

OREGON DREAM

A Play in Two Acts

Charles Deemer



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Performance rights to *Oregon Dream* will not be available until after the author's death. At that time, contact his widow, Harriet Levi, for information: amelia693@yahoo.com.

CAST (2F, 1M)

HANK, 60s, a retired history professor. Same actor plays PIONEER HUSBAND.

CHEYENNE, 30s, a psychiatrist, Hank's daughter. Same actress plays YOUNG MARTHA and PIONEER WIFE.

MARTHA, 60s, retired Women's Studies professor. Cheyenne's mother, Hank's ex-wife. A lesbian activist.

SETTING

An abandoned cabin near Mt. Hood, Oregon. A Sunday in summer, 2005. And flashbacks as noted.

ACT ONE

1/

(AT RISE: Inside a ramshackle cabin. It's an under-furnished mess and clearly hasn't been lived in for a long time.)

(At a table sits HANK, 60s. He is dressed in outdoor gear, as if he planned to take off on a hike somewhere.)

(Prominent on the table are a bottle of whiskey and an outdoor vest from which wires hang out. This was, in fact, an attempt at making a bomb.)

(Someone is shouting at Hank from outside. This is CHEYENNE, 30s, his daughter.)

CHEYENNE (OS)

Dad, please let me in!

(Hank takes a swig from the bottle. No response.)

CHEYENNE (OS)

I'm not going away ... so you might as well unlock the door. ... Dad, for God's sake! Unlock the door!

HANK

(not loud)

It's not locked.

CHEYENNE (OS)
What? Did you say something?

HANK
It's not locked.

CHEYENNE (OS)
What?

HANK
It's not locked! It's stuck! If you want in so bad, use your shoulder!

(Another swig. Noise outside – and a sudden crash, as the door swings open and Cheyenne falls inside. She's over-dressed for the cabin, having come from church services. Her body language suggests she's expecting spiders to fall on her at any moment.)

HANK
The door doesn't have a lock.

CHEYENNE
It doesn't have a lock?

HANK
They took it.

CHEYENNE
Who?

HANK

The last ones to break in while there were still things left to steal. A year or more ago, I guess.

(Cheyenne looks like she wants to sit at the table but is afraid of getting dirty.)

HANK

You going to stand or sit?

(Hank reads her hesitation correctly. He gets up, grabs a broom across the room, comes back and sweeps off an empty chair at the table.)

HANK

Sit.

(Cheyenne sits.)

HANK

You want a drink?

CHEYENNE

No thank you.

HANK

Good. They took all the glasses.

(She stares at the wired vest.)

CHEYENNE

Is this ...?

HANK

It's my piece of shit. I've failed at a few things in my life, but this ... I may have set a new standard of failure here. Wait a minute. How did you know what it is?

CHEYENNE

Dad, I read your note.

HANK

So that's why you're here.

CHEYENNE

Why else would I be here?

HANK

Good point. I'm not thinking too clearly at the moment.

(A swig.)

CHEYENNE

I'm sure that doesn't help.

HANK

I'm sure you're sure.

(Another swig.)

CHEYENNE

I talked to mom.

(Hank studies her.)

HANK

Say what you mean.

CHEYENNE

She wants me to call her. She's very worried about you.

(Cheyenne takes out a cell phone.)

HANK

That'll be the day. Good luck getting reception out here.

(And he's right – nothing.)

HANK

How'd you find the note?

CHEYENNE

Your landlord called me. He found it. I dropped by your apartment after church.

(She brings the note out of her purse. It's printed on a sheet of paper. Hank reaches for it but Cheyenne pulls it away.)

HANK

What do you plan to do with it? Send it to your mother?

CHEYENNE

I think we should talk about it.

HANK

I can't afford you.

CHEYENNE

Very funny.

HANK

What is it you told me you charge? Hundred an hour?
What a world. Hundred an hour to listen to folks ramble.

CHEYENNE

Dad, I'm not here as a professional. I'm here as your daughter.

HANK

Right.

CHEYENNE

You don't believe me?

HANK

I don't know what I believe any more.

CHEYENNE

Can I tell you what I think is going on?

HANK

Can I stop you?

CHEYENNE

Dad, sometimes you scare me.

HANK

Like now.

CHEYENNE
Yes, like now.

(A pause.)

CHEYENNE
(re the vest)
Is this dangerous?

HANK
I couldn't get the damn thing to go off. I don't think it's going to explode on its own.

CHEYENNE
It still scares me. Could you put it somewhere?

(Hank moves the vest across the room. He comes back and sits down.)

CHEYENNE
I know how upset you've been. I couldn't believe it driving up here. There's so many houses going up.

HANK
Oregon Dream. Isn't that a lovely name for a housing development? I guess it beats Nottingham or Sherwood. All those snobby fenced-in communities they built in central Oregon.

CHEYENNE
This doesn't look pretentious. Just crowded.

HANK

I didn't say pretentious. I said snobby. There's a difference.

CHEYENNE

Some of them don't look so bad.

HANK

You came up the mountain to tell me this? You can just head on back down.

CHEYENNE

I came here because your note scared the bejesus out of me. I didn't know what I'd find.

HANK

I'm not suicidal, if that's what you're asking.

CHEYENNE

What do you call your note then?

HANK

Sacrificial. There's a difference. It's a trade off. I go, but some of them go with me. No, that's not right. I made sure I went to their office on a Sunday. I wanted to blow up the building, not the people. I wanted to make a statement. Well, I sure did. Oh, Jesus, did I. I mailed it to the paper. Fuck.

CHEYENNE

What did you send to the paper?

HANK

Explaining what I did. Only I didn't do it – so now I come

off looking like a goddamn fool. Unless I can figure out how to do it right.

(He gets up and starts toward the vest across the room.)

CHEYENNE

Dad! Stop this!

(Her passion stops him in his tracks. He comes back to the table.)

HANK

It looked easy enough on the Internet.

CHEYENNE

You learned this online?

HANK

You can learn anything online.

CHEYENNE

So you wrap yourself in a bomb, go to the office of the developer, and blow the building and yourself to smithereens.

HANK

Something like that.

CHEYENNE

Because you're pissed that they're building condos all around you.

HANK
To make a statement.

CHEYENNE
Aren't you being a little selfish?

HANK
What are you, the Better Business Bureau?

CHEYENNE
I'm your daughter. And the more I talk to you, the more you scare me. Dad, I have to say this. I know we haven't had a relationship for long, but I've never seen you this bad. Never.

HANK
It sucks, doesn't it?

CHEYENNE
Yes, it does. So why don't you do something about it?

HANK
Is that code for see a shrink?

CHEYENNE
It wouldn't hurt.

HANK
I'm not nuts here. You have to understand how special this place was. When your mother and I bought the land, and built the cabin on it, there wasn't a neighbor to be seen. The view of Mt. Hood, the sound of the river below, the smell of the pines, it was our little piece of heaven. A man needs something to look forward to when he retires.

A man needs a sense of ending up somewhere. Of having worked for something worthwhile.

(A pause.)

HANK

Of course, this was all before your mother went through her ...

(A pause.)

HANK

...changes.

(A pause.)

HANK

So how's your love life?

CHEYENNE

Pardon me?

HANK

You got anybody special in your life?

CHEYENNE

I broke up a three-year relationship recently. I'm taking a break.

HANK

Guy? Girl?

CHEYENNE

Jesus, Dad.

HANK

It's a common question today.

CHEYENNE

I'm straight. I told you before.

HANK

Once upon a time, so was your mother.

CHEYENNE

No, she was never straight. She was in the closet.

HANK

I was in bed with her, and I'm telling you she was straight.

CHEYENNE

She was bi even then. Dad, this is ancient history.

HANK

She's still the best woman I ever knew. And I mean, *woman*.

(Hank seems lost in thought. The lights change. We are going back thirty-odd years, and Cheyenne will become the young Martha. Hank's body language will be younger as well.)

(They rise and move close. They are outdoors.)

HANK

Look at the view, Martha! Just look at it!

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

How much is ours?

HANK

Enough.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

I can't wait to build our house.

HANK

First a cabin to get by. We have lots of time.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

Can I design the house?

HANK

You design the house. I'll build the cabin. In fact, I think I've already got the perfect design. One big room!

