

AVE MARIA

A Play

by Yosun Chang

AVE MARIA

<http://avemaria.nusoy.com>

Yosun Chang

Dramatis Personae

EVELYN	Of pristine innocence, an otherworldly beauty. Untouched by time or the slings and toils of life. Hair long enough to dangle off side of bed.
MARILYN	The heroine protagonist. The story evolves through her. Evelyn's twin.
HOBO 1	Cynical, belligerent.
HOBO 2	Young, gullible.
SHADY DRUG DEALER	Sinister. His goal is to dilute talent by way of drugs. (<i>Played by MAN.</i>)
OLD LADY	Looks like the evil witch from Disney's <i>Snow White</i> .
MAN	Lost eyes. Thrives on talent, but wishes to stop being a parasite.
STRIPPER 1	Grew up strong, accepts the world as it is. Lower east side accent.
STRIPPER 2	Ex-mafia daughter, lives life to repent for her sins.
STRIPPER 3	Chronic alcoholic, lives life with the shield of drunkenness.
STRIPPER 4	Eloquent college drop out feminist. Job at bar is just a stage for her.
BAR BOSS	Cares more about the E-bill than the strippers. Harmless, though.
STRIPPER 5 (minor)	Older woman. Victorian dame.
SMOKER STRIPPER (minor)	Affected French accent. Accompanied by heavy cigarette smoke.
BONDAGE STRIPPER (minor)	The stripper who specializes in BD, SM, and BDSM.
MR BLACKWOOD	An emaciated man dressed all in white.
MARILYN (SEX-STUNT-DOUBLE)	Looks like MARILYN under dim light.
FIREFIGHTER	Very sympathetic. Laconic. Not a man of action.
POLICE 1-4	Played by different characters, though they are all disturbingly alike. (Possibly played by Strippers 1-4.)
EMS INTERN 1	Seasoned EMS professional. Experienced, cynical. (<i>Played by Hobo 1.</i>)
EMS INTERN 2	INTERN 1's trainee. Young. Still idealistic enough to believe in medical morality. (<i>Played by Hobo 2.</i>)
TV NEWSWOMAN	Stereotypical neutral, yet concerned, voice of newscaster.
HOMELESS POET	A man of talent in rags. (<i>Played by Hobo 1.</i>)
MOTHER	She only wants what's "best" for her child. (<i>Played by Stripper 1</i>)
CHILD	Boy, age 12, 5 th grade. The look of innocence in his eyes.
ARTIST	A man of talent who cannot find a place in the world. (<i>Played by HOB0 1.</i>)
MANIAC	A sniveling neurotic out to steal the talent of the world. (<i>Played by MAN.</i>)
PUNISHER	One who looks imposing while wheeling a portable guillotine around.
VICTIM	One who looks too meek to exist in real life. (<i>Played by STRIPPER 3.</i>)
WOMAN	Talent-lust, money-lust, destruction-lust. Scandalous. (<i>Played by STRIPPER 2.</i>)
LITTLE GIRL	Too innocent and happy to survive in a cruel and sad world.
NURSE 1 & 2	Stereotypical bubbly, fake-ish, charity-hospital denizens.

To:

The Artist who died forgotten—

Having only one's own art

To take away into the afterlife

And, to this work:

May it be the rare pathos bereft of the hackneyed theme of unrequited love.

I hope that I have written it right.

MARILYN

I have words to tell, many words, but unlike the conventional storyteller, I won't paint for you a solid piece where only one interpretation is holistically viable. Nor will I give you all the elements you've come to expect in a play. Instead, I introduce the elements of a new type of play by telling you the events of my late life, as they happen, and I let you formulate your own meaning.

The play is poetry. Being a poetry play, the symbols are of the essence. Poetry drives the play, but so do the symbols—the scenery, the precise language, the characters. The events happen as if the *deus ex machina* has a weakness for symbols. The players each speak ponderous words. There is a cruel poetic justice bubbling in the air, and each and every single character has his or her own symbolic significance.

I am an emissary from the play and also a character in it. The other players are—my innocent, pristine idealism... my persistent self-doubt, which the real world helps goad... and my realization of the greater truth undermining the nature of reality and the era of my life—they are conveyed by an ensemble of artists, strippers, hoboes, vicarious mothers, and vicious businessmen—all whom I meet in my heroine's journey.

My ultimate stagnation to become the rootless wreck I started out as holds no epiphanies for me. I end up dying, a naïve child, without knowing why I have to die. But you, my dear audience, shall end up the wiser. The symbols shall guide you.

I play a reckless girl of age, though barely so. She lets the telltale symbolism of the world around her pass on by. She lives blindly from moment to moment—there is a desperateness in her that drives her on. It is the belief that her poetry is good and that she is fated to live a greater life. This is manifested, or perhaps epitomized, as references to such elusive abstractions as a “distinction divine,” a “gift from the gods.”

