) Hwinegi! (Go get it!)

(Cherokee)

Chanterelle blasus! (Delicious chanterelle.)

(Excited at discovery.)

Chanterelle meithrin. (Nurturing chanterelle.)

(tone changes) Chanterelle consensitif. (Conniving chanterelle.)

(dramatic sadness) Pam wyt ti'n fy nghasáu cymaint? (Why do you hate me so much?)

(As Generys acts to place a mushroom in her foraging sack, the mushroom speaks back through Generys. This surprises Generys even though she brings life to the chanterelle. Enchanting and playful—after all, she has lived with herself in isolation for over 800 years.)

CHANTERELLE

(noticeable different voice maintained when speaking for the mushroom) Rwy'n poeni amdanoch chi. (I care about you.)

(Chanterelle speaking to Generys)

GENERYS

Ti amdo. (You shroud.)

CHANTERELLE

(matter of fact) Rwy'n gwybod hynny. (I know that.)

GENERYS

(sly) Celu. (Conceal.)

CHANTERELLE

Oes. (Yes.)

GENERYS

(stealthy) Cuddio. (Hide.)

CHANTERELLE

Oes. (Yes.)

GENERYYS

(nasty) Brathiad (Bite.)

CHANTERRELLE

Nac oes. (No.)

GENERYYS

Oes. (Yes.)

CHANTERRELLE

Nac oes. (No.)

GENERYYS

(playfully annoyed) Nid yw hyn yn cyrraedd unman. (This is getting nowhere.)
(Grunting with frustration, places mushroom in the sack. Silence until another one is plucked.)

Rwyf wedi gorffen gyda chi. (I am finished with you.)
(Generys picks another one.)

CHANTERRELLE

Wnaethon ni ddim byd o'i le. (We did nothing wrong.)
(Chanterelle speaking to Generys)

GENERYYS

(teacher) Pob un ohonom niwed. (All of us harm.)
(Surprised then grunting with more frustration, places this mushroom in the sack and picks another.)

CHANTERRELLE

(defending itself) Nac oes. Rydym yn berffaith. Blasus. Iach. Melys. (No. We are perfect. Tasty. Healthy. Sweet.)

GENERYYS

(accusing) Ti'n cuddio! (You hide!)

CHANTERRELLE

Oes. (Yes.)

GENERYYS

(painful) Rydych chi'n brathu! (You bite!)

CHANTERRELLE

Nac oes. (No.)

GENERYYS

(betrayed and shocked) Ac rydych chi'n dweud celwydd! (And you lie!)

(playfully mourning) Roeddwn I'n eich adnabod chi unwaith. (I once knew you.)

CHANTERRELLE

Rwy'n dal i chanterelle. (I am still chanterelle).

GENERYYS

(philosopher) Bob amser chanterelle. Madarch bob amser. (Always chanterelle. Always mushroom.)

CHANTERRELLE

Gwneud iawn? (Make amends?)

GENERYYS

Madarch ni i gyd. (All of us mushroom.)

CHANTERRELLE

(correction) Wyt ii Ghigau. Madarch ydym ni. (You are extraordinary woman. We are mushroom.)

(Cherokee and Welsh mix)

GENERYYS

(disappointment) Hmmm...Byth perffeithrwydd. Ymdrechu bob amser am ragoriaeth. (Never perfection. Always strive for excellence.)

CHANTERRELLE

(begging) Os gwelwch yn dda. (Please.)

Rydyn ni'n dy garu di. (We love you.)

GENERYYS

(matter of fact) Ac yr wyf yn eich meddiannu! (And I possess you!)

CHANTERRELLE

Efallai. (Perhaps.)

GENERYYS

(laughing teacher) Pob un ohonom niwed. (All of us harm.)

CHANTERRELLE

(confession) Efallai y byddwn yn brathu weithiau. (We might bite sometimes.)

GENERYYS

(soothing instruction) Pob un ohonom niwed. (All of us harm.)

Mae pob un ohonom yn meithrin. (All of us nurture.)

(biting fact) A ninnau oll yn marw! (And all of us die!)

(Generys places the mushroom in her bag then picks another one.)

Beth? (What?)

(Holds up the mushroom waiting for a response.)

Dim siarad yn ôl nawr? (No back talk now?)

(playful cackle) Hmmph.

(Grunts then eats last mushroom picked.)

(Lights out.)

RISE ON THE PINHOTI TRAIL

“WHEN PEOPLE SEE SOME THINGS AS BEAUTIFUL, OTHER THINGS BECOME UGLY. WHEN
PEOPLE SEE SOME THINGS AS GOOD, OTHER THINGS BECOME BAD.”

— LAO TZU, THE TAO TE CHING

*(Beautiful clear afternoon on the Pinhoti Trail navigating from
Fort Mountain into the Cohutta Wilderness. Penny, Theda, Buch,
and Gartner remain experienced hikers and campers. So much so,
they are somewhat foolhardy though they plan trips well.)*

Birds chirp and sing in the distance.)

THEDA

I'm ready for lunch.

(Theda is on point for the hike. She looks around and plants.)

GARTNER

Yeah. We're doing great on time—no rush.

PENNY

I'm a little hungry myself.

(close to Buch)

BUCH

The biggest thing is sundown...

PENNY

A lot easier to set up camp without having to use a headlamp.

(finishes Buch's thought with a soft-kissed embrace)

THEDA

(laughing) Geez you two. You've been at it this whole hike.

(drinks water)

GARTNER

(laughing) Find an oak tree already.

*(Gartner is setting up a jet boil. Penny and Buch continue to hold
one another close locking eyes).*

PENNY

(chuckling) You're sweaty.

(ignores comments)

BUCH

(performance anxiety) Of course! I think we made it to Double Top, right G, twenty
kilometers *(directed at Gartner while still in embrace)*? You're a little sweaty, too, you
know. *(chuckling flirt)* What's wrong with a little sweat?!

PENNY

(flirtatious) Nothing, I suppose...we are on Double Top, no doubt.

(Penny reads watch and completes answer before Gartner.

Gartner tries to finish jet boil and looks at GPS watch at the same time.)

THEDA

What's the plan, now? Keep pushing the Pinhoti?

(searches through bag for meals)

PENNY

(borderline seduction) I'll push the Pinhoti.

(staring at Buch)

GARTNER

We're close to Potatopatch, if you all wanted to divert to the interior.

(Jetboil complete. Gartner drinking water waiting for Theda.)

BUCH

(chuckling) I'm down with whatever...*exterior...interior... (still embraced).*

PENNY

(continuing teasing tone) Me too...flexible.

THEDA

Could you two just drink water or eat or do something else. I feel like I'm watching the prelude to a porn.

(hands Gartner meals)

GARTNER

Yeah, right!...Not that I necessarily have a problem with that.

(working meals in a pan)

PENNY

(chuckling) Sure. We can pause and refocus some energy.

(breaks embrace slowly stretching arms wide.)

THEDA

What. The. Actual. Hell.

(eyes Penny suspiciously)

BUCH

Yeah. I'm going to take a piss. I'll be right back.

(walks off stage)

PENNY

(chuckling) What?! I've been reading the Tao Te Ching. It makes sense.
(directed to Theda slightly embarrassed)

GARTNER

(laughing) Might take you a minute to deflate *(directed at Buch.)* My boy!
(continuously stirring meals)

(Lights down.)

WALES TALE

“LIFE IS AN UNFOLDMENT, AND THE FURTHER WE TRAVEL THE MORE TRUTH WE CAN COMPREHEND. TO UNDERSTAND THE THINGS THAT ARE AT OUR DOOR IS THE BEST PREPARATION FOR UNDERSTANDING THOSE THAT LIE BEYOND.”

— HYPATIA OF ALEXANDRIA

(Cohutta Wilderness interior—nighttime at camp. Gartner, Penny, and Theda onstage with two one-person tents, four camp chairs, and a campfire. Another three-person tent depicted in forested distance.) (Re-position noticeable waxing gibbous moon.)

Appalachian nightlife enchants the air throughout the scene.

Absent, Buch prepares for the next scene entrance through the house).

GARTNER

What is taking him so long. Dude! You good?!
(calls towards three-person tent)

PENNY

He’s good. He’s right behind me—just wrapping up our tent.
(Penny enters from offstage closest to three-person tent side. Faded headlamp seen in distance. Recorded Buch reacts from the distant tent, “I’m good!” Buch preps romantic area in their tent.)

THEDA

You guys want to tell some ghost stories? Awesome by the campfire.
(ominous)(stokes fire)

GARTNER

Yeah, whatever. That’s cool.
(gathers extra wood close by)

PENNY

Ooooh yeah! I’ve got one!
(moves chair closer to fire)

THEDA

Let’s hear it.

PENNY

This story is relevant to this very area.

GARTNER

(sarcastic) Oooooooh, creepy.

(stokes fire)

THEDA

Yes. Delicious. Continue.

PENNY

Did you guys happen to read that historical marker before we left Fort Mountain?

THEDA

The Moon-Eyed People!

GARTNER

Yeah. I glanced at it—the other one about Prince Mardūk from Wales too.

THEDA

(laughing) Madoc. Prince Madoc of Wales. This isn't Harry Potter. Jesus.

PENNY

(laughing) Yeah. That's who I'm talking about. Those aren't the only markers. They are all around this part of Appalachia. And the locals talk of them too. Moon-Eyed People. Fairies. Witches. Sightings of short, bearded, pale fleeting shadowy figures at night.

THEDA

Yeah. What do they say?

GARTNER

(chuckling) Probably yank you off the trail with a meat hook or something.

THEDA

(sarcastic) Oh yeah. There is plenty of that going around. Machetes and chainsaws too.
(threatening music fades in)

PENNY

(sinister) One night like this with a bright moon in the air, for a small group of hikers, the legend of the Moon-Eyed People proved true.

GARTNER

(captivated) Ok.

(stokes fire)

THEDA

Nice. That hits.

PENNY

Deep into the Cohutta interior, the group decided to make camp for the night.

GARTNER

(distracted) Something sounds familiar...where the fuck is Buch? Buch!

(Recorded Buch yells from the distance offstage tent, "Yeah! I'll be there in a minute!")

Buch's headlamp can no longer be seen, just the fire.