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

And a bathroom.

HANK

That's a little more complicated. This isn't going to be like living in Portland. I'm going to have to make a mountain woman out of you.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

I promise to be a good student.

HANK

Even if it means peeing in one of those outdoor portable
jobbies?

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

Even then.

HANK

Reading by a lantern?

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

Yep.

HANK

Fetching water? I mean, for everything. Washing dishes.
Mixing drinks.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

I can get used to it.

HANK

I bet you can.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

I can get used to anything. I love you.

HANK

I like the sound of that.

(They kiss. BLACKOUT.)

2/

*(LIGHTS CHANGE back to present time.
They sit at the table as before.)*

CHEYENNE

Here's what I think we should do, Dad. In my line of work, I make connections. I think I can get you to see a doctor who will help you. He works a lot with veterans. With post-traumatic problems.

HANK

I loved the Army. After Korea, before Vietnam. Perfect timing. They put me in the Army Security Agency. Sent me to a language school in Monterey to learn Russian. It was a very intense and important learning experience for me. I became a man in the Army. What post-traumatic problem?

CHEYENNE

Not so much from a war as from the world. The way everything has changed. I mean, right here, look at all the changes around you. He can help you deal with them.

HANK

You want me to deal with this shit?

CHEYENNE

I don't know! I don't want you trying to blow yourself up just because you can take down a developer with you.

HANK

Make a statement.

CHEYENNE

Fine, make a statement. I want you to write a letter to the editor if you want to make a statement.

HANK

I did that already – and more than once.

(Hank starts laughing.)

CHEYENNE

What?

HANK

I wish I could've seen the look on my face. All that planning and anticipation. You talk about a rush. And I didn't even have 43 virgins waiting for me.

CHEYENNE

This isn't a joking matter.

HANK

That may be true. But making it one may be the only sensible thing left.

CHEYENNE

Will you come down the mountain with me?

HANK

I have to think about it.

(He takes a swig.)

CHEYENNE

I'd like to leave before it gets dark. I need to go in early

tomorrow.

HANK

(offering the bottle)

You sure you don't want a drink?

CHEYENNE

Is there anything besides whiskey?

HANK

Sorry. If we had a refrig in here, somebody would've taken it by now anyway.

CHEYENNE

It will safer up here with neighbors.

HANK

Whoopee.

CHEYENNE

You like being broken into?

HANK

Of course not. In the beginning, nobody even knew about this place.

*(LIGHTS CHANGE to the past again.
Hank younger, Cheyenne as young
Martha.)*

HANK

(gesturing, showing off the new cabin)

I know, it's not much. But it'll keep us warm and dry. It'll do until we build our house.

(Young Martha looks around, taking it in.)

HANK
It's not the Ritz.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
No, it's not the Ritz.

HANK
I want you to like it.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
I do! But like you always say, I'm a city girl. It's going to take me a little time to get used to this.

HANK
We've got all the time in the world.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
No water. No electricity. I guess this is what you call primitive.

HANK
Primitive is a tent. This is base rock civilization. We're like pioneers.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
Pioneers.

HANK
You don't like it.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

Actually, I'm impressed that you built it yourself. I don't think I've ever met anyone who built a cabin.

HANK

It's my first and last. Come on, let's break it in.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

You brought champagne?

HANK

I mean make love in it.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

On the floor?

HANK

On the sleeping bag. I'll pump up the air mattress. It's not really home till we make love in it.

3/

*(LIGHTS CHANGE BACK to present.
Characters return to present.)*

CHEYENNE

It's called progress, Dad.

HANK

My PhD dissertation made the argument that history

wasn't progressive, it was circular. We never learn from our mistakes. Do you already know this?

CHEYENNE

I'm not sure I agree with it.

HANK

Not the thesis. That this was what my dissertation was about.

CHEYENNE

No, I didn't.

HANK

I keep forgetting how little you know about me.

CHEYENNE

What can I learn if you're not there?

HANK

You deserve to hate me for that.

CHEYENNE

I don't hate you. I just don't understand it.

HANK

It's difficult to explain without sounding like I'm criticizing your mother. It was my failure, not hers. I should've done whatever it took to stay in your life.

CHEYENNE

She didn't want you to see me?

HANK

It's more complicated than that. She never talked about me?

CHEYENNE

Not that I remember. You were gone, and that was that.

HANK

You came into the world at the worst possible moment. It was the worst time of my life after your mother...

CHEYENNE

Came out.

HANK

That sounds so inconsequential. Like she stepped through a door into the afternoon.

CHEYENNE

I've thought about how much it must have hurt you. I had a friend in school whose dad came out gay. It devastated her mother – and her, too. I can't imagine going through something like that.

HANK

I thought shrinks understood everything.

CHEYENNE

What I understand is, a person has to move forward. My job is to help them through crisis and transition. I wish I could help you.

HANK
It's a little late for it to matter.

CHEYENNE
How can you say that? You were ready to blow yourself up.

HANK
Were?

CHEYENNE
Oh, God.

HANK
No God. No heaven. No 43 virgins. Just trying to go out with a little dignity.

CHEYENNE
I see nothing dignified about suicide.

HANK
Most people don't. I'm aware of the argument.

CHEYENNE
We're not getting anywhere here.

HANK
Where's to get?

CHEYENNE
I want you to come down the mountain with me.

HANK

So you can take me to your doctor friend.

CHEYENNE

I would prefer that. I'd settle for just getting you out of here.

HANK

You have a point. It's depressing here. No more view of the mountain, no more river sounds. It even smells different.

CHEYENNE

Then let's saddle up.

HANK

Saddle up.

CHEYENNE

It's an expression mother uses.

HANK

Which she got from me.

CHEYENNE

I didn't know.

HANK

How could you?

(A pause.)

HANK

I had so many dreams for this place. Even after your mother left me. This was the only thing I wanted in the divorce. I gave her everything else.

CHEYENNE

How come you never built a house here?

HANK

Good question. I think a house implied a family. I kept waiting to renew my faith in family.

CHEYENNE

You'd lost it?

HANK

Of course I'd lost it. We'd talked about having a large family.

CHEYENNE

Mother never wanted more than one. She told me so.

HANK

I'm sure that's true. But I thought different.

CHEYENNE

She said she wanted more?

HANK

I don't remember.

(LIGHTS CHANGE to past. Hank and Young Martha are cuddling after love making.)

HANK

I want a large family.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

How many is large?

HANK

I don't know. Four. Are you okay with that?

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

When I feel like this, I'm okay with anything. I want to feel this way forever.

HANK

Half boys and half girls. What do you think?

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

God, the last thing I want to do is think. I can barely talk. I shouldn't try. I'll end up sounding stupid.

HANK

You never sound stupid.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

Everything that comes into my head now is a cliché. "That was incredible. I didn't know it could be like this. It was magical. On a scale of one to ten, that was a fifteen."

HANK

We aim to please, ma'am.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

It's this place. The river, the wind. I felt like we were in rhythm with the universe.

HANK

Wow.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

My body took on its own life. My head didn't get in the way like it can. I felt total abandon to forces beyond my control.

HANK

I can't top that.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

It wasn't good for you?

HANK

Of course it was. And it *was* special – because I knew it was special for you. Maybe you're right. It's this place.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

I wish we could stay up here forever.

4/

(LIGHTS CHANGE to present.)

CHEYENNE

She's not the mother type, really. She had a hard time raising me.

HANK

What's-her-face didn't pitch in?

CHEYENNE

Emily. I don't think she wanted me around.

HANK

She took off then?

CHEYENNE

Dad, they're still together. You didn't know?

HANK

Nobody tells me anything. Still together after thirty-something years. Impressive. I guess your mother found happiness after all.

CHEYENNE

Why do you always say that? Your mother.

HANK

Somehow it goes down better than "Martha." Does it bother you?

CHEYENNE

I'm just curious. You hold grudges, don't you?

HANK

Compared to your mother – to Martha – no, I don't think I do. I made the peace offering before she did, and she turned me down.

CHEYENNE
When was that?

HANK
A few years after we broke up. I missed you terribly.

CHEYENNE
I didn't know that.

HANK
I'm sure she didn't tell you.