But, she is bound to the world, and despite the vibrancy of her soul, her escape from Hades is a slow and uncertain struggle. When you are too far down in The River Styx, its mud starts clinging at you, and the water becomes thick and grabbing and sinking like quicksand, and you find yourself submerging deep unto its depths as if a helpless piece of stone. You find yourself lost in the middle of Hades, a mere ghoul, forever and ever.

The lights fade slowly as MARILYN finishes the last paragraph, and her words fade away in the last sentence, with the word “ever” a mere whisper.

AVE MARIA

At Rise: The nude EVELYN stands alone in a black box, centerstage. Spotlight on her; darkness, all around. Possibly a multimedia screen projecting her facial expression, making it evident that she speaks the first line absolutely emotionlessly. (See Stage Notes.)

Scene 0: The Lost One I

EVELYN

My name is Evelyn, and I have been imprisoned in a black box for all eternity.

Instant Blackout.

~ ~ ~

ACT 1: Divine Fate

Scene 1: Exordium

Lights slowly fade on. But, have a spotlight focused on EVELYN in the dying twilight. EVELYN stands alone, eyes closed, statue-like unmoving, in a black box that seems to blend into the walls of the set. As the lights become bright enough to light the whole stage, MARILYN, sleeping at first, begins stirring in her grungy tenement bed. The other salient features of the dilapidated room include pieces of torn paper scattered across the floor, a wire-hatched trash can filled to the brim with crumpled pieces of paper, and a scratched window. The walls should look stained from years of neglect—except the half of the back set wall furthest away from MARILYN's bed should remain pristinely blank (for the multimedia projector screen).

MARILYN wakes up, sits on the side of her bed, feet on floor, on top of scraps of paper.

MARILYN

(In a haunted tone.) Last night, I had a dream...

(Pauses to look off into the audience, eyes glazed, as if she's not totally present. After a few seconds, a noticeable pause, her eyes begin focusing until she makes hauntingly direct eye contact with a front-row audience member.)

I... I was at a poetry reading.

Multimedia projector on, shows MARILYN dressed formally, standing on a stage bare except for a solo microphone. The projected MARILYN looks off into the darkness; projector is hooked onto a live camera that shows a sweeping view of the audience.

MARILYN

(Bewildered voice.) I... I was about to give a reading. Of poems—my *own*... To utter the words of existence, of life, divine. To deliver my soul to... An audience of hundreds, thousands... An audience of legion—uncountable... *the world*.

Projector shows MARILYN on poetry stage again, syncs projected image with her words:

(Dream-like tone.) My hands were trembling, and I didn't believe it was real. But, it *felt* real. As real as life... No, *more* real than... than mere life. I gazed off into the audience, the millions of people waiting to hear my words. I wanted, at that moment—more than anything in the world—to disappear. Not to die, but to vanish—to de-materialize, melt into thin air, as if I were never there. As if I'd never been born, never existed. Never was.

But, there was something too tantalizing in the air. And, soon I found myself accepting my existence, my presence on the fateful stage. I found myself smiling—genuinely happy.

Projector shows a silent film of the audience clapping, the masses standing up to cheer for her. Projector shows MARILYN on poetry stage again, syncs projected image with her words:

I waved at the audience, as the millions applauded. I looked forward to the reading to come at the end of their clapping.

I looked down at the piece I held in my hands. I opened my mouth.

I was about to read the first word. I was on the fine twilight between word and silence... when my throat started tightening.

Projector shows projected MARILYN choking.

It felt as if the air was being sucked out of me... No, it was *more* than that. I felt as if... as if my *essence* were being torn out of me, that there were bleeding ligaments clutching onto my core, even as it was being pulled out by a force greater than life, greater than fate.

I couldn't breathe. I couldn't draw forth that fateful breath required to utter that first word. I couldn't... couldn't do anything but choke. I looked to the audience for help.

Projector shows the masses of audience sitting still, unmoving, apathetic. Projector shows MARILYN choking, then falling.

I fell to the floor, its bare wooden panes as frozen as the coldest winter ice. I looked into the darkness... I looked... to the audience for help.

Projector shows the masses still unmoving. Shows projected MARILYN suffering, dying on poetry stage.

I felt myself slowly fading away. I died.

Projector shows the masses getting up to leave with no apparent alarm. As if nothing's happened. Shows an unmoving projected MARILYN on poetry stage.

They left as if nothing's happened. My dead body was alone on-stage... and beyond, there was just this darkness, neverending. I had these weird flashbacks of my life, and then I saw this bright, pure, white light—it was all too cliché, the stereotypical death.

I felt myself going towards the light, about to disappear forever. But, there was this screaming agony inside of my head—there was a part of me that wasn't ready to die.

The screaming got to a point where I thought my head would blow up... and then I woke up. I kept my eyes closed—a part of me didn't want to come back.

I knew that the first thing I'd see when I wake up would be *this*. (*Waves her hand, gesturing deprecatingly to the room.*) My room, my home... but not much of one.

But, even as I was dying, there was a part of me that wanted—more than anything in the world—to live. I... I wanted to exist, to be. I wanted...