Menacing music that continues after lights go out).

PENNY

All was well. The camp set. Food eaten. Water drank. Time to sleep. Everyone was fast asleep dreaming of waterfalls and autumn colors. Quaint. Calm. Crickets serenading the hikers in harmonic waves joined by the occasional contrast of a screech owl, when suddenly all dreams were interrupted.

Little did the campers know that havoc disguised as safety. Chaos masked as peace. And Confusion concealed as certainty.

THEDA

Ok, ok. This is lit. What the fuck happened?!

(Gartner and Theda remain drawn into the story.)

(Lights down.)

SWEPT AWAY

“THE PATH THAT ONE PERSON FOLLOWS IS NOT THE CORRECT PATH FOR ANY OTHER PERSON. EACH OF US MUST WALK HIS OWN PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT— THAT IS THE WAY.”
— FU XI, I CHING

(Nighttime reverse angle at camp from Buch’s perspective. The two one-person tents and campfire are now seen portrayed in forested distance. Adjust moon accordingly. Buch walks through the audience with a headlamp on.

Appalachian nightlife continues to fill the air. Add mild wind.

Play Buch and Generys amidst audience as permitted by stage and puppetry—make the audience an uncomfortable part of the curse experience.)

BUCH

I’m on my way back...lost the trail for a minute!
(yells towards campfire)

GARTNER

(bellows offstage from campfire; could be recorded) You’re headed in the right direction!

BUCH

I can’t believe this *(talks to himself in no rush to get to the others)*. Now that it’s finally happening...I’m nervous as shit. Calm down, dude. You got this. You love her, and you’ve been dreaming of this moment since you met her in Psych lab.

Should you wait? Or should you just go with the flow?

Are you fucking crazy?! Tonight is *the night!* Fucking congratulations! You made it! Way to be faithful...steadfast...and fucking true!

Really?!

Well...what is this light switch in Penny? Maybe you should talk through this first. Will this fuck up your relationship?

Absolutely. Fucking. Not! You are *in love!* This is it, and it is about time! *(amping himself)* It is time to finally do the horizontal tango! Ride the baloney pony! Tumble. Bunk. Boff. Screw. Mount. Make love. Diddle. Do the nasty. Copulate. Bang. Bone. Shag. Smash. Ride. Pound. Tap. Nail. Hump. Bop. Netflix and chill. Hot beef injection. Glazing the donut. Baking the potato. Horizontal refreshment. Buttering the biscuit. Charming the cobra. Rolling in the hay. Get jiggy with it. Get lucky. Get laid. Get frisky. Get down and dirty. Get naughty. Get railed. Make whoopee. Bump uglies. Fuck. Score! Now...get movin’ dude!

(dances gleefully celebrating when rattling off euphemisms)

Once the internal wrestling match is over, Buch turns to head determined towards campfire and the others. Only surprised to face Generys for the first time.)

GENERYYS

(observes Buch this entire monologue unbeknownst to him) Ysbryd chwilfrydig! (A curious spirit!)

BUCH

(Freezes in shock and fear)...

(Buch has never seen anything like Generys. And now, in the Cohutta wilderness far from civilization.)

GENERYYS

Nunnehi? (Cherokee wandering spirit)

(paces slowly examining Buch back and forth, head to toe)

BUCH

(Still frozen)...

GENERYYS

Nac oes. (No.)

Dynol (Human).

(angrily) Appalachia!

(continues examination)

BUCH

(Recognizing Appalachia stutters response) Wh-who are you?

(stepping on foxglove)

GENERYYS

(Seething) Uktena...(Cherokee for revered spiritual serpent or white person).

Nac oes. (No.)

Wasi'chu! (Borrowed Cherokee for disparaging non-indigenous person!)

(dreadful memories) Grym dinistriol! (Destructive force!)

BUCH

(Continuing shock and stutter) Uh-uh, I-I can leave. I-I will just move away.

(continues stepping on plants slowly moving in any direction other than camp)

GENERYYS

(Fuming concentration) Rydych chi'n tarfu ar bysedd y llwynog. (You disturb the foxglove.)

(obvious rage) Goresgynasoch fy nghartref. (You invaded my home.)

Lladdaist fy mam. (You killed my mother.)

Fy ngad. (My father.)

Fy mhobl. (My people.)

BUCH

(Continues to move slowly) I-I-I will just go.

GENERYS

(sarcastic taste)(Continued concentration following Buch's movement) Byddaf yn rhoi anrheg I chi yn gyfnewid. (I will give you a gift in return.)

Melltith cenedlaeth. (A generational curse.)

(morose) Ers cenedlaethau wedi hen anghofio! (For generations long forgotten!)

BUCH

I-I-I am going now.

GENERYS

(ignites through assumption) Dinistr are ich meddwl? (Destruction on your mind?)
(fade in looming music and slow light changes for magic.)

Dinistr a gewch! (Destruction you will receive!)

Bydded I'r hyn sy'n difa dy feddyliau...(Let that which consumes your thoughts...)
(reaches in sack then sprinkles and tosses curse ingredients through pitiful eyes line)

Llywodraethu eich bywyd am byth. (rule your life forever.)

Gadewch I'r cerrynt eich ysgubo i ffwrdd... (let the current sweep you away...)

Nes eich bod yn gwybod dim rheolaeth! (Until you know no control!)

BUCH

Wh-What is happening?!
(feels the curse pulsing throughout his body)

GENERYS

Bywyd hybys. (Normal life is defeated.)

Bywyd newydd yn cael ei eni. (New life is born).

Ffocws sengi. (Single focus).

Fel y gwelir trwy dy lygaid truenus (As seen through your pitiful eyes).

BUCH

Ahhhhrrrggh!

(crouches with hands over face)

GENERYS

Y drych a lewyrcha i ti (The mirror shines unto you)

Beth sy'n bwyta dy fod (what eats your being)

Y cythreuliaid hyn y tu mewn i chi! (These devils inside of you!)⁸

(culminating curse lights and music)

Buch runs the direction he entered scattering randomly screaming when looking at people's eyes.)

GENERYS

(playful cackle) Hmmph.

(directed towards Buch) Y drych a lewyrcha i ti (The mirror shines unto you)

(strolls to foxglove)

GENERYS

(Bends down to foxglove) Sut wyt ti heno perlysiâu? (How are you tonight, foxglove?)

FOXGLOVE

(distinct) Teimlo'n well... (Feeling better...)

Ers i'r dyn cymedrig adael (Since the mean man left).

GENERYS

(playful cackle) Hmmph.

(Lights out.)

A NEW MAN

⁸ Adapted from Welsh Folktale, "The Fairy of the Dell," Accessed December 21, 2024 at https://www.worldoftales.com/European_folktales/Welsh_folktale_12.html#gsc.tab=0.

“PEOPLE CAN WILL NOTHING UNLESS THEY HAVE FIRST UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY MUST COUNT ON NO ONE BUT THEMSELVES; THAT THEY ARE ALONE, ABANDONED ON EARTH IN THE MIDST OF THEIR INFINITE RESPONSIBILITIES, WITHOUT HELP, WITH NO OTHER AIM THAN THE ONE THEY SET THEMSELVES, WITH NO OTHER DESTINY THAN THE ONE THEY FORGE FOR THEMSELVES ON THIS EARTH (CHANGE IN ITALICS, MINE).

— JEAN PAUL SARTRE, BEING AND NOTHINGNESS

(Scene reverses again to two one-person tents onstage along with four camp chairs and a campfire. Three-person tent once again rendered in forested distance with waxing gibbous moon.)

Nighttime ambiance remains with slight change.

Penny, Gartner, and Theda continue their stories and conversation around the campfire with growing concern for Buch).

GARTNER

(competitive spirit) Then all of the sudden, the dude vanishes out of thin air! Could've been out the back window...maybe a trap door in the floor or something.

(All huddle close to campfire.)

THEDA

...

PENNY

...

GARTNER

What?

THEDA

...

PENNY

...

GARTNER

What? That was it.

THEDA

That was terrible.

GARTNER

Are you kidding me? My grandpa told me that story when I was like twelve! I might've fucked it up a little at the end...

PENNY

(dumbfounded) Uh. Thanks G.

(Buch enters with subtly strange movement.)

GARTNER

(To Theda) Really, what? *(To Penny)* You're welcome *(sees Buch)*. Dude! It's about time. What the hell were you doing?

BUCH

(Trance-like confusion) Something just happened.

(All make movements to Buch; Theda who is closest makes it first.)

THEDA

Buch, are you ok?

(makes eye contact with Buch)

BUCH

(Over-the-top disbelief visualizing Theda having sex with a female stranger)

ARRGGHHH! REALLY?! WHAT THE FUCK?!

(steps back hands over face)

PENNY

Buch?

(consoling, makes it to him wrapping her arms around him.)

GARTNER

(concerned) Dude, what's up?!

(close by Buch.)

BUCH

(Makes eye contact with Gartner visualizing him jacking off in a familiar bed)

WHOAH?! WHAT THE FUCK IS HAPPENING?! ARE YOU SERIOUS *(reacting to visualizing Gartner)?!*

(strips embrace bewildered runs across camp)

PENNY

(confusion) Buch? What's wrong?

(calmly walks towards him. Theda and Gartner remain puzzled—awestruck and stationary.)

BUCH

(reflecting and searching) I don't know. I don't know what is happening.

PENNY

(soothing) Just relax. Take your time. Breathe. Find your words.

(closer to Buch)

BUCH

(intentional breathing as practiced) On my way back, I stumbled into this, this... creature...in the woods. I don't know what it was. I think it was female. Old.

PENNY

Ok *(makes eye contact)*. Tell us more.

BUCH

(fun surprise with eye contact visualizing Penny pantomiming intercourse with Buch and humping a pillow the night before.) (amazed) WHOAH!!! THAT JUST HAPPENED!
(begins pacing back and forth rapid breathing)

PENNY

Buch? What is going on?! You're freaking me out.

GARTNER

Buch, talk to us, man!

(close by campfire)

BUCH

I DON'T FUCKING KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON!

(slowly paces)

THEDA

Wow. Just wow.

(shakes her head)

PENNY

(confidently) It's ok. Everything will be fine.

THEDA

Glad you are so sure about that. Looks like he finally flipped his lid—done in by no sex *(sarcasm)*.