CHEYENNE
So what happened?

HANK
I wanted you to spend the summer with me.

CHEYENNE
How old was I?

HANK
Two. Three. I suppose I could have taken the matter to court. Being on different coasts, it was harder for me to raise hell about it. I didn't have tenure yet, I felt very unsettled and insecure.

CHEYENNE
So you forgot about me.

HANK
I wouldn't put it that way. I gave up the effort it would

take to stay in your life. Personally, I mean. I sent you things. You remember, don't you?

CHEYENNE

I think so. For a while.

HANK

I never got anything back.

CHEYENNE

I was just a child!

HANK

I know. She could have sent me one of your drawings or something. A photograph. It was abundantly clear she wanted me out of your life entirely. She always was more strong willed than I am.

CHEYENNE

I would have liked to spend a summer with you.

HANK

Maybe if we'd done that ...

CHEYENNE

What?

HANK

I don't know. I'm just glad we finally connected. Maybe that's too strong a word.

CHEYENNE

I was shocked, to be honest.

HANK

I can understand that.

CHEYENNE

What made you contact me after so long?

HANK

I'd totally lost track of you. I suppose I could've hired a detective. But I didn't.

CHEYENNE

And then you read about me in the paper.

HANK

Here we were, both in Portland. It was like a gift from the gods.

CHEYENNE

You're lucky I took my maiden name back after the divorce.

HANK

You're right. I never would've recognized you. The name made me curious.

CHEYENNE

I almost didn't agree to see you.

HANK

Understandable.

CHEYENNE

You know why I did? I wanted to make sure you realized what a failure as a father you were. I wanted some kind of ... I'm not sure what the word is.

HANK

Revenge.

CHEYENNE

That'll do.

HANK

But you were so nice.

CHEYENNE

Nervous as hell. Angry. But there's something almost mythic about our meeting ... there's something about bloodlines. I saw a little of myself in you.

HANK

You don't have to say that.

CHEYENNE

It's true. The upper face, forehead to nose. I got mine from you.

HANK

At least I contributed something.

CHEYENNE

I read all your books. You contributed there, too.

HANK
How did you know about them?

CHEYENNE
I began with the one that sold so well.

HANK
Circular History.

CHEYENNE
I found it in the bookstore. Your photo was on the back cover. I knew the name, of course. I bought it and confronted mother about it.

HANK
I bet she loved that.

CHEYENNE
She said you were a homophobe. She was just trying to protect me.

HANK
A homophobe!

CHEYENNE
I have no idea if you are or not.

HANK
"Some of my best friends" and so on. Your mother not among them, unfortunately.

CHEYENNE

Here's something that's always puzzled me. She's the one who changed. She came out, not you. So how did you become the bad guy?

HANK

The old-fashioned way, I earned it. You really want to know?

CHEYENNE

Very much.

HANK

It's a long story.

(Pause.)

HANK

Okay. First, you have to imagine my shock when she told me what was going on. You have to picture the setting. We're living on Maryland's Eastern Shore then, the Delmarva Peninsula, which is a long sandbar between Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. We're both teaching at Chesapeake College, our first jobs. I'm in History, and your mother, who they really wanted, is starting one of the first Women's Studies programs in the country. We're renting a farm house outside of town, set about a quarter mile off the paved road. A great old house, four bedrooms, just the two of us, so we each had an office. It's a summer day, hot and humid. I'm sitting on the front porch with a gin and tonic, avoiding a deadline I have for a book review. Your mother – Martha comes out with a fresh drink and one for herself. Here's the deal: if you'd asked me if I was happy, I'd have said, yes, absolutely happy. How could I not be? We both had teaching jobs, money wasn't a problem, we were renting a great old house, I was in an ideal marriage. I truly thought so. I felt bonded with my soul mate. Nothing less.

(Pause.)

CHEYENNE
So what happened?

HANK
By my lights, an ideal marriage. Martha sits down, and we drink in silence for a while. She excuses herself to refill her drink and comes back with a pitcher. That's the only time she ever made a pitcher of gin and tonics. "We have to talk," she says. I asked what about. "Something is happening to me." Was I thinking that the ax was about to fall? Not at all. I'm not sure what I expected. I waited for her to go on. Finally she says, "I met someone at the conference." Oh, shit. Now I knew what was coming. But she didn't go on. Finally I asked, "Should I be worried about him?" She hesitated – and I read in the hesitation the worst that could happen, she'd met a colleague at the folklore conference in D.C. last week and maybe even had fallen in love with him. At least had slept with him. I waited and waited. Martha says, "She. And I don't know. I only know I discovered something in myself that I need to explore."

(A long pause.)

CHEYENNE
Dad?

HANK
It's all coming back to me. It was surrealistic. Was I hallucinating? I might as well have been abducted by aliens. She had met a woman. A woman! I stammered, asking, "Are you telling me you slept with a woman?" Yes, she says.

CHEYENNE

Was this Emily?

HANK

Yes. Love at first sight and all that.

CHEYENNE

I'm so sorry.

HANK

The best is yet to come.

(Pause.)

CHEYENNE

What did you do?

HANK

I just got up and left. I didn't know what the hell to think or say. The love of my life, my soul mate, sleeps with a woman and tells me she wants to explore this side of herself. I should have asked her if she was a lesbian or not. Straight out. I couldn't handle it. I just left.

CHEYENNE

That's not so terrible.

HANK

It gets worse. I go to the Oysterman, a bar we often went to. And who did I find there but Heather O'Reilly. How can you forget a name like that? I'd had her in one of my history classes, and Martha was grooming her to study women's studies in graduate school. Heather O'Reilly. She was with some friends, students, and they invited me to join them. Before I knew it, people were getting up to

go. Heather had had a little too much to drink and looked like she wanted to stay. I bought her another drink. Later I offered her a ride back to the dorm.

CHEYENNE
Dad, you didn't.

HANK
I guess it is that predictable.

CHEYENNE
Did she ... ?

HANK
Say no? Not that I remember. We drove to Ocean City and walked on the beach. We made out. It got hot and heavy ... nature took its course.

CHEYENNE
And mother found out?

HANK
Not right away. It didn't end there. I pursued her. Surreptitiously at first. I told her I was unhappily married – by now, I was – and I think she fell in love with me. Anyway, in less than a month, the rumors were spreading and finally Martha cornered me. "Are you sleeping with Heather O'Reilly?" I moved out after that. I was a wreck. A week later, I resigned my teaching job and moved back west. I had to get as far away as possible.

(Pause.)

CHEYENNE
Wait a minute. What about me?

HANK

Somewhere in there, your mother found out she was pregnant. I didn't learn until after the divorce. It was—...

CHEYENNE

What?...It was what?

HANK

Slip of the tongue.

CHEYENNE

Tell me.

HANK

It's not how I feel now.

CHEYENNE

Damn it, Dad!

HANK

Sometimes I thought her being pregnant, the timing of it, the accident of it, was the cruelest irony I've ever experienced.

CHEYENNE

Ironic because ...?

HANK

I wanted it so badly. The house in the woods, the land, the wife, the kids.

CHEYENNE
The American Dream.

HANK
More like the Oregon Dream. The real one, not this development shit. The landscape here was a big part of it. Before all this crap.

CHEYENNE
But the dream would have ended anyway.

HANK
I suppose so. It just seemed more cruel, ending the way it did.

CHEYENNE
The way you tell the story, I'm surprised mother had me.

HANK
She and what's-her-face—

CHEYENNE
Emily.

HANK
They wanted a family. Everyone in love wants a family. So suddenly it became very easy for them. I became their sperm donor.

CHEYENNE
I'm so sorry ...

HANK

I made it worse than it had to be. I don't blame your mother for getting pissed.

CHEYENNE

I wish she would've made it easier for you to see me growing up.

HANK

I wish I'd've been more forceful to make it happen.

CHEYENNE

I guess we do what we think is right at the time.

HANK

I was lazy. I didn't enjoy confronting her.

CHEYENNE

I know what you mean. She can be intimidating.

HANK

Do you take after her?

CHEYENNE

I think I'm softer than she is. Don't you?

HANK

I don't know you well enough to know.

CHEYENNE

I'd like to change that.