Long silence. Then, stage lights dim down a few shades. A spotlight focuses on MARILYN's feet, and especially, the scraps of paper scattered across the floor next to her bed. MARILYN bends down to pick up a particular piece. Spotlights on MARILYN and EVELYN (eyes-closed), as they solemnly read:

MARILYN

EVELYN

“A WORD is dead
When it is said,
Some say.
I say it just
Begins to live
That day.” (*Credit: Emily Dickinson.*)

Of sonorous echoes, through and through.
Here, there, everywhere. Now,
The words: the depths of their kismet
Rings true unto the moment.
(*Crosses out the line. Takes the pen worn
around her neck, as if a pendant and rewrites.*)
Pulled forth from the void,
Forced into life:
(*Crosses out line. Rewrites.*)
Of uncaring grunge poverty—
The acid rain that slices its own
Marks upon the masterpiece statue.
Of life lived in vain—

Rings true unto the said word,
Verbalized unto existence,

The world of reality:

MARILYN (cont'd)

The lost blossom that clings

To scattered dirt atop the dull grey
Roof of a tenement tower;

But growing unto the precipice,
The edge, the slab-of-cement-balcony;
Unto its growth, too stilted,
It falls.

Into the colorless world,
Its petals, vibrant,

A brand new shade in
The spring of existence.

And then the words form,
To carry it aloft, a breeze,

It flies, higher and higher,
Unto the shining sun.

The words carry it aloft,
A flower in the sky,
High, above,
For all to see.
(Crosses out a giant block of text.)

The secret battle of WORDS:
The words alone slew and slew
Until naught remained of drudgery in the world.
They knew that they could,
They knew that they would,
They knew, they knew...
Of Divine Fate, of mine eine—(Crosses out the
line in wide sweeping motion. Then, in a rush,
crumples the paper. Slight shriek, uncrumples
paper. Tears it to pieces.)

*MARILYN bursts into tears, as she throws the
piece into the overfilled garbage can. The piece
bounces out. She shrieks, then takes the whole
trash can out to the window. She dumps the
contents out. When it's emptied, she takes it
back to where it was, then throws the piece in.*

(She screams.)

EVELYN (cont'd)

With tenacity insurmountable

Flowering towards the sunlight

Of colors exotic,
A brand new shade in
The spring of existence.

A zephyr, sweet, uplifting.

Unto the shining sun;
It is no Icarus; it ascends.

(Cringes, shrinks back in horror.)

*EVELYN cries, while standing still. The
multimedia projector shows a close-up of her
face, showing a single drop of tear falling from
the edges of her closed eyes.*

(Her eyes pop open. She screams.)

Lights fade out.

Scene 2: About to Enter the Bar

Dilapidated alleyway, the pits of the inner city. Rotten corpuscles of food and garbage dripping here and there, having missed the unfaithful garbage cans lining one wall. Stench of urine in the air. The runned-down atmosphere of the alley should convey a sense of rampant danger. People have been killed down this end.

EVELYN's box looks vaguely like an out-of-place black-graffiti-painted telephone box mis-located in the center of the set's back wall. (This relative location to the front of the stage is the same as that for the other half of the rotating set, the bar in the next few scenes.)

The side-entrance to the Strip Bar is on the other end of the stage from which Marilyn enters. There is an old-fashioned vintage wooden sign jutting out of the wall on top of the door. The hand-carved letters read, "The Styx." Smaller letters meticulously painted below the name of the bar reads, "137 Stygian Avenue." But, the sign is old and stained by time, the carving faded and un-tended-to. Once, perhaps, the strip bar might have been a reputable establishment; the sign is a relic from the olden days.

MARILYN enters the alley, climbing down towards one side of the stage from a narrow wire-frame staircase—the kind used for both stair-way and emergency-exit-way in urban apartments.

MARILYN

(mutters, barely audible, as she walks slowly across the alley stage)

But, the tragedy is that I am of the world...

On the other side of the stage, two hobos suddenly pop out from Oscar-metal trash cans.

HOBO 1

If thou art piss and thy piss art thou, then
The fact that thy piss stinketh my box
Means thou art trespassing my terri'try.

The pride of my tattered rags I must keep,
Thus, thy wanton pissful soul, I must reap.

HOBO 2

Never, that ye shall take mine, for—

A SHADY DRUG DEALER suddenly jumps out from a giant trash bin.

SHADY DRUG DEALER

Ah, two hobos of fair talent, now,
What say ye spend thy beggings on my wares?

Without waiting for a response, SHADY DRUG DEALER opens up the front side of his trench coat, both flaps of which are filled with stapled zip-loc bags of multi-colored powders, pills, or leafy-looking stuff.

HOBO 1

Hero, MJ, cheap coke, meth, ex, ... , puuureee stardust...

HOBO 2

(in the drooling-with-lust-for-stardust tone)
Ahhhhh *(beat)*

HOBO 1

We take all—but most especially the purreee...
Oh, let hero show us what dreams may come!

HOBO 2

We take all—but most especially the purreee...
Oh, let hero show us what dreams may come!

The two hobos of fair talent, now, fall and sink back into Oscar-metal trash cans, disappearing