(Buch remains slowly pacing while pondering circumstances.)

PENNY

You are *not* helping *(directed at Theda)*.

GARTNER

Penny is right. Let's just give him space.

PENNY

He said he saw something or someone in the woods—an old female *creature of sorts*.

GARTNER

Maybe I should get my bear spray.
(walks to his tent)

THEDA

Yeah. Good idea (*sarcasm*). I'll get my pistol.
(walks to her tent)

PENNY

Do you need more space...or do you think you're ready to tell us more?
(makes her way close to Buch again)

BUCH

(Avoiding eye contact) I-I-I have told you what I know. That was it (*moves to sit down by the fire*). I-I-I was making my way to ya'll and got a little off-course. Th-the-the next thing I remember wa-was staring low at these huge pale blue eyes (*sits*). Dilated.

PENNY

(intensely listening) You encountered this thing...what happened next?
(sits by Buch)

GARTNER

Yeah...what then, man (*sits on the other side of Buch*)?
(pausing taking time)

BUCH

(Still avoiding eye contact with anyone) Sh-Sh-She talked. Said something. In a language I couldn't understand.

GARTNER

What did she say (*missing different language part*)?
(Penny and Theda glare at Gartner.)

THEDA

Really?

PENNY

(Still listening) Say more.

BUCH

(focused on reflection closing eyes head facing down) Sh-She got angry. I'm n-not sure why. M-Maybe I stepped on something?
(take time)

Then. She spoke again. Only this time...only this time...it was different...something

happened.

This time. Sh-She She reached in a bag and spread something around and shit started glowing while *(into reflection then looks at Gartner)*...ARRGHHH! WHAT THE F-F-FUCK, MAN!

(leaps up which causes everyone else to jump up and back)

GARTNER

(shocked) JESUS! What?!

(Penny and Theda shocked.)

BUCH

(focused on Gartner's sexual vision) Four nights ago. Did you jack-off in my bed to Beyonce's Texas Hold Em cover art?!

THEDA

(laughing) That's specific.

GARTNER

(embarrassed) Uh. How did you...I'm sorry man...I was looking for my orange Nike shirt thinking it might've been in your clothes basket...I got distracted thinking about Beyonce bouncing back and forth on top with that silver bikini...wait.

(Theda and Penny laugh.)(Penny moves to hold Buch.)

How did you know that?!

THEDA

(laughing) How *did* you know that?

BUCH

I don't know. I just...saw it...when I looked at Gartner...twice...I just saw it. Like I was there watching it real-time...streaming live...in my bed *(disgusted)* *(realizes what he saw seconds ago)*. WHOAH!

(Strips away from Penny shocked again)(maintains blocking eye contact with everyone)

PENNY

What now?

BUCH

Theda.

THEDA

(sheepishly) Yeesss?

BUCH

Five nights ago, did you have sex in multiple positions for hours with a Latina who had

red highlights in her hair?

THEDA

(uncomfortable) What the fuck? How?!

(Theda backs away. Others are in dismay.)

GARTNER

(envious) For hours?

BUCH

I don't know. I don't know how. But...this is happening.

PENNY

What is happening, babe?

BUCH

THIS. Whatever *this* is. *This is happening*. Has happened. *This* has happened...that thing!

PENNY

What thing?

BUCH

The creature I pissed off in the woods. That thing...that old woman, or whatever! She did this.

PENNY

She did what?!

BUCH

She made me *see things*.

GARTNER

She made you see me jacking off to Beyonce in your bed?

BUCH

No! I mean...yes. Kind of.

THEDA

You also knew about Claudia.

PENNY

(laughing) Claudia? Really? I thought you were over her.

THEDA

(boldly embarrassed) I thought so too.

PENNY

And...you saw something when you looked at me, too.
(Take time for this moment)

BUCH

(smiles) I did.

PENNY

(slight embarrassment) I wanted so bad for that to happen.
(Will we get a chance?)

BUCH

(saddened) Me too.

PENNY

Maybe...

GARTNER

(lightbulb) My friend. You have a *superpower*.
(moves to place an arm around Buch)

BUCH

I'm not so sure. This *whole thing is...* fucked up. I'm not sure what is happening.
(still avoids eye contact)

GARTNER

Maybe not. Maybe not. But one thing we do know/

THEDA

(understanding Gartner's intent) /Just like a man./

GARTNER

/You see sex. And...you see it good...like a fucking hidden security camera.

PENNY

Whatever this means...*(holds Buch's hands pulling him away from Gartner)* I am with you. We're in this together.

GARTNER

Absolutely *(pats him on the shoulder)*. Not going anywhere...*dirty man (seeing dollar signs)*.

(Lights out.)

INTERMISSION

(Twenty minutes. Wind and nighttime Appalachia creatures fill the air during intermission. Transition to noises applicable to Boone, North Carolina.

Optional considerations: (1) Coors light in Red Solo cups available in lobby, and (2) play Hideous Heart by the White Buffalo three minutes to Act II opening.)

Setting: Boone, North Carolina. River's Street across from Appalachian

State University's Schaefer's Center for the Performing Arts.

At Rise: Somewhere in the dark house sits Gartner in business attire and the Dirty Man in full costume. As recording of live news feed begins and continues, the Dirty Man becomes increasingly uncomfortable while Gartner remains a proud father.

EXPOSURE PACKAGE OPTIONS

“...BUT THERE COMES A POINT I'M AFRAID WHERE YOU BEGIN TO SUSPECT THAT THE ENTIRE MULTIDIMENSIONAL INFINITY OF THE UNIVERSE IS ALMOST CERTAINLY BEING RUN BY A BUNCH OF MANIACS. AND IF IT COMES TO A CHOICE BETWEEN SPENDING YET ANOTHER TEN MILLION YEARS FINDING THAT OUT, AND ON THE OTHER HAND JUST TAKING THE MONEY AND RUNNING, THEN I FOR ONE COULD DO WITH THE EXERCISE.”

— DOUGLAS ADAMS, THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

(Months have passed since the curse. Gartner has convinced Buch to use his superpowers as a business for profit under non-profit guise.

Penny and Buch remain on hiatus though they stay in touch. Penny rethinks her ASU master's degree decision. Buch wrestles between his new-fangled abilities, his wealth, and his identity as the Dirty Man—including his vision of love and life with Penny.

Act Two, Scene One opens with WFMY Channel 2 News anchors Aidan Carlton and Jasper Davis conversing with reporter Donna Dixon. Donna interviews the Dirty Man in front of the Appalachian State campus. Afterwards, she interviews victims of the Dirty Man and clients who have conducted business with Gartner and the Dirty Man. Vehicle noises are heard in the background. It is here that the audience learns about many newfound capability discoveries over the past months.

Lights remain low while recording plays ushering in Act Two.

WFMY Channel 2 News and selected ensemble pre-record and project the News scene for Exposure Package Options. Video Media Designer (VMD) collaborates accordingly.

Throughout the projection of the pre-recorded live feed, two spots slowly expose Gartner and the Dirty Man's location in the audience. Gartner and the Dirty Man sit close to one another though not necessarily right next to each other waiting for a client on a bench or seats in the house at the ASU pond. The light remains dim until the final line when full exposure occurs.

The Dirty Man and Gartner reflect on the live interviews from this pre-recorded feed while they wait.

The female college student also blends in audience and crowd playing as reflecting at the ASU pond until dialogue.)

JASPER

(Pre-recorded and projected live news feed) Welcome back. The world's dirty laundry airs in Boone, North Carolina. *Embarrassing exposure* rises as the bustling, taboo talk of the town.

AIDAN

That is right, Jasper. WFMY News Two, Donna Dixon, joins us live now from Appalachian State Universities' campus where we learn more about the man behind this mass risqué public display of affection.

DONNA

Jasper. Aidan. Yes, *embarrassing exposure* seems fitting words. Maybe as extreme as humiliation or *even shame*. I'm standing here live with the masked figure known only as, *Dirty Man*. Dirty Man. May I call you, *Dirty Man*?

THE DIRTY MAN

(nervous) Hi Donna. Well...I prefer *the Dirty Man*.

DONNA

Sure thing, *the Dirty Man*. Why that preference?

THE DIRTY MAN

(timid) I've discovered in a weird way, all men are dirty, Donna. Some slightly more than others. *(humble)* But...I'm unique because of my powers.

DONNA

That makes sense, *the Dirty Man*. Can you tell us more about your special abilities?

THE DIRTY MAN

(more confident noticing Gartner's encouragement off-camera) I certainly *can and will*. You see, Donna, *I see* *(chuckles at himself)*. When I look at someone *directly* in the eyes—either in person, on social media, movie, TV, or even paper, like a magazine—I envision their last sexual escapade—*whatever that might be*. Like I am live streaming...more like *actually in the room observing using twenty cameras with various attachments, from any angle I want or need...* with as much time as I want or need, *slow down, reverse, fast forward*, move it to the left 20 degrees, zoom, pan out, etc. *(trying to help explain)* Uh...kind of like a high-quality pornography take. And...I can do all kinds of things *with the feed or footage*—a new development, such as record it on a hard-drive or upload it to a social media site.

DONNA

(*dismayed and careful*) Oh. Wow. Ok, *the Dirty Man* (*gains composure*). Thank you. Could you tell us why you wear that strange headgear?

THE DIRTY MAN

(*awkward*) Well...I don't think it is *that* strange...maybe goofy...but, yes (*cognizant of live television audience*). (*regains confidence*) The screen-like panel, door, window-like thingy, allows me to close or open access to my powers...without having to squint my eyes, or wear a blindfold, which quite frankly wears on you after a bit (*chuckle*). We installed this little flip single-locking mechanism last week, actually, because of an...unfortunate mishap with a professor and TA.

DONNA

Jasper. Aidan. Shortly after this portion of the interview, a victim of one *the Dirty Man's* latest exploitations chased him off the scene and down the street. We later agreed with his business manager and Charlotte, North Carolina native, Gartner Johnson, to remove this segment. Listen to Gartner Johnson's latest advertisement found on www.thedirtyman.org (*emphasizes the*).