HANK

Ah. Is this where you get back on topic? How I come down the mountain with you and you take me to your shrink friend?

CHEYENNE

That's not what I meant. I do want to know you. But I don't know the man who wanted to blow himself up in order to make a statement.

HANK

That man is your father.

CHEYENNE

Then maybe we never can be close.

HANK

Probably too late for that anyway.

CHEYENNE

You sound like you're glad.

HANK

It's just reality, Cheyenne. You know, I always hated that name. I thought it was a name trying too hard to be hip.

CHEYENNE

I like my name.

HANK

Sometimes I thought of you as Albuquerque.

CHEYENNE
Albuquerque?

HANK
My little joke with myself at your expense.

CHEYENNE
Thanks a lot.

HANK
Not something I shared with anyone.

CHEYENNE
Do you still think of me as Albuquerque?

HANK
It's hard to think of you as anything. It's hard to believe you came up here after me.

CHEYENNE
What was I supposed to do after finding out?

HANK
I didn't think you cared. I'm glad you do.

CHEYENNE
Please come down the mountain with me.

HANK
I'm giving it serious consideration.

(A swig.)

CHEYENNE

You should sell this place, Dad. Put all this behind you.

HANK

You don't realize how much of my life was invested in this. In what I thought this would be.

CHEYENNE

I'm sorry you lost your dream. But you have to move on.

HANK

I care more about losing certain memories than losing this. A man depends on memories.

CHEYENNE

What memories?

HANK

The ones that make the present make sense.

(A pause.)

CHEYENNE

I don't know what to tell you. Mom changed in ways that you didn't. It happens all the time. But you have to let all this go. Mom, the condos, everything. Give yourself some peace. You're retired. You should be enjoying life.

HANK

You want me to play golf?

CHEYENNE

Travel, something. Live in the present.

HANK

Look around you. This is the present!

CHEYENNE

But whatever you think you and mom had—

HANK

Ecstasy. That's the word I've been looking for. We had ecstasy.

CHEYENNE

Ecstasy is not something that lasts.

HANK

But it's not something you deny either. She won't admit it. She won't admit we had something once. She says it was just me.

CHEYENNE

Maybe she's right, Dad.

HANK

I was there! I heard her screams! I felt the sweat on her body! I could smell the ecstasy on her!

(A pause.)

HANK

Sorry. I get emotional thinking about it.

(A pause. Cheyenne is uncomfortable,

not knowing where this is leading.)

HANK

I probably shouldn't tell you this. But I'm not crazy here. I'm not hallucinating. I'm not even exaggerating. It was the greatest experience of my life. Her orgasms. To be inside her when they happened, to have that kind of a connection to her energy, which seemed to drive mine. To bond with her like that. It was like we were animals. I mean that in a profound, spiritual way. What was going on was more basic, more fundamental, than we normally allow ourselves to be. We were out of control. We were out of our comfort zone, out of our rational understanding, out of all our previous experiences. It was like being in a strange land without a map. We came together, bonded, and exploded together. It was miraculous. It was exhausting.

(A pause.)

HANK

But she denies it ever happened.

CHEYENNE

You've talked to her about this?

HANK

Not in years. Decades. When I was trying to get you for the summer, I reminded her of how it had been between us. That we'd shared ecstasy. She said I was exaggerating.

CHEYENNE

Couldn't it have been different for her?

HANK

How? I was an eye witness. She was shaking, she was

screaming, she was sweating – and then, finally, crying in my arms? How the hell could that be different from what it was?

(A pause.)

CHEYENNE

Dad, I'm leaving. With you or without. I wish you'd come with me.

(Hank changes expression.)

HANK

Jesus.

CHEYENNE

What?

HANK

How could I be so stupid?

(He bolts up and starts looking for something.)

CHEYENNE

What is it?

(He's going through things on the counter.)

HANK

I made a mistake!

CHEYENNE

What are you talking about?

(He finds what he's been looking for: some diagrams and instructions printed from the Internet. He starts turning pages, looking for something.)

HANK

I forgot a connection, I'm sure of it.

CHEYENNE

Are you talking about the bomb?

HANK

Here. Jesus. How could I have forgotten to double-check?

(Now he goes to the bomb-vest. He carefully opens it and inspects the wiring. Cheyenne, frightened, stands.)

CHEYENNE

Dad, what are you doing?

HANK

I have to check something ...

CHEYENNE

It's too dangerous!

HANK

I know what I'm doing. Finally.

CHEYENNE

I'm leaving now.

(She heads for the door.)

HANK

Jesus.

*(He moves back toward the table.
Cheyenne stops at the door and
watches him.)*

HANK

If my head wasn't attached, I'd misplace it.

CHEYENNE

Dad?

HANK

I connected a wire to the wrong place. One wire. So the switch doesn't do anything. I can fix it and do it right.

CHEYENNE

No.

HANK

This isn't something I decided on a whim. I've been thinking about it for a long time.

CHEYENNE

I won't let you.

HANK

I don't think you can stop me.

(She comes back into the room.)

CHEYENNE

I want to know more about you and mom. Tell me about how happy you were.

HANK

Distractions aren't going to work, daughter girl.

CHEYENNE

I know what you mean about ecstasy. Especially as a woman, It is more intense for us. It can be scary. I frightened Tim.

HANK

I don't need to hear about your love life.

CHEYENNE

My passion. My ecstasy. My orgasms. He wasn't like you, feeling a bond, letting my energy lead his. He ran from it. He was scared of it.

HANK

You don't have to tell me this.

CHEYENNE

He was so inhibited. It's what finally drove us apart. I didn't feel connected to him. It's rare when two people can connect that way.

HANK

Your mother – Martha and I were connected, believe me. I don't know why she won't admit it.

CHEYENNE

Maybe she associates everything before coming out as a charade.

HANK

It was biological. She was like gravity, falling whether she wanted to or not.

CHEYENNE

She defines her own reality, Dad. If she thinks the experience wasn't authentic, even if it happened, she's going to live in the present with that assumption.

HANK

Isn't it your job to make her see the truth? If she were your client.

CHEYENNE

No. It's to make her live in the present with as much self-worth and health and integrity as she can.

HANK

What about me?

CHEYENNE

What about you?

HANK

Don't you see what that does to me? If she denies it, if this is her reality, then I might as well have hallucinated the entire experience.

CHEYENNE

No, it just led to different consequences for you.

HANK

It didn't lead to any consequences. That's the point.

CHEYENNE

This is the consequence, Dad. Right here and now. You thinking of connecting the bomb right and going back to blow up the building.

HANK

If I hallucinated the ecstasy we shared, then I hallucinate everything. Then I might as well use the bomb on myself. I can't live in the world if I can't trust my own perceptions of it.

CHEYENNE

You're really stuck, Dad. Let me help you get unstuck.

HANK

By what? Denying it ever happened? I already told you, it was the greatest experience of my life.

CHEYENNE

By letting it go. Not forgetting it. Just not obsessing about it. Letting it drive you where you don't want to go.

(Hank laughs.)

HANK

I'm sorry. Everybody thinks they know what's best for their neighbor. We're a nation of meddlers.

CHEYENNE

You don't think you have a problem?

HANK

Of course I have a problem! Jesus. But it's my problem, okay? I own it. If I have nothing else in this world, I have my problems.

CHEYENNE

Promise me you won't go to the developer.

(She gestures to the vest.)

HANK

I'm not sure I can promise that.

CHEYENNE

Dad ...

HANK

Even if I said I would, how could you trust me? If I'm as crazy as you think, why wouldn't I lie to you?

CHEYENNE

You're not crazy. You're suffering.

HANK

We all suffer.

CHEYENNE

You're suffering over things you can't change. You need to let them go.

HANK

Easier said than done.

CHEYENNE

That's why you need professional help. You can't do it alone.

HANK

What a mess, huh?

CHEYENNE

It doesn't have to be.

(He takes the last swig from the bottle.)

HANK

All gone.

(He puts the bottle on its side.)