GARTNER

(*confident*) Feeling hurt? Feeling *suspicious*? Second guessing your intimate relationship due to tomfoolery or *worse*, presumed distrust? Maybe...cheating? Well...*look no further*. The Dirty Man is here. The Dirty Man is here for you! Just give this number a call, 1-800-DIRT-MAN, that is 1-800-347-8626— toll free 1-800-DIRT-MAN or select exposure package options found on our website, www.thedirtyman.org. We have everything from revealing through a *public service announcement interrupting a favorite series*—one of my personal favorites—to snail mailing DVDs or VHS for old-timers. The *Cell-phone Contacts Conundrum* or *Social-Media Snowstorm!* to a special throughout the month for *TicTok-Til-You-Drop* and *Bail-Me-Out! Blackmail*. That's right, folks! *The Dirty Man* is a non-profit organization, because we care about how you are treated—just like the NFL used to care during their non-profit status.

DONNA

Thankfully, the victim who chased the Dirty man from our interview *agreed for an interview*. Later, we had no shortage of other clients and targets who were willing to share their experiences.

DONNA

Sir?! (*shouting after victim*) *SIR!* Care to talk about why you chased the Dirty Man?

VICTIM #1

(*angry*) Yeah. I'll talk about it. That motherfucker (*beep*) ruined my relationship!

DONNA

What happened?

VICTIM #1

(*angry*) My fucking (*beep*) girlfriend got a special motherfucking (*beep*) thumb-drive of some fucked-up (*beep*) shit in the mail. That's fucking (*beep*) what (*storms off*)! (*while walking away he yells back*) You're going to hear from my fucking (*beep*) lawyer you fucking (*beep*) OP voyeur!

DONNA

And there he goes. A lot of colorful metaphors from *one angry young man*.

Aidan. Jasper. Two more victims were willing to talk frankly about their apparent public humiliation and shaming.

VICTIM #2

(*sobbing*) I'm terrible...I'm fucking (*beep*) ruined. My whole life is destroyed.

DONNA

It's ok. Take your time. You are *not* terrible.

VICTIM #2

(*continual sobbing*) ...

DONNA

We can cut this. If you want/we can...

VICTIM #2

(*pause in sob—anger*) /fucking (*beep*) no! He needs to be exposed like he exposed me. *The fucking (*beep*) world needs to know!*

DONNA

Ok. Tell us what happened.

VICTIM #2

(*slight crying*) ...he posted it on Instagram. Facebook. Snapchat. YouTube. Twitter. TikTok. It's fucking (*beep*) everywhere! It's now on Pornhub, Thumbzilla, xVideos, xHamsterHomemade, and fucking (*beep*) YouPorn (*work to sob*).

DONNA

What exactly was posted?

VICTIM #2

(*sobs and runs away.*)

DONNA

Cut.

VICTIM #3

(*angry but calm.*) Every contact in my mothafuckin' (*beep*) cell.

DONNA

What do you mean?

VICTIM #3

He fuckin' (*beep*) sent that shit to every contact in my cell.

DONNA

That sounds horrific, sir.

VICTIM #3

Yeah. That's ok. He got his comin.'

DONNA

He has what coming, sir?

VICTIM #3

Any man that do shit like that...it's just a matter of time. The POLICE. Lawyers. Hell, I don't know. Somebody probably gonna cap his ass!

DONNA

Jasper. Aidan. Boone appears flooded once again. Only this time, it is not a hurricane that caused it—It was the torrential *Storm of the Dirty Man*.

We also interviewed some clients of *the* so-called, *Dirty Man*. Some of them claimed the Dirty Man *saved them*.

CLIENT #1

The Dirty Man? He is a fucking (*beep*) hero. Or at least *a good fuckin' dude*. I was spending \$2000 a month to help that bitch! Not anymore. That money is in my pocket. And it only cost me \$500 for a lifetime of peace and happiness! I knew that bitch was cheating on me. And using me on the side to pay rent for her goddamn (*beep*) condo in Four-Fucking (*beep*)-Queens! Not any fucking (*beep*) more!

DONNA

The latest client wishes to remain anonymous for protection. However, they agreed to interview provided we concealed their face and voice.

CLIENT #2 (*concealed voice*)

I no longer need to be concerned about my husband and one of my aides.

DONNA

Tell us more.

CLIENT #2 (*concealed voice*)

It's quite simple, really. It can be challenging to obtain hard evidence for sexual misconduct of any variety. In this case, cheating and embezzlement among other things. The Dirty Man discreetly uncovered what later amounted to years of backstabbing, infidelity, and money laundering into substantial shell companies across the globe. All of this and more was exposed last month beginning with a recording of a sexual rendezvous at a neighboring city hotel. *Everything* unfolded from there.

DONNA

I see.

CLIENT #2 (*concealed voice*)

I understand the Dirty Man remains a controversial figure. But frankly, *I can't thank the Dirty Man enough*. He saved me potentially a lifetime of pain—personal and professional sabotage, for an altogether minimal cost. I owe him a debt of gratitude for saving my life.

DONNA

There you have it. *The Dirty Man doing deeds done dirt cheap.*⁹ Live on River's street in Boone, North Carolina, I'm Donna Dixon, WFMY News Two. Aidan. Jasper. Back to you.

(Full spots on the Dirty Man and Gartner. The Dirty Man's costume remains a work-in-progress. Stumbling happens due to the locking blind preventing complete vision for walking. As a result, sometimes the Dirty Man must open it to see where he steps.

Gartner and the Dirty Man have been enjoying a morning near ASU pond waiting for a client on a bench or seats in the house. The house and audience function as the ASU pond, administration, college students, professors, clients, and victims of the Dirty Man.

At the end of the pre-recorded live news feed, the deal complete, they begin walking back to their home and lair or the stage, through the park or the house and audience. This takes time and includes interactions with the audience until the end of scene one.

The audience peeks into the Dirty Man and Gartner's intimate dialogue; much like the Dirty Man's intrusive gaze.)

GARTNER

(Leading) A lot of people out on campus today *(to the Dirty Man while looking around house)*.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. This is still uncomfortable in public, man. It really looks ridiculous. And I can barely see where I'm going.

⁹ AC/DC, "Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap," September 1976.

GARTNER

(devious) Well...remove your blind.

THE DIRTY MAN

Dude. You know I should not do that unless I have to.

GARTNER

I'm not sure why you get so worked up about it. Everybody be fuckin' *(looking around arms wide open)*!

THE DIRTY MAN

Really? How about some dignity, man.

GARTNER

Dignity?! Dignity is here, man *(pounding heart side of chest)*. You need some practice. Fuck dignity! I'm not convinced you know everything about your powers yet, such as *controlling them*. And the only way to do that is practice. May I remind you this is our living, now?

THE DIRTY MAN

...

GARTNER

I'm telling you, man. You need to release the Kraken!¹⁰ We have some serious exploration and practice to do. And the pond is packed with post-coitus clever primates!
(glances around audience)

THE DIRTY MAN

(Stops)...alright. Fine. You're right. You're right. I just feel guilty doing it sometimes *(unlocking blind)*. Sometimes downright disgusted.

(What follows is a series of interactions with audience members in route to the stage or the Dirty Man's lair. Be sure to avoid anyone who looks like they might be underage—overcompensate).

GARTNER

(proudly) Let's get dirty, my friend!

THE DIRTY MAN

(Slowly walks looking at everyone he walks by. Respond to visions from the audience member's eyes. Continues responses then finds a perfect female audience member. Control remains the primary goal—to shut off a vision with his mind after it begins).
Who wants to play ball...*(choosy)*. Can't be just anyone. It needs to be juicy. Something difficult to control OH SHIT! THAT IS FUCKING WILD! Shut it off. Shut it off! Shut it off *(staring at their eyes)*! It's not working man *(closes blind)*. Fuck!

¹⁰ Clash of the Titans, April 2, 2010.

GARTNER

(amazed) DM. Really? *(consoling)* You expect it to be that quick *(shakes head)*? That's not practice, man. You know that.

THE DIRTY MAN

(slowly walks) Yeah. I know. Just hoping *(deep breath)*. OK. I'll try again *(removes lock and slides blind)*.

GARTNER

Awesome. Just think how practice helps our *exposure package options*.

THE DIRTY MAN

(continues slow walking eventually finding a person that no one would suspect—must appear to have a companion with them). Yeah...I know, dude *(searching with focused eye contact)*...I'm not concerned about the money like you *(searching)*...I've already saved up enough to pay for Penny's grad school through doctorate—if she doesn't dump me...*(bingo!)* FUCK! GODDDDD-DAMNNNN DUDE! THAT...IS...AMAZING *(staring continual lock)*! Turn it off. Turn it off!...Oh, but that is SOOOO GOOD! Turn it off! Turn it off! SHIT *(slams blind and locks it)*!

GARTNER

(Both stop). You got to tell me about that one, man.

THE DIRTY MAN

No personal gain other than money. Rule number one *(begins walking slowly opposite direction from before)*.

GARTNER

I know, man. That's a great rule. It's important. But *(gestures at the person)*...really? You can break it one time.

THE DIRTY MAN

No, dude.

GARTNER

Geez. Fine. Whatever, man. Keep practicing.

THE DIRTY MAN

I will. Give me a sec. This drains me, man...*(removes lock and slides blind to see)*.

GARTNER

Think it fucks with your sperm count?

(Gartner moves freely through this dialogue pacing the Dirty Man at close range)

THE DIRTY MAN

Never thought of that.

GARTNER

Hopefully not.

THE DIRTY MAN

I wouldn't think so...although I have been whacking it more since I've given up on Penny and I having sex again...ever.

GARTNER

Yeah, let's not talk about that right now.

THE DIRTY MAN

Which part?

GARTNER

Focus, dude.

THE DIRTY MAN

Right. Cool. Whatever.

(shakes off thoughts of Penny)

GARTNER

Try over there.

(points across the pond or house)

THE DIRTY MAN

(slowly walks to a completely different side of house while continuing to search with eyes having a minor range of reactions to visions along the way—cover many people continuing to overcompensate for adults).

These are all *good*. And *mostly* recent (*lock eyes with someone who is an obvious couple*)...only on your anniversary? Geez.

GARTNER

Wow. Not me.

Do you know that assisted living centers and nursing homes have the next highest percentage of STDs to university campuses in America?