HANK

Let me try this another way. Where I'm coming from. When I built this, when I was with your mother early on, living together, even before we got married, I was happy. I truly was happy. And so was she. This is the real issue. She refuses to accept that she was happy with me. She refuses to accept that she experienced ecstasy with me. With a man, I suppose it is. What is it, politically incorrect for a lesbian to have a past of pleasure with me? But that's not really what I'm getting at. I was happy then, truly happy. And you know what I thought at the time? I thought it would only get better. I was only 25, my life ahead of me, and already I knew what happiness was. I knew what ecstasy was. I knew what passion was. And I had my life ahead of me. Everything would only get better. What an incredibly energizing thing to feel as a young man. Never for a moment did I think that this was it. This was my allotment of happiness. This was my

share in the universe of ecstasy. After this ended, there'd be nothing more. It would never get better. After 25, well, after 27, when the shit hit the fan, after that, everything that followed would feel empty in comparison. My life of ecstasy was over.

CHEYENNE

Dad, it doesn't have to be this way.

HANK

When you're my age, I think you'll see it differently.

CHEYENNE

God, I hope you're wrong.

HANK

I wish I was wrong, too. But I'm not. When we're happy, we think we'll always be happy. And we're always wrong.

(LIGHTS CHANGE to past. Hank and Young Martha cuddle after lovemaking. Young Martha has been crying.)

HANK

Are you okay?

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

It was an out-of-body experience.

HANK

A good thing?

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

Words can't describe it.

HANK
I hear you.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
I love you so much.

HANK
I love you, too.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
It's scary, in a way.

HANK
Scary how?

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
To be so out of control. It's like jumping off a building
and realizing in the middle of flight that you're falling
and can't stop yourself. You're at the mercy of something
far greater than yourself.

HANK
Gravity. Big difference, though. No splat at the end.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
Maybe a pleasurable splat. Is it like that for you?

(Hank kisses her cheek.)

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
I think it's more intense for me. For women, in general.

HANK

I like being close to you then. The sense of being one.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

It's more than just you and me. It's like being capital-O
One with the universe. Sometimes I'm aware of the river
or the wind, and I seem to be moving in the same rhythm.
God, listen to me. You've turned me into a babbling
mystic.

HANK

Not a bad thing.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

No, definitely not a bad thing.

HANK

One day, a miracle will come from such a moment.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

It's already a miracle.

HANK

A child.

(A pause.)

HANK

When we're ready.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA

After we graduate.

HANK
After we're teaching.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
Um.

HANK
Well. We should get back, I suppose.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
Not yet.

HANK
I have an exam tomorrow.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
I know. In a moment. I want to do it again.

HANK
I don't know if I can.

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
You always say that. And you always can.

HANK
Once more, and then we have to saddle up. Promise?

CHEYENNE/YOUNG MARTHA
Promise.

(They embrace. LIGHTS UP to present.)

5/

(Hank and Cheyenne at the table.
MARTHA, 60s, enters.)

MARTHA
You two look cozy.

CHEYENNE
Mother!

*(Cheyenne goes to Martha. They
embrace.)*

MARTHA
I've been trying to reach you. I was worried.

CHEYENNE
My cell doesn't work up here.

HANK
Martha.

MARTHA
Hank. Are you all right?

HANK
Do you care?

MARTHA
(to Cheyenne)
Can we have dinner together?

CHEYENNE

Of course. I'm trying to get him to come off the mountain with me.

HANK

She knows a shrink.

MARTHA

(to Cheyenne)

I don't want to get involved in this. Do you know the Barlow Trail restaurant on the highway?

HANK

I was telling her about your cosmic orgasms.

MARTHA

Jesus Christ.

HANK

Flowing with the river, in rhythm to the wind. The big-O
Orgasm in the big-U Universe.

("Twilight Zone"...)

Dah-dee-dah-dah, dah-dee-dah-dah.

MARTHA

(to Cheyenne)

How long will you be?

CHEYENNE

(to Hank)

Dad, are you coming with me or not?

HANK
Not, I think.

CHEYENNE
Then I'm leaving. I can't help you if you don't want to be helped. You have to take the first step, however small, on your own. Apparently you can't do that.

HANK
Apparently not.

(Cheyenne starts away, Martha following.)

HANK
Don't deny it, Martha. I was there, too. I know what we experienced together.

(Martha turns to him.)

MARTHA
Cheyenne is right. You're a very sick man.

HANK
Why do you keep lying to yourself? You were there. You damn well know what happened.

(BLACKOUT. Suddenly in the darkness we hear Young Martha's orgasmic CRIES OF ECSTASY. Eerie, cosmic, a tad frightening. And then SILENCE. Act One is over.)

ACT TWO

1/

(AT RISE: As before. Martha and Cheyenne are heading for the door. Hank takes a pistol from the vest. He aims it at Martha.)

HANK
Hold it.

(The women turn to him.)

CHEYENNE
Dad, please ...

HANK
(to Martha)
We're going to settle this once and for all.

MARTHA
There's nothing to settle.

HANK
Sit down. This may take a while.

CHEYENNE
Mom, do as he says.

MARTHA
He wouldn't dare.

CHEYENNE
For me. Please.

(The women return and sit at the table. Hank stays across the room.)

HANK
We need to do this for Cheyenne's benefit. Let her know she was born of ecstasy.
(to Cheyenne)
You probably don't even know how we met.
(to Martha)
Does she?

MARTHA
I certainly never told her.

HANK
Tell her now.

CHEYENNE
Dad, I don't have to know this.

HANK
I want you to. Tell her.

MARTHA
We met at Maxie's. It was a campus hangout.

HANK

A graduate student hangout. A tavern near campus. Tell her the rest.

MARTHA

There isn't any more. That's where we met.

HANK

We were set up. A mutual friend thought we'd connect. Both being progressive thinkers interested in history and all. You remember?

MARTHA

Sam Henderson.

HANK

Now we're getting somewhere. Was Sam right? Did we hit it off?

MARTHA

I suppose so, yes.

HANK

No doubts about it. We ended up at your apartment. Remember?

MARTHA

Yes.

HANK

For the next two days! We skipped classes and screwed our brains out. You remember that?

MARTHA
May I say something?

HANK
Remember?

MARTHA
I don't know why ancient history has become so important to you but—

HANK
Do you remember skipping classes to stay in bed? Do you or don't you?

MARTHA
I remember.

HANK
So we had an auspicious beginning. But this is nowhere near where we'd end up getting. This wasn't a few days of ecstasy. This was just great sex. Nothing magical or mystical about it. We were just getting off. There's a big difference between sex and ecstasy. Am I right?

MARTHA
I don't follow.

HANK
Bear with me. You'll get it eventually. So we quickly became an item. In two months, we rented a house together. Remember the house on the tracks?

MARTHA
Yes.

HANK

(to Cheyenne)

It was an old Victorian, larger than we needed, set only ten or fifteen yards from the railroad tracks. When a train came by, the whole house shook. Remember waking up to the train? Remember how you called it an aphrodisiac?

(No reply.)

HANK

You remember. It was in this house that you had your first vaginal orgasm. Your words, not mine. You didn't think such a response was possible. In the house by the tracks, you discovered it was. That's what you told me.

MARTHA

I'm not comfortable talking about this in front of Cheyenne.

CHEYENNE

She's right. I really don't need to hear this, Dad.

HANK

But this is for your benefit. You weren't a mistake, dropped into the world by accident at the end of a failed marriage. You weren't an inconvenience. You were born from ecstasy.

MARTHA

Let her go. We can talk about this privately.

HANK

I want her to know!

(He waves the gun menacingly.)

CHEYENNE

It's okay, Dad. I'm staying. Go on.

HANK

(to Martha)

You remember getting married?

MARTHA

Of course.

HANK

(to Cheyenne)

I wasn't hot for the idea. That probably sounds strange. But I'd been reading a book by Bertrand Russell, *Marriage and Morals*, so far ahead of its time it's amazing. Written in 1900 or something. He was banned from lecturing in this country because he wrote it. It was considered obscene because it challenged traditional marriage. Over a century ago!

(to Martha)

Remember how much I was into that book?

MARTHA

Yes.

HANK

Russell argues that marriage exists for children, not for adults. To get a marriage license, therefore, a couple would have to prove that the woman is pregnant. Otherwise, just live together.

CHEYENNE

Why did you get married then?

*(Martha shoots a glance at Cheyenne.
Hank sees this. He smiles.)*

HANK

(to Martha)

She has a right to know. You want to do the honors or shall I?