THE DIRTY MAN

Dude. Awareness. (*gestures house*) More than half of the professors here creep closer to nursing homes daily.

GARTNER

Yeah. That's my point. Sex never stops, man. It's human. MILFs. DILFs. COUGARS (*caterwauling*)...Silver foxes...ooooohhh, Sugar daddies! I could do that gig in the future. Fuckin' G-Money *Hugh Hefner style*. The regular Playboy Mansion!

THE DIRTY MAN

(*shaking his head ignoring Gartner*) I can't get her out of my head, dude.
(*continuing movement to opposite side while searching visions*)

GARTNER

The crazy chick back there?
(*referencing a person with whom the Dirty Man went on about*)

THE DIRTY MAN

No, Man. You know who I'm talking about.

GARTNER

(*concerned*) I know, man. I know. But that ship might have sailed, brother.

THE DIRTY MAN

(*doubting and faithful*) I'd like to think not. We're just...at a low point in our relationship.

GARTNER

(*empathetic*) Might be more than a low point...I know, man. I would not have ever wished this on you...though it is super fucking cool.

THE DIRTY MAN

(*continues perusing and reacting to visions*) Yep. I get it. Maybe I need to just get over her. I am a different man, now. Changed. New.
(*attempting to convince himself*)

GARTNER

Fuckin' better if you asked me. Holy shit...*this* still blows my mind...oh by the way, that lawyer from the commercial interviews next week.

THE DIRTY MAN

(*only partially hearing due to focus*) There are parts I like, if I'm honest. But...this *turning it off control thing*...and what if there is more...(finds a beautiful female and stops suddenly). Not to mention what it has done for...OHHHHH. MYYYYYYY!.

GARTNER

/DUDE! THAT IS WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT (*gesturing to the beautiful woman*). It is too fucking early for you to settle down. You are absolutely in your prime.

THE DIRTY MAN

(locking eyes dumfounded) YEAH...maybe. Keep fixed. Stay on target. Red 6 Six. Stay on target. STAY ON TARGET!¹¹

GARTNER

DM! You're doing it! And...break rule one...show me this one later.

THE DIRTY MAN

(locking eyes) NO! I WON'T BREAK IT! STAY ON TARGET. SHUT IT DOWN! SHUUUUUTTT IIIITTTT...**FUCK (slams blind shut and locks it)!** Ohhhh my god...I uh...I should get back to the **house and go to the bathroom.**

GARTNER

Dude. This is so unfair. You have a terabyte on you, right? Just break the rule once, SHE IS GORGEOUS!

THE DIRTY MAN

(stationary) I can't, man. I won't. It is a slippery fucking slope.

GARTNER

Fuck me, man. You are the lucky one that gets to watch porn on demand. I have to live vicariously through you.

THE DIRTY MAN

(slowly walking in stage direction) If it makes you feel any better, it's not as cool as it seems.

GARTNER

Easy for you to fucking say! You can see any chick you want having sex! It doesn't even have to be in person! You fucking saw Livvy Dunne doing it doggystyle with a tall baseball player dude by looking in her eyes on a Sports Illustrated swimsuit pic!

THE DIRTY MAN

(continuing walking to stage reacting to eyes) Yep. And...it was cool at first. But later, it became a fucking chore. Maybe a nightmare because it was eating me up inside. This stuff is...*private*. One more time, by the way, and I'm done with practice for now.

GARTNER

Yeah...I got it...your moral code's getting you. Burden and weight and shit.

THE DIRTY MAN

...more like a moral injury of sorts...it's a huge fucking internal conflict you will probably never understand because all you care about is money.

GARTNER

¹¹ Red Six refers to a rebel X-wing pilot in George Lucas' Star Wars: A New Hope, May 25, 1977.

(stops) DM. That actually fucking hurts...I do care about money. Sure. But I also care about you.

THE DIRTY MAN

(closer to stage still looking and reacting to eyes; should have covered a lot of audience members by now)...Yeah. I know...I believe that...but it doesn't feel that way sometimes because/.

STUDENT

(eyes shut stands up)/You are the Dirty Man, right?
(Gartner and the Dirty Man stop. The Dirty Man approaches the woman.)

THE DIRTY MAN

(close to college student). Yeah. Yes, I am.
(conflicting internal emotions)

STUDENT

I don't want to look at you.

THE DIRTY MAN

(remorseful empathy) Yeah. I get it.

STUDENT

(remorseful mild crying while speaking) I don't want to look at you because I am not proud of what I did last week with my married boss. And...I cheated on my boyfriend who is a genuinely good person...I don't want *anyone to see that mistake*. Not even you. Or...especially you.

THE DIRTY MAN

Ok. I understand.

STUDENT

But...I do want to talk with you. If you have a minute.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. That's fine. Sure. (realizing he has a blind) Oh. Uh. Here. Let me close my blind, so you don't have to worry about your eyes (shuts and locks his blind.) You're good.

STUDENT

(opens eyes after line) Ok, thanks.

(rubs eyes and notices Gartner). Do you mind if I talk with the Dirty Man alone?

GARTNER

(shakes his head, no) No. Not at all...(directed to DM). DM, I'll just walk on the other side of the pond.

(Gartner motions to the opposite house and begins walking. Once he arrives, he can choose pantomiming a host of actions to occupy his time while trying not to upstage dialogue.)

THE DIRTY MAN

Thanks, G...(directed to college student, mild unease) what would you like to talk about?

STUDENT

(blows nose and gathers herself) I appreciate it.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. No problem.

STUDENT

Do you love someone? Intimately? Entirely?

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah...Yes, I do.

STUDENT

How long have you been together?

THE DIRTY MAN

A while now. Look, I don't mean to be rude, but...I really don't want to talk about my shit.

STUDENT

Ok. That's ok. My bad...I'll cut to the chase. I don't know if anyone has told you this. So, I felt it a responsibility of sorts to try...

THE DIRTY MAN

Ok.

STUDENT

I...I made a bad choice last week. I'm pretty sure I know why I did it. And I was wrong. I might pay for it dearly. I might lose a love I cherish. The best I've ever had...one I might not deserve. But...*I am not wrong.*

THE DIRTY MAN

What do you mean?

STUDENT

I think I am more than my bad choices... I am so much more than that thankfully. I'm going to tell my boyfriend what I did and why. And I'm not doing it, again. My

boss...that's up to him what he decides to do. I'm in therapy now starting this past Tuesday because I am hurting. I think I let shit that happened to me when I was a little girl sort of *control me*. I think I'm very afraid and bleeding. And *I don't like it*. I'm not so sure what I am afraid of...but...I think I can heal and scar. Recover and move forward.

THE DIRTY MAN

Uh...that's a lot. But...you are being brave. For what it's worth. I think it's...extremely courageous of you.

STUDENT

I hope my boyfriend sees it the same way...and doesn't leave me.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. Me too.

STUDENT

I love him. He is amazing to me. And like I said, he is one of the best people I have ever met. Truth be told...*sex seems an overall tiny part of this*.

THE DIRTY MAN

(relatable, breathes) Yeah. I get it.

STUDENT

The Dirty Man... (soft challenge) don't you make mistakes?

THE DIRTY MAN

All the time.

STUDENT

Is it possible for two people who love each other to make mistakes then make amends? And maybe...even be stronger if they work through it? Live happily ever after?

THE DIRTY MAN

(reflecting on his own life) I don't know. I'd like to think it happens every day... sometimes it doesn't feel like it is possible.

STUDENT

(pause) Thank you.

THE DIRTY MAN

(chuckles) Sure. I don't think I did much.

STUDENT

You helped me *face my own mistakes*. Respected my choice and space to do it.

THE DIRTY MAN

(matter of fact) Yeah. I guess so.

STUDENT

(begins to walk opposite stage out of house) Thank you, again. Time for me to deal with my crazy and the shit it has caused.

THE DIRTY MAN

(after student walking) Hey! Uh...

STUDENT

(stops and looks back) Yeah?

THE DIRTY MAN

Thank you.

STUDENT

For what?

THE DIRTY MAN

I've also been wrestling with some personal stuff...and you helped me more than what you will ever know...I'm going to sit with what you said *(pointing to head)*.

STUDENT

(smiles) No problem! I'm glad I ran into you. This is my favorite place to really *think* on campus.

(walks out of house)(Stationary the Dirty Man looks in her direction with blind still on.)

GARTNER

(noticing her leaving turns and heads toward DM) You good?!

THE DIRTY MAN

(unlocks and slides blind open taking time) Yeah. Probably better than I have been in a while—much to think about.

(Gartner and the Dirty Man walk back to the lair or the stage.)

GARTNER

(curious) Ok. That's a good thing, I guess.

THE DIRTY MAN

(confident) Yes, it is, my friend. But I know I'm officially done with practice today.

GARTNER

Ok. That's cool man. We had a good workout.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yes. We did. A couple more things...

GARTNER

Yeah. Sure...what's up?

THE DIRTY MAN

I'm going to call Penny when we get home. And I may go to her apartment if she's open to it.

GARTNER

Fuck.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yep. And...

GARTNER

(both stop) What else?

THE DIRTY MAN

(laughing) We're...we are going to have some new rules for the Dirty Man.

GARTNER

(hesitant) Oh, fuck. Like what?

THE DIRTY MAN

(laughing) Like an intake session or screening for every client.

GARTNER

Jesus Christ. That's overhead.

(At home or stage walking to exit)

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. It may be.

(Follows Gartner to exit)

(pauses then turns back to face the house saying line to the sky) IT IS GOOD DAY TO BE A FUCKING HUMAN BEING!

(Lights down.)

OVER YOU¹²

“IT IS LIKE USING THE FINGER TO POINT AT THE MOON, WHICH [OF COURSE] IS SEPARATE FROM THE POINTING FINGER. ALL YOU ARE DOING NOW IS GRASPING AT THE LITERAL MEANING OF THE WORDS... YOU ARE JUST LOOKING AT THE FINGER AND FINDING FAULT WITH IT FOR NOT BEING THE MOON. THAT IS WHY THE MORE REFINED THE OBJECTIONS YOU POSE, THE FURTHER YOU ARE FROM THE INNER TRUTH.