MARTHA

I can't wait to hear how you'll twist this one around.

HANK

I haven't twisted anything around. I was there. I know what happened. So do you.

MARTHA

Fine. You tell it.

HANK

(to Cheyenne)

It was the beginning of our first summer together. We were going to do some camping and end up in Denver, where Martha's parents lived. But at the last minute, Martha, with something like cold feet, insisted we get married before visiting. Ends up, they didn't know we were living together. Your granddad didn't approve of that sort of thing. Martha wanted to show up with a husband, not a live-in boyfriend.

(to Martha)

Did I get it right?

MARTHA

Close enough.

HANK

Right on, and you know it.

CHEYENNE

(to Martha)

It's true?

MARTHA

I had a complicated relationship with my father.

HANK

We got married across the river in Vancouver because in Washington, unlike Oregon, you didn't need a blood test. This saved us a lot of time. We got married in a judge's office, with the secretaries bearing witness. Am I right?

MARTHA

Yes.

HANK

The honeymoon was our camping trip. And our visit.

CHEYENNE

Were you disappointed?

HANK

Not at all. I was okay with all of it. I didn't have to get married, to be sure, until we were ready to start a family. But it seemed like a big deal to your mother, so I went along with it.

(to Martha)

I was a gentleman and a scholar in those days.

MARTHA
Can we move on?

HANK
Impatient to get to the ecstasy part? I can do that.

MARTHA
If you really insist on doing this, you may not like what you find out.

HANK
Oh?

MARTHA
I'm just warning you.

HANK
That almost sounds like you admit it happened.

MARTHA
I do know what happened, Hank. And it's not like what you think happened.

HANK
You're still in denial.

MARTHA
There's a loaded word.

HANK
You're right. I take it back.

CHEYENNE

Why is denial a loaded word?

HANK

It's too easy. Claims of innocence become proof of guilt.
It's a Catch-22 situation.

MARTHA

Denial closes the possibility of discussion.

HANK

And we don't want to do that.
(to Martha)
Shall I go on?

MARTHA

By all means.

HANK

You're sure?

MARTHA

I want to see your face when you find out the truth.

HANK

And I, yours, when you admit it.

MARTHA

Let's get on with it then.

HANK

The blue tent. Remember the blue tent?

MARTHA

In the interest of time, assume I remember everything. I'll stop you when you go off track.

HANK

Fair enough.

(to Cheyenne)

We bought a used blue canvas tent at a garage sale.

CHEYENNE

For the honeymoon camping trip?

HANK

This was before we got married. The first time we used it we camped on the coast.

MARTHA

Near Seaside.

HANK

Very good. It was during Spring break, and we hiked to a cove and put up the tent. We had the beach to ourselves. It was a little piece of paradise.

MARTHA

That first night, they made love in the tent.

HANK

You mean we did.

MARTHA

She'd already started having vaginal orgasms in the house along the tracks. She hadn't thought they were possible.

HANK
You didn't.

MARTHA
Very intense. Quite incredible, really.

HANK
I can't believe you're suddenly admitting it.

MARTHA
The more often she had them, the easier they seemed to be. It was a very erotic period of her life. So when they made love at the beach, she was already in tune with a deep sensuality within her.

HANK
Wait a minute. You're up to something.

MARTHA
The first night in the blue tent was special. She could hear the ocean roaring close by, and somehow the sound of it, the rhythm of it, began to influence her own rhythm in lovemaking, and she became part of some energy larger than herself, some—

HANK
Wait a minute!

(A pause.)

MARTHA
Isn't this what you want to hear?

HANK
But it was true!

MARTHA
Have I said otherwise?

HANK
You're mocking it, putting everything in the third person
as if you weren't there.

MARTHA
(to Cheyenne)
Was I mocking it?

CHEYENNE
I don't think I should be here right now.

MARTHA
But it's for your benefit.
(to Hank)
Right?

HANK
Why are you doing this?

MARTHA
Telling the truth?

HANK
Making it sound so ...

MARTHA

What's the right word? Far-fetched? Melodramatic? No, I think the right word is ... sophomoric.

HANK

Sophomoric.

MARTHA

And Male.

HANK

You left out the most important parts. You were completely out of control. Sweating, gasping, crying out – and later in tears, you had something close to a nervous breakdown in my arms.

MARTHA

In rhythm with the ocean, I think she said.

HANK

It was an intensely emotional experience for you!

(A pause.)

CHEYENNE

The one time I cried afterwards with Tim, he thought he'd done something wrong. From that point on, he seemed guarded in our lovemaking. He seemed afraid to make me cry again.

HANK

It was different with us. We bonded.

(to Martha)

I felt so bonded to you. When I was inside you then, it felt like we were the same Being, the same Body, the same

Energy.

(A pause.)

HANK
I think you felt the same.

MARTHA
Maybe she did.

HANK
Stop saying she!

MARTHA
Whoever this woman was. It was not me.

HANK
Of course it was you.

MARTHA
No. She was a charade. You married a shadow, a fantasy,
a performance. You didn't marry *me*.

HANK
Fine, it wasn't the person you are now. But it was *you*.

MARTHA
I'm not a liar. That woman was a liar.

HANK
So you deny me everything.

MARTHA

I'm not talking about you. I'm talking about her.

HANK

About you.

MARTHA

Her. The lie I was living then.

HANK

Who felt one with the Universe. You even called it cosmic sex.

MARTHA

She did, I'm sure. She was attracted to hyperbole and the dramatic. It better camouflaged the lie at the core of her being.

HANK

Give me something here, for God's sake!

(A pause.)

CHEYENNE

Are we done?

HANK

No. It started in the house by the railroad tracks, and reached new heights in the blue tent at the beach. But it didn't stop there. It didn't stop there! Even after we were married, it didn't stop. I was afraid it might. Marriage changes everything, I'd seen that in my friends. Happy couples living together become bickering married folks. But after we married, we still bonded, we still came together with all the same incredible intensity. We could

bond wherever we were. We bonded in the cabin.

MARTHA
She was faking it.

HANK
What?

MARTHA
Even before they got married. It stopped working for her.

HANK
I don't believe you.

MARTHA
She knew how important it was to you. She knew how much pleasure it gave you, how her pleasure fed your own. So when she lost it, she pretended she still had it. The last year of your time together, more than that, she was faking it.

HANK
Cheyenne was born in ecstasy!

MARTHA
She wasn't.
(to Cheyenne)
I'm sorry. I can't lie to you.

HANK
I was there. I would have known if you were faking it.

MARTHA

Obviously you'd already stopped paying close attention by then.

HANK

I don't believe you.

MARTHA

She lost her trust in you. After that, she couldn't respond the same way. She had orgasms, yes, but they were different, not so ... well, you're right, her word was cosmic. She stopped having cosmic sex with you.

HANK

You son of a bitch ...

CHEYENNE

(to Martha)

Why did she lose it? Why did she stop trusting him?

MARTHA

Because of something that happened.

CHEYENNE

What?

MARTHA

(to Hank)

You're not going to want to hear this.

HANK

Whatever you say, it's a lie.

(to Cheyenne)

Don't trust her.

CHEYENNE
What happened?

MARTHA
(to Hank)
We were visiting your college friend in L.A. Remember?

HANK
Greg. What about him?

MARTHA
(to Cheyenne)
Greg was black.

HANK
He still is.

MARTHA
We felt very liberal, having black friends. Didn't we?

HANK
What about Greg?

MARTHA
Remember the night he took us bar hopping in his old neighborhood in Watts?

HANK
Of course I remember.

MARTHA

(to Cheyenne)

This wasn't in your best neighborhood, believe me. Most of the time, we were the only whites around. It was a little stressful, even for liberals.

HANK

Speak for yourself.

MARTHA

You were as uneasy as I was. Don't deny it.

(to Cheyenne)

Hank had to use the men's room. We were sitting at the bar. The place was crowded, standing room only, great blues playing from a juke box, everybody talking under it, over it, a high Saturday night in the neighborhood. And we were the only white people to be seen.

HANK

I went to the john. So what?

MARTHA

You don't remember?

HANK

Wait a minute. Yeah, what happened when I was in the john. I remember.

CHEYENNE

What happened?

MARTHA

(to Cheyenne)

While he was gone, a man slipped onto the vacant stool next to me, Hank's stool. He leaned so close I could smell

the whiskey on his breath. Do you remember?

HANK

Thirty-plus years and you're not over it.

MARTHA

Look who's talking.

(to Cheyenne)

He leaned in close enough to kiss me. And then he asked, How much I charged for a blow job.

HANK

What the hell was I supposed to do?

MARTHA

Well, as soon as he said it, I saw Hank coming out of the men's room and heading back. I felt like I might faint. The man saw I was looking over his shoulder, turned and saw Hank, and then moved away. As soon as Hank slid onto the stool, I told him what had happened.

HANK

What could I do? We were the only white people in the place.

CHEYENNE

Where was your friend?

MARTHA

Greg. He'd left us there while he picked up his girlfriend after work. He was going to join us later.

HANK

You insisted we leave.

MARTHA

He thought I was a whore!

HANK

(to Cheyenne)

You have to understand the demographics. Most white women in a place like that were, in fact, prostitutes.

MARTHA

That's an excuse. And probably not even true.

HANK

What the hell would I accomplish by confronting him? You wanted me to start a race riot?

MARTHA

I wanted you to stand up for the dignity of your wife.

HANK

(to Cheyenne)

You know what gets me to this day? Your mother is the Great Liberal Feminist. And here she's bitching because I don't defend her honor like a cowboy in some Grade-B western!

MARTHA

It wasn't like that.

HANK

That's exactly how it was. You wanted me to protect your precious honor because the poor guy mistook you for what the odds said you were, a white prostitute in a black bar.

CHEYENNE
So what happened?

MARTHA
We left.

HANK
We drove back to Portland. I had to explain to Greg on the phone later.

MARTHA
Lying, of course.

HANK
I didn't want to make an issue of it.

CHEYENNE
What did you tell him?

MARTHA
What was it? I had a virus, food poisoning?

HANK
What difference does it make?

MARTHA
Food poisoning, I think.

HANK
What was I supposed to tell him? You were so upset at getting propositioned that we had to leave?

MARTHA

It would have been the truth.

HANK

It wouldn't have been fair to Greg.

MARTHA

To Greg!

(to Cheyenne)

Men have to stick together.

CHEYENNE

(to Hank)

I don't understand how the truth isn't fair to him.

HANK

It was a reflection on his favorite tavern. His neighborhood. It wasn't being a good guest.

MARTHA

(laughing)

A good guest! You are truly amazing.

HANK

I don't have to take any more of this abuse from you.

MARTHA

Listen to him. Poor baby.

HANK

I don't believe you were faking it. I think you're afraid to admit you shared pleasure with me. Shared ecstasy. With

a man, for God's sake! It goes against your Lesbian Politics or whatever you call it.

MARTHA

You know what you've become? A male cliché. It saddens me actually.

HANK

A male cliché, I see. Is that code for warrior or football player or cop or what?

MARTHA

All of the above.

HANK

I'm not getting into a name-calling game with you. If you want to be called a dyke, you have to go somewhere else.

MARTHA

Oh, I'm sure among your friends, you've called me that more than once. And worse.

HANK

Which shows how little you know me.

MARTHA

Good. I'm glad you realize that. Maybe we can make progress here after all. I don't know you – and you don't know me. Get it, Hank?

HANK

I knew the woman who wept in my arms.

MARTHA

Perhaps you did. God rest her soul.

HANK

I loved that woman.

MARTHA

I'm sure you did.

HANK

Maybe I still do.

CHEYENNE

That's the problem, Dad. You have to move on.

HANK

I will not abandon or deny or reduce the importance of my past experiences. Especially experiences that are rare in this world. Don't you see why this is so important? I was blessed to share ecstasy with you! With her! Whoever the hell it was. It doesn't matter who it was. It happened – and it happened to me, I was there, I was participant and witness to something extraordinary. I will not give that up.

CHEYENNE

You don't act like you're blessed. You act like you're haunted.

MARTHA

Doomed. Branded. The brand of Dionysus.

HANK

Fuck off.

MARTHA
Does that mean we can go?

(A pause.)

CHEYENNE
Dad, I think it's time to stop this. Please put down the gun.

(He actually does, setting it on a counter.)

HANK
I wanted you to know you were born in ecstasy.

CHEYENNE
In *your* ecstasy. I can see that now. I'm glad I know that.

MARTHA
What does that make me, a womb for hire?

CHEYENNE
You said you were faking it.

MARTHA
That doesn't mean I didn't want you. I wanted a baby a hell of a lot more than he did.

HANK
I wanted a family!

MARTHA

You wanted the Idea of a Family. A cabin in the woods, lots of pretty scenery, a barefoot wife baking bread, and a cute little baby crawling on the cabin floor. You didn't want to change diapers.

HANK

Apparently you have no idea what I wanted.

MARTHA

You were a dreamer, Hank. Apparently still are.

HANK

A dream beats the hell out of this crap being built all around us.

MARTHA

That's another issue.

HANK

No, it's the same issue.

CHEYENNE

What issue do you mean?

HANK

The natural order of things. Living in harmony with nature.

MARTHA

Is that the cue to beat a drum? Or do we start chanting?

CHEYENNE

I don't follow you, Dad.

HANK

We don't live in Nature, we live against it. We fight it. We try to "fix it," as if something needed fixing. And it always comes back to bite us in the ass. Progress is an illusion. History is circular.

MARTHA

But evolution is linear. This is the sense in which progress means something.

CHEYENNE

Explain that.

MARTHA

I'm waiting for a response from your father.

HANK

No comment.

MARTHA

We do evolve. We're not living in caves, and as much as you hate the way condos and cheap ugly housing projects sprout up everywhere, as I do, people do buy them and apparently find what happiness they can in them. We learn to adjust to our environment. With one important, and perhaps suicidal, exception. Shall I pause for effect? Anybody want to guess?

HANK

As if it's not obvious what you're going to say.

CHEYENNE

This is all over my head.

MARTHA

Want to tell her, Hank?

HANK

Nem, short for nemesis, spelled backwards.

CHEYENNE

Men?

HANK

Your mother thinks the world's problems are caused by men. I suppose that's capital-M Men.

MARTHA

I think this is perfectly obvious.

CHEYENNE

It's too simplistic.

HANK

Good girl. I want to read you something.

(He starts looking around.)

MARTHA

Think about it.

HANK

A former student sent me a poem. Quite remarkable really. I never knew he was a poet. It's about how much

men and women have changed.

MARTHA

(ignoring this)

Take away men, and you take away most of the violence in the world.

HANK

Here it is.

(He picks up a sheet of paper.)

MARTHA

The facts of history speak for themselves.

HANK

Catherine the Great? Margaret Thatcher?

MARTHA

Women trying to become men.

HANK

A man can't win, can he? Is this the Lesbian Agenda?

MARTHA

(to Cheyenne)

Didn't I say your father was a homophobe?

HANK

You're making the political pronouncements, not I. Listen to this:

(reading from the sheet of paper)

"I'm not fit company for women of intelligence if their necks are long, if their hips are slim, if their eyes darken

with forbidden possibilities

I'm not fit company for women of intelligence who reject an old biology, who prefer sensitive men who talk about feelings un-biologically

If a thought is unspoken speech then isn't a feeling unthought thought? And if a feeling is unthought, how possibly can it be talked about?

I'm not fit company for women of intelligence who mistake equality for similarity

Which brings me to you

In these dim lights I'm not sure what I see but go on instinct when I say the odds strike me as good, despite the pleasantries between us, I'm not fit company, I'm not fit company"

CHEYENNE

Let me see that.

HANK

What's happened to men and women in this country is very sad.

(He gives Cheyenne the poem. A pause.)

MARTHA

Let me try again. I'm suggesting that the male half of the species has outlived its usefulness because it has not evolved and responded to changes in the world environment. Once upon a time, warriors were necessary for survival. But for some time now, warriors have been the problem.

HANK

The world is more dangerous than ever. I think that means we need warriors, men, more so, not less.

MARTHA

Dangers unilaterally caused by men. You continue on this path and the species becomes extinct.