— WÔNHYO, TREATISE ON THE TEN WAYS OF RESOLVING CONTROVERSIES

(Penny and Theda’s apartment as seen before in Act I, Choking on Hello. There might be additional furniture on stage if chosen due to the space available.)

A couple of weeks have passed since the Dirty Man’s conversation

¹² Ingrid Michaelson, “Over You,” April 16, 2014.

with the female college student.

The Dirty Man believes he has found balance in his identity and that there is hope for his relationship with Penny. Penny thinks it is time to move on and is strongly considering other Master's degree options. The Dirty Man is in normal clothes.

Thick intensity in the air.

The Dirty Man respectfully avoids eye contact until directed otherwise.)

PENNY

(doorbell rings) Coming.

(Penny looks through the peephole and opens door. If a door is not available or a good fit, modify accordingly.)

THE DIRTY MAN

(slightly sheepish) Hi.

PENNY

Hi...uh...come in.

(walks to sofa and sits)

THE DIRTY MAN

Thanks.

(follows Penny and sits by her but not too close)

PENNY

(abrupt) What did you want to talk about?

THE DIRTY MAN

(confident) I've been thinking these last couple of weeks.

PENNY

*(slightly bitter) Ok. About what? Problems with *the Dirty Man's* lair?*

THE DIRTY MAN

(shakes off comment)...a lot of stuff...and no...the house is fine. It's nice to have the space.

PENNY

...Ok. Then what? Money hungry ambition driving you insane?

THE DIRTY MAN

(matter of fact chuckling) Of course...

(tries to find words)

PENNY

(resentment) Ok. What else, then...guilty conscience?

THE DIRTY MAN

(That hurts.) Yeah. That's certainly part of it.

PENNY

Well, listen. I'm deep in a paper right now, so...

THE DIRTY MAN

I understand...I don't want to waste your time. This is just hard.

PENNY

(looks at time and breathes). When I agreed for you to come over, I gave myself a short break. You can take your time, but I don't have much.

(Time or patience? What is going on?)

THE DIRTY MAN

I met someone a couple of weeks ago. *(mad at himself)* That came out wrong.

PENNY

(breathes). Ok...where is this going?

THE DIRTY MAN

Gartner and I were practicing at the pond.

PENNY

(frustrated, gets up abruptly). Get to the point, please.

THE DIRTY MAN

(breathes) I...I...I'm not so sure this is the right time. You seem really angry with me. Or upset at something.

PENNY

(awe) And that surprises you?

THE DIRTY MAN

(breathes) Yeah...a little...we haven't talked much in a while.

PENNY

(despondent) You are all over the news, Buch. Local. National. Reality TV. Basically any network...the things that are being said about you. Who you are and what you've done. It's... *disgusting...nasty*.

THE DIRTY MAN

(breathes) I know...it's been...out of control. I'm mad at myself.

PENNY

(looking away) I don't think I can do this anymore.

THE DIRTY MAN

(breathes) Pen...

PENNY

(cries softly) I think...I really think it's over, Buch.

THE DIRTY MAN

(breathes) Pen...I came to apologize.

PENNY

(cries softly) Another apology? How many more? Hmmm? How many more apologies for the *same things*?

THE DIRTY MAN

(breathes) ...look...Pen...there is *no script for any of this*.

PENNY

(grabs DM holding his hands) I'm tired...look into *my* eyes.
(DM avoids eye contact.)

THE DIRTY MAN

(yanked and standing surprised) Pen. What are you doing?!

PENNY

(pleading) Look into *my* eyes. What do you see when you stare *at me*? Huh?

THE DIRTY MAN

(resisting looking into her eyes) Pen...

PENNY

(adamantly focused) What *do you see*, Buch?!

THE DIRTY MAN

(surrender) Pen...*(closes eyes, breathes, then stares)* Pen...*(tears up)*...
(The Dirty Man sees the same vision he saw in the Cohutta Wilderness.)

(composure) I see the woman I love and *that I will always love*.

PENNY

Maybe that is true. But what you *can't see* is a woman who has had enough.

A woman who *was in love with a man she doesn't know anymore.*

THE DIRTY MAN

(painful) Pen...I'm still me...I've just...just changed. That's all. But I'm *still me.*

PENNY

Really. When do you use the name, Buch, anymore? Or your real preferred name? At all?

THE DIRTY MAN

...what happened to me in the wilderness...it wasn't my fault...but I've...I've had to deal with the consequences.

PENNY

That's what I'm talking about. You're not the only person who has had to deal with the consequences.

THE DIRTY MAN

(sorrowful listening)...

PENNY

And I'm just the obvious one. What about *all those people*, Buch? All those people you have embarrassed. Humiliated? Shamed? Cybercrimes? Aiding and abetting revenge porn? Not to mention the naked women you've pleased in the bathroom...you were going to school to be a therapist. You may not be able to control what you see. But you can control what you do with it.

THE DIRTY MAN

(solemn) I...I know...I am trying...

PENNY

Do you know you've been accused of causing someone to suicide? Honestly, it's probably been more than one. *(resolute)* I do not know you any longer.

THE DIRTY MAN

I'm not *proud* of everything I've done. And how people react *to their shame* is not my fault. Even if it is tragic.

PENNY

(peaceful sorrow taking a moment to gather herself) Regardless of your *(flippant)* new discoveries you think you need to apologize for...I think I'm finished.

(releases hands)

THE DIRTY MAN

(painful) Pen...I'm not. *Please*...give me a chance to make this right.

PENNY

I'm not even sure...what *needs to be made right*. But...I'm sure I'm done with us. And I'm done with this University and this town.

THE DIRTY MAN

(remorseful plead) Pen...*please*.

PENNY

(breathes and wipes eyes)...I think it's time for you to leave.

THE DIRTY MAN

(breathes and pauses listening and taking it in) I don't feel like I had a chance.

PENNY

(chuckles angrily) You don't *feel like you've had a chance?* Really.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. I feel like you made up your mind before I got here but haven't communicated *anything* with me since our trip.

PENNY

(determined) I've given you nothing but chances.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. I know that, and I'm thankful. That's not what I/

PENNY

/OUT! Now. It's time for you to go. Just...leave.

THE DIRTY MAN

(acknowledging he has lost) Ok. I'll leave.

(The Dirty Man shows himself out.)

PENNY

(crying softly)...

(Lights down.)

BENCHED

“WHAT MAKES ONE HEROIC?—TO APPROACH AT THE SAME TIME ONE’S HIGHEST SUFFERING AND ONE’S HIGHEST HOPE. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IN?—IN THIS: THAT THE WEIGHT OF ALL THINGS MUST BE DETERMINED ANEW. WHAT DOES YOUR CONSCIENCE SAY?—YOU SHOULD BECOME WHO YOU ARE.”

— FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, THE JOYFUL WISDOM

(One week removed from Penny’s apartment conversation.)

The Dirty Man sits in regular clothes on the same ASU pond bench as the beginning of Exposure Package Options from a different angle. His depressive condition appears outwardly.

Gartner finds him feeding ducks while conversing with them. Gartner and the Dirty Man intentionally avoid eye contact until the very end as a routine habit.

Noticeably abundant bread bags riddle the bench. The Dirty Man feeds ducks as a distraction throughout the entirety of the scene.)

THE DIRTY MAN

(pantomimes feeding ducks with bread bag) It must be nice...being a duck.

Not a worry in the world...

Live here on the campus...

Where do you go anyway? At night? You have to sleep somewhere...(looking around).

I’ve never been here at night.

...have to check it out...

(empties bread bag and grabs another) Maybe I’ll visit you while you sleep...assuming you sleep.

How do you sleep?

(Puts bread down on bench and grabs cell phone typing “How do ducks sleep?” in browser.)

(reading from cell) What the fuck is *unihemispheric sleep*?

One half of the brain sleeps while the other is alert!

(to a duck) That doesn’t sound very restful.

(back to original page) You sleep at all hours? In different positions? Impressive.

(chuckling) One eye open...

On land...

Or in the water?!

(Gartner walks up during these lines to interrupt DM's thoughts)

Even flying?!

Shit! I didn't know that!

GARTNER

I thought I might find you here.

THE DIRTY MAN

(disappointed) Hey man *(focused on ducks)*.

GARTNER

Didn't know what?

THE DIRTY MAN

Ducks sleep on land, in the water, or even while they fly.

GARTNER

(matter of fact) Yeah. Pretty cool, huh.

THE DIRTY MAN

You knew that?

GARTNER

Yeah. Worthless zoology trivia picked up in one of my classes...I think sophomore year.

THE DIRTY MAN

You only know what you know, I guess.

(sets down cell and grabs bread)

GARTNER

Yeah. True.

THE DIRTY MAN

(feeding ducks again) I wonder what else I don't know about you?

GARTNER

Do you know what they taste like?

THE DIRTY MAN

(chuckles) One time. Wasn't a fan.

GARTNER

(mild laughing at his own joke) Mind if I sit?

THE DIRTY MAN

No. That's fine. Go ahead.

GARTNER

...

THE DIRTY MAN

(continues feeding ducks)...

GARTNER

Tried your cell.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. I saw I had some texts from you.

GARTNER

A lot of shit going on, man.

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. I know.

GARTNER

I need you to get your shit together.

THE DIRTY MAN

(facing Gartner eyes closed as if old habit) What the fuck does that mean?

GARTNER

(facing DM eyes closed as if old habit) No offense, man. You just seem...a bit *off the rails*. And stuff is piling up.

THE DIRTY MAN

(breathes) Yeah. It is.

GARTNER

I'll be honest with you. You look like shit. You smell worse. Stuff is strewn out all over the house...the maid *was confused today*. Far from normal.

THE DIRTY MAN

...

GARTNER

We have a thick, growing client waiting list since we changed the criteria for a deal. We don't have anyone to help with screening yet. In the meantime, the complaints and lawsuits grow. I like our new lawyer, he seems *on it*, but...

THE DIRTY MAN

(matter of fact) I'm sure.

GARTNER

Your acting like you don't *give a fuck*. Do you?

THE DIRTY MAN

*Honestly...*no, man. Right now, I don't.
(empties bag and picks up another)

GARTNER

What the fuck gives, dude?

THE DIRTY MAN

None of this seems to matter anymore.

GARTNER

Wow. Ok. Thanks, man.

THE DIRTY MAN

(sorrowful) The *love of my life* is gone. Gone. That's all that matters right now.

GARTNER

What do you mean, *gone*?

THE DIRTY MAN

(continues feeding ducks) Penny dumped me. She's transferring out. Moving somewhere.

GARTNER

Dude. Why didn't you fucking tell me?!

THE DIRTY MAN

It all happened so fast. Besides, what's the point?

GARTNER

(takes time) When did this happen?

THE DIRTY MAN

Not something I really want to talk about, man.

GARTNER

(frustrated) We have to talk about it, DM. At least *we have to fix it because nothing will change if we don't.*

THE DIRTY MAN

There *is no fixing this, G.* Once Pen sets her mind on something...good luck.
(grabs another bag, gets up, walks slowly while still feeding ducks and talking.)

GARTNER

Look, man. I got this. We got this. I don't know how yet...but *we got this.*

THE DIRTY MAN

(continues feeding ducks) No, dude. Not even the great G-man, Gartner Marc Johnson himself can change this.

GARTNER

You underestimate me, man...you always have. I'm magic. You really don't have a clue.

THE DIRTY MAN

(chuckles) Yeah. Maybe...but not this time.

GARTNER

Do you remember that time in Kindergarten?

THE DIRTY MAN

I barely remember Kindergarten.

GARTNER

No, man. You remember this. The bullies...what were their names?

THE DIRTY MAN

*(thinking)...**(laughing)* Derrick...Ford and Phillip.

GARTNER

Yes!

THE DIRTY MAN

(laughing) I'm not sure how you pulled that off.

GARTNER

Friends in low places, my brother!¹³

THE DIRTY MAN

(laughing) Yeah. That song really means something else...I think.

¹³ Earl Bud Lee and Dewayne Blackwell, "Friends in Low Places," August 6, 1990.

GARTNER

Maybe. But the point is all it took was some finagling and a slightly falsified love note to a mean third grader.

THE DIRTY MAN

(laughing) Ok. Now it makes a little more sense.

GARTNER

Seventh grade math class.

THE DIRTY MAN

What about it?

GARTNER

You don't know.

THE DIRTY MAN

Don't know what?

GARTNER

How do you think you passed math avoiding summer school.

THE DIRTY MAN

By doing the extra work Mrs. Stevens ask for...that's how.

GARTNER

Really?! You went from a low "F" because you never turned in shit to a fucking "B."

THE DIRTY MAN

Yeah. So. I did extra work.

GARTNER

I think you realize by now a couple of "As" ain't gonna bring that shit up in a short time.

THE DIRTY MAN

What did you do?

GARTNER

I had a conversation with Mrs. Stevens...

THE DIRTY MAN

(hand on head) Arrggh...about?

GARTNER

I wanted to spend the summer with my best friend...so...I just so happened to have some photos of her with the shop teacher in the garage...

THE DIRTY MAN

Holy fuck, dude! Mr. Barnes and Mrs. Stevens?! No way.

GARTNER

(opens eyes) Eleventh grade.

THE DIRTY MAN

(continuing feeding ducks) What fucking now.

GARTNER

Made a deal with a computer nerd.

THE DIRTY MAN

(continuing feeding ducks) Oh shit. For what?

GARTNER

You've never been that good at math, man.

THE DIRTY MAN

(continuing feeding ducks) I'm not going to ask.

GARTNER

You really are clueless sometimes. But that's cool, dude. Because you're caring, genuine, and fucking constant. You're *the best person I know*, DM. But...clueless.

THE DIRTY MAN

(continuing feeding ducks) Dude.

GARTNER

Like now. You're clueless now.

THE DIRTY MAN

(head shake) Really. How?

GARTNER

I think the ducks are full man. You have bread lying around on the ground. And they don't look interested.

THE DIRTY MAN

(chuckles opening eyes) Hmmm. Never seen that before.

GARTNER

How much fucking bread did you bring out here, man?

THE DIRTY MAN

Enough *(both laugh)*.

GARTNER

(looks intently at DM) I'm going to fix this, man. Just like I always do. I love you, bro.

THE DIRTY MAN

(pauses then looks Gartner in the eyes) ARGGGHHHH! REALLY?! GODDAMNIT, DUDE!

GARTNER

(covers eyes embarrassed) It was an accident, man. I was looking for one of my house shoes that your fucking dog took...

THE DIRTY MAN

Will you please, for the love of god, stay out of *my bedroom*. We have a fucking huge house, dude.

GARTNER

(chuckles) Yeah, man. I will.

THE DIRTY MAN

(continues throwing bread to uninterested ducks) Thank you...we shall see.
(not convinced)

GARTNER

(exits) I'm going to fix this, man!!!

THE DIRTY MAN

(yells at Gartner) There is no fixing this!

(pausing, looks at ducks) Ahhhh damn it...how did it come to this? It must be nice being a duck. Not a care in the world...maybe that's what I need to do. Fly away. And sleep while I'm flying.

(laughs) Sleep while I'm flying...so tempting to run.

You guys are lucky *(to ducks)*...

(pause) I wish *I could fly*. That would be a cool superpower.

(Lights down.)

WHEELIN' AND DEALIN'

“IN THE MIDST OF WINTER, I FOUND THERE WAS, WITHIN ME, AN INVINCIBLE SUMMER.
AND THAT MAKES ME HAPPY. FOR IT SAYS THAT NO MATTER HOW HARD THE WORLD
PUSHES AGAINST ME, WITHIN ME, THERE’S SOMETHING STRONGER – SOMETHING BETTER,
PUSHING RIGHT BACK— ALBERT CAMUS, THE STRANGER

*(The living room in The Dirty Man’s lair. Consider using furniture
from Theda and Penny’s apartment. Nice but simple.*

Gartner is seen holding his cell phone with speaker on.

*The aide and Senator Rogers or Client Two from Exposure
Package Options might be recorded or live on mic out of sight
from audience.)*

GARTNER

May I speak with Senator Rogers please?

AIDE

Do you have an appointment sir? The senator is a very busy woman and will not take calls without an appointment.

GARTNER

No, I do not. Please tell her it is Gartner Johnson. She will most likely take my call.

AIDE

I understand, Mr. Johnson. One moment sir.

GARTNER

Thank you.

(waits patiently pacing)

SENATOR ROGERS (CLIENT 2)

Mr. Johnson. A bit of a surprise to receive a call from you...at this number.

GARTNER

Hello, senator. I realize this might be strange, ma’am. But I assure you, I would *not* call unless it was absolutely necessary.

(stops pacing)

SENATOR ROGERS

Unfortunately, it’s a terrible time, Mr. Johnson. Our government landline is experiencing major technical challenges. I’m going to hang up now. Please call me back on 204-622-8448 so that we might talk freely without hindrance. That is 204-622-8448. Goodbye.

GARTNER

(hangs up and calls burner) Right. Fuck...Senator Rogers?

SENATOR ROGERS

Hello Mr. Johnson. Help me understand what you require.

GARTNER

My bad on the landline, ma'am. The Dirty Man...*is in grave trouble*, and I need to ask a favor.

SENATOR ROGERS

I have been tracking *the trouble* piling up, Mr. Johnson. I was expecting a call from you.

GARTNER

Right...yeah...this all happened so fast...there certainly is a lot going on...but we're learning. Adjusting. We got it. We have hired a stellar lawyer, and he is helping us hire more...changed our policies...though we need additional support with screening and...anyway...

SENATOR ROGERS

Yes...Mr. Johnson, how might I help?

GARTNER

This request has to do with his personal life.

SENATOR ROGERS

Intrigued...ok. I'm listening.

GARTNER

(breathes) I could use help with Penny Kennedy—the Dirty Man's girlfriend of almost three years and lifetime love—he's losing her, and I need a massive, thorough messaging campaign of sorts.

SENATOR ROGERS

Tell me more.

GARTNER

I think...maybe you and others can help her see *the other side of him*, how he has used his powers to help people. His huge heart. His annoying moral compass—rules and whatnot. If she glimpses this side again—a side, she fell in love with—she might not leave him. All she sees is the bullshit.

SENATOR ROGERS

I see.

GARTNER

The thing is...*I know* what happened to DM is a freak occurrence. *I know* everything...*most* of what he's done. But *I also know*...at his core, he is still a good dude. He is really a good fucking human being—the same one Penny fell in love with, only changed with superpowers. She just sees his bad choices since...the accident. His mistakes.

SENATOR ROGERS

Tell me more specifics of the Dirty Man's so-called *bullshit*. Why is Ms. Kennedy so upset?

GARTNER

Maybe you should ask her...that is part of the favor. Could you call her? Listen to her and help talk some sense into her? Remind her how DM is a...good person? Still helps.

SENATOR ROGERS

Mr. Johnson, I'm not a therapist. And honestly, I'm a little biased towards cheating partners in which you are acutely aware.

GARTNER

DM has not cheated. Sure, he's done some fucked up shit with his powers...but...he didn't wish these powers on himself. He's learning to control them. To deal with them. He has a moral code. He is a victim of some fucked up hoodoo or something. He has just had *to wrestle with it*. A dude learning to live with being a walking security camera. Crazy cool porn cameras inside his head.

SENATOR ROGERS

I understand, Mr. Johnson...I suppose in some ways, *all of us fall victim*. Ok...I will call Ms. Kennedy. What else? You said *massive and thorough*.

GARTNER

Yes! Fucking, yes! Yeah...this part is a little harder. I also need you to leverage your power base and enlist others to support—a call, email, or text. People who DM has helped. Batter her with the good side. The *other side*. I can help with the contact list, people, numbers, everything.

SENATOR ROGERS

Cunning and smart, Mr. Johnson.

GARTNER

It's what I'm good at.

SENATOR ROGERS

Ok. I agree. If we are going to demonstrate and reflect who the Dirty Man really is—all sides of him—we need more than just me. It's an *information war*. Consider it done, Mr.

Johnson. I am happy to repay the Dirty Man.

In all of this, however, we remain discreet. My name cannot be brought into it. My aides will follow suit.

GARTNER

I get it. Totally.

SENATOR ROGERS

This call never happened.

GARTNER

Nope.

SENATOR ROGERS

Do not let word get out otherwise. Furthermore, Ms. Kennedy can only know so much.

GARTNER

Absolutely.

SENATOR ROGERS

My debt is settled after this favor. I want to move forward past this part of my life.

GARTNER

Too easy. Sounds lovely.

SENATOR ROGERS

Good day, Mr. Johnson.

GARTNER

Senator Rogers, have an excellent rest of your day! If it means anything, you forever have my vote.

SENATOR ROGERS

I appreciate that, Mr. Johnson. Clean this mess up, please. And pump the brakes on your business. Thank you and the Dirty Man, again. Goodbye.

GARTNER

Yes, yes, yes! This will work. It has to work.

(hangs up call.)

(deep breath referring to a written list on the table) Next, call the lawyer and interview ...*(referencing a list of techs and cell numbers)* Blanche Peterson, for a screening tech.

(Lights down.)

REDEEMED AFTER THE ACTS: FAITHFUL¹⁴

“TODAY, WE TURN TO ONE PERSON TO PROVIDE WHAT AN ENTIRE VILLAGE ONCE DID: A SENSE OF GROUNDING, MEANING, AND CONTINUITY... IS IT ANY WONDER THAT SO MANY RELATIONSHIPS CRUMBLE UNDER THE WEIGHT OF IT ALL?”

— ESTHER PEREL, MATING IN CAPTIVITY

(Split stage again between the Dirty Man’s lair one side of stage; Penny and Theda’s apartment on the other side. Opposite sides from Choking On Hello.

Again, lighting establishes clarity for the separate apartment dialogues.

Have fun with the positive messaging campaign—possible VMD work.

The conclusion of the message campaign and culminating event is Senator Rogers’ call. Penny has a change of heart)

PENNY

(dialogue with seemingly the thousandth person the Dirty Man has helped) Ok. Thank you for calling. I appreciate your story. Have a good day.

THEDA

You are being *flooded* today. What the fuck is going on?

PENNY

(curious and open) I’m not sure. It’s not just calls. It’s texts. Emails. Notes in the mailbox. All saying the same thing. They are talking about Buch...or *the Dirty Man*...how he helped...listened...and what a good person he is...fishy. It seems to have Gartner written all over it.

(Theda rolls her eyes watching more reality TV.)

BUCH

(sitting on the sofa) I can’t believe you actually watch that in your spare time. *Caught in the Act?* Really? We live that shit.

GARTNER

(watching MTV Caught in the Act: Unfaithful from his love seat). What?! Great material. This is like...training. Intelligence. I’m almost through season one. Tami Roman is out of control! You’d love her!

¹⁴ Adapted from MTV’s “Caught in the Act: Unfaithful,” January 29, 2022.

PENNY

(cell rings...breathes) Hello. This is Penny Kennedy.

SENATOR ROGERS

Hello Ms. Kennedy. This is Senator Rhonda Rogers.

PENNY

(shocked) Senator Rhonda Rogers...uh...hello...how may I help you?
(Theda turns in amazement and disbelief.)

THEDA

Senator fucking Rhonda Rogers?

BUCH

(sitting on the sofa) How many screening Techs have you set up for conversations?

GARTNER

(Distracted by MTV) Uh...I don't know...maybe four that seem doable.

PENNY

(fast forward through the conversation) Senator Rogers, I appreciate your call. Really. I...I uh...I need a little time to reflect. Buch has also exploited people. Hurt them. And used their vulnerabilities...
(sitting on the couch)

SENATOR ROGERS

I understand. But frankly you *should reflect*, Ms. Kennedy. You remain fortunate enough to have a love that has been loyal with *optimal opportunity not to be*. Not perfect, of course. But steadfast. And proven caring and compassionate in general.

PENNY

Yes....I get that.

SENATOR ROGERS

Remember, Ms. Kennedy, the Dirty Man was a victim himself. The question is...can you tolerate his idiosyncrasies? *His crazy?* Everyone has it. But commitment on the other hand...faithfulness...a trustworthy core...that might be harder to acquire.

PENNY

(breathing and reflecting) Thank you. I'll think more. This whole day is a whirlwind.

BUCH

I appreciate your work with that, really. The screening is important for accountability... keeping us tame *(laughing)*.

GARTNER

(Distracted but hears DM, sarcastic). Yeah, no problem, DM. Somebody needs to keep you in line.

SENATOR ROGERS

Mrs. Kennedy...how many others has he helped? How many people in flagrant, scandalous situations with which exude disrespect, ill regard, and selfish pain?

PENNY

I...after today, I don't know...It makes sense, I guess...knowing Buch.

SENATOR ROGERS

Good day, Mrs. Kennedy. Consider my debt settled. Please speak my name to no one other than those who need to know. Goodbye.

PENNY

Goodbye. *(hangs up)* Unreal. He really helped Senator Rhonda Rogers. That situation was *terrible*.

THEDA

(flipping channels) Yes it was—the reason why I will *never* be in an exclusive relationship when I'm in office...he was on the fucking Epstein list...unreal *(looking at Penny)* wait, the Dirty Man helped *her*?¹⁵

PENNY

No. *Buch did*.

BUCH

When is our meeting with the lawyer?

GARTNER

(Still caught in MTVland). Next week sometime. It's in my planner on the dining room table.

PENNY

I'm going to call him.

THEDA

(surprised) What? Really?

PENNY

Yeah. We've been through too much for me to just leave it all abruptly. I should give him a chance to talk.

(lights adjust for both the apartment and the house)

¹⁵ Adapted from human trafficking Jeffrey Epstein investigation, accessed December 21, 2024 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-67861498>.

THEDA

Your call. I wouldn't do it.

(Penny calls Buch.)

BUCH

(sees Penny is calling cell) Shit! It's Penny! She's calling!

GARTNER

(larger than life smile) Really? That's whack.

PENNY

Hello, Buch?

BUCH

(maintaining composure) Penny! Uh...hi. What's up?

PENNY

I was wondering if you might be available to talk today—*in person*?

GARTNER

(yells) Hi Penny!

PENNY

(flat) Hello, G.

BUCH

(excited) She says "hi." Uh...sure! Where are you thinking? Want me to come over?

PENNY

No. It's not *very private* here today.

(looking at Theda; Theda rolls her eyes.)

BUCH

(excited) Ok. What do you have in mind?

PENNY

Maybe...our spot in the cafeteria?

BUCH

(tears up and pauses) Sure thing. I'd love to meet you there.

PENNY

Ok. Great. In thirty minutes or so?

BUCH

That works.

PENNY

Perfect. Bye.

BUCH

Bye.

(The couple smiles noticeably. Theda remains focused on TV while Gartner reflects pride in his abilities as a henchman.

Lights out slowly.)

EPILOGUE

IT IS PERFECTLY TRUE, AS THE PHILOSOPHERS SAY, THAT LIFE MUST BE UNDERSTOOD BACKWARDS. BUT THEY FORGET THE OTHER PROPOSITION, THAT IT MUST BE LIVED FORWARDS.— SOREN KIERKEGAARD, JOURNALS IV

(Dark. Allow space for the audience to feel as if the play has ended in conclusion of Redeemed After the Acts: Faithful then bring in noticeable New moon and wind. Generys meanders in coupled with nighttime woodland creature noises. Create space setting mysterious feel.

Generys enters foraging and notices a rare St. John's Wort. Generys converses briefly with the herb before addressing the audience.

Again, choose how to translate dialogue for the audience.)

GENERYYS

(thankful and surprised) Eurinllys! (St. John's Wort!)

Mae wedi bod yn rhy hir, fy ffrind. (It has been too long, my friend.)

ST. JOHN'S WORT

(high pitch) Rydych chi wedi bod yn bell. (You have been distant.)

GENERYYS

(offended) Nid fi sydd wedi bod yn bell!! (It is not I that has been distant!)

ST. JOHN'S WORT

Oes. (Yes)

GENERYYS

Nac oes! (No!)

ST. JOHN'S WORT

Oes. (Yes)

GENERYYS

Nac oes! (No!)

ST. JOHN'S WORT

Oes. (Yes)

GENERYYS

(irritated) Oooooooh! Ni safaf y tynnu coes plentynnaidd hwn. (I will not stand this

childish banter.)

(meanders away slowly then stops)

ST. JOHN'S WORT

Byddwch chi'n fy ngadael i Appalachia i bigo? (You will leave me for Appalachia to pick?)

GENERYS

(playful switch) Wrth gwrs ddim! (Of course not!)

(shuffles back to St. John's Wort)

Byth eto. (Never again.)

(talking to a child) Eiddof fi yw dewis a rhwyddineb. (You are mine to pick and soothe.)

ST. JOHN'S WORT

Diolch i ti Ghigau. (Thank you, extraordinary woman.)

GENERYS

Paid â poeni. (Do not worry.)

(picks St. John's Wort and places it in her sack)

(maniacal tone) Peidiwch ag ofni Appalachia. (Do not fear Appalachia.)

(build this intensity) Melltithion i Appalachia! (Curses to Appalachia!)

(Generys slowly pivots to facing audience)

Melltith cenedlaeth. (A generational curse.)

Ers cenedlaethau wedi hen anghofio! (For generations long forgotten!)

(fade in curse music and slow light changes for magic.)

Bydded I'r hyn sy'n difa dy feddyliau... (Let that which consumes your thoughts...)

(reaches in sack then sprinkles and tosses curse ingredients through pitiful eyes line)

Llywodraethu eich bywyd am byth. (rule your life forever.)

Gadewch I'r cerrynt eich ysgubo i ffwrdd... (let the current sweep you away...)

Nes eich bod yn gwybod dim rheolaeth! (Until you know no control!)

Bywyd hybys. (Normal life is defeated.)

Bywyd newydd yn cael ei eni. (New life is born).

Ffocws sengi. (Single focus).

Fel y gwelir trwy dy lygaid truenus (As seen through your pitiful eyes).

Y drych a lewyrcha i ti (The mirror shines unto you)

Beth sy'n bwyta dy fod (what eats your being)

Y cythreuliaid hyn y tu mewn i chi! (These devils inside of you!)

(culminating curse lights permeate house and music)

GENERYS

(comforting the St. John's Wort) Yno! Dim i'w ofni. (There! Nothing to fear.)

(playful cackle) Hmmph.

(Lights out.)

END OF PLAY