HANK

You know what would happen if all American men disappeared overnight? In less than a year, you'd be given the choice of worshipping in a mosque or getting your head chopped off. You think the Lesbian Coalition is going to save America?

MARTHA

(to Cheyenne)

I rest my case.

CHEYENNE

Did you two argue like this when you were married?

MARTHA

I've never been married.

CHEYENNE

When "she" was married?

MARTHA

I think she and Hank were both good liberals of their day. At least, until she discovered she no longer could trust him.

HANK

I wasn't going to start a race riot on your behalf! Jesus Christ. Go on, get the hell out of here. Both of you. I've had it with you.

CHEYENNE

What are you going to do?

MARTHA

(To Cheyenne)

When the door cracks open, rush through it before he changes his mind.

*(Martha starts for the door.
Cheyenne stays put.)*

CHEYENNE

You scare the hell out of me, Dad. Please come down the mountain with us.

MARTHA

Leave me out of it.

CHEYENNE

With me.

MARTHA

I thought we were having dinner.

CHEYENNE

I'm worried about him. Don't make me choose between you.

MARTHA
Are we having dinner or not?

CHEYENNE
Not now. Not tonight.

MARTHA
Very well.

(Takes the door knob.)

CHEYENNE
I'll call you!

(Martha turns back into the room.)

MARTHA
(to Cheyenne)
I don't trust him. I want you to leave with me.

CHEYENNE
I'm fine. I think it's better if you go now.

MARTHA
You're sure?

CHEYENNE
Yes.

MARTHA
Hank? You wouldn't hurt her to spite me, would you?

HANK

(ignoring this)

It was not a terrible thing to weep in my arms. It's not something to be ashamed of. Not even for a lesbian to be ashamed of. Vulnerability like that is precious and rare. We have to remember it. We have to honor it. "To be is to be vulnerable." Who wrote that?

MARTHA

(to Cheyenne)

Call me tonight.

CHEYENNE

It may be late.

MARTHA

I don't care how late it is.

CHEYENNE

Okay.

*(With a final glance at Hank,
Martha exists.)*

CHEYENNE

I was conceived from your ecstasy. I like how that sounds.

HANK

I've never seen anyone as naked, as emotionally raw, as fragile and vulnerable, as your mother weeping in my arms. I wanted her to know she was safe. I wanted her to know I would protect her.

CHEYENNE

I think that's what she wanted from you in the bar. She

wanted to feel like you were protecting her. She wanted to feel like she did in your arms in the blue tent and the house by the railroad tracks.

HANK

What could I have done?

CHEYENNE

It was unrealistic to confront him and make a scene. I understand that. But maybe there was something ...

HANK

I don't know what.

CHEYENNE

I don't know either. It was a complicated situation. But I think what she wanted was to feel protected.

HANK

I was protecting her, and myself too, by leaving. I thought I was.

CHEYENNE

In reality, you probably were. But she wanted to feel like your arms were around her.

(A pause.)

HANK

Can a woman fake it that well?

CHEYENNE

Dad, in my experience, a woman can fake it very well.

HANK

It's not right. A man can't fake it. He gets it up or he doesn't.

CHEYENNE

You know what they say: no one ever said life was fair.

HANK

It never occurred to me she was faking it.

CHEYENNE

For you. It was like a gift.

HANK

A gift?

CHEYENNE

She didn't want to take your pleasure from you, even as she, her authentic self, was beginning to move away from you.

HANK

You think she was faking it just for me?

CHEYENNE

Of course. There's no point in faking it for yourself.

HANK

But it felt the same to me.

CHEYENNE

In a way, it was the same.

HANK

No. We weren't bonded if she was faking it.

CHEYENNE

That's true.

HANK

Wait. I should have seen the difference. She stopped weeping in my arms. I thought it was because it was less surprising to her, less jolting. She became used to the intensity of it. But she stopped weeping in my arms. That was the end of it, and I missed it.

CHEYENNE

That makes sense to me, Dad.

HANK

So now I know. All that time, I was duped.

CHEYENNE

It doesn't lessen the other. She still wept in your arms. You'll always have the memory of that.

HANK

But it wasn't her.

CHEYENNE

Whoever she was, she was a woman weeping in your arms. She was someone. You didn't imagine it. She was flesh, she was real. You touched her, you smelled her. Whoever she was. Not many people get such an experience, I think. I never have.

HANK

You never wept in Tim's arms?

CHEYENNE

Once, a little sobbing. Even that frightened him to death. I usually feel disconnected after sex. I feel sad.

HANK

I've felt that. That's just about all I've felt since, you know ...

CHEYENNE

You're still one of the lucky ones. You have a true memory of something absolutely and profoundly human. I think if we were mentally healthy, it would be like this for everyone all the time.

HANK

You do?

CHEYENNE

I really do.

HANK

Where did we go wrong? Was sex always this screwed up?

(LIGHTS CHANGE to the past. But now Hank and Cheyenne are a PIONEER COUPLE, homesteading in the 19th century.)

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

I have supper for you, husband! Come in now before it gets cold!

(Hank enters and will mime washing his hands.)

HANK/PIONEER
Let me get cleaned up.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER
I used the last of our meat. I thought we should celebrate you getting the crop in.

HANK/PIONEER
It's the rain we need now more than celebrating. If it doesn't come soon, we're in for a long winter, I fear.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER
I've prayed for rain every day. I feel like the Good Lord has heard me.

HANK/PIONEER
Then we've nothing to worry about.

(He moves to Cheyenne.)

CHEYENNE/PIONEER
Have your seat, and I'll serve you.

HANK/PIONEER
Not yet. I want to hold you.

(They embrace.)

CHEYENNE/PIONEER
You must be tired.

HANK/PIONEER

Harder work than I thought when we were in Missouri dreaming about Oregon. They left the hard work part out of the brochures.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

You don't fool me, husband. You knew how hard it would be. You pretend to think otherwise for my sake.

HANK/PIONEER

You work as hard as I do. Sometimes I think harder.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

We do what has to be done. Your dreams don't come true without work.

HANK/PIONEER

We're on our way to ours. We made it safe to Oregon, we got our own place ...

(She tries to wiggle out of his arms.)

HANK/PIONEER

Now where do you think you're going?

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

Your food's getting cold.

HANK/PIONEER

I ate cold food before.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

What is going on? Are you fixing to tell me something?

HANK/PIONEER

I guess I am.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

Well, get it said so we can eat.

HANK/PIONEER

I was thinking there's still one thing missing from that Oregon Dream of ours. I was thinking it's time to start a family.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

Listen to you.

HANK/PIONEER

I see no reason to wait.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

It might help if we knew we had crops to harvest.

HANK/PIONEER

I trust your prayers on that.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

And if I'm taking care of a baby—

HANK/PIONEER

I figured all that out. My brother's coming west. Bringing the whole family.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

When?

HANK/PIONEER

Right away. I got a letter yesterday. Jed brought it by.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

And never told me?

HANK/PIONEER

I was waiting for the right moment. I figure my brother can build on the lot behind us, and two of his boys are old enough to farm now, we'll have a whole family to do the work around here. You can spend all day spoiling our baby.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

Please don't pinch me. I want to believe I'm not having a dream here.

HANK/PIONEER

It's time to start a family.

CHEYENNE/PIONEER

I love you so much ...

(They kiss. BLACKOUT.)

2/

(Hank and Cheyenne at the table as before.)

CHEYENNE
Dad, let's go down the mountain.

HANK
I suppose it's time.

CHEYENNE
Good.

HANK
I've got a bomb. Maybe I should blow this up.

CHEYENNE
Not a good idea.

HANK
I guess not.

*(They get up to go. Hank picks up
the vest/bomb.)*

CHEYENNE
Leave it here.

HANK
Right.

(They move to the door.)

CHEYENNE
You have good memories, Dad. No one can take them
away from you.

HANK

A man needs his memories.

CHEYENNE

I understand that. You've been one of the lucky ones.

HANK

You think so?

CHEYENNE

I'm so glad you shared this with me. I like being born in ecstasy.

HANK

I like it, too.

CHEYENNE

Yours is all the ecstasy I need.

*(Arm-in-arm, they leave. BLACKOUT.
The play is over.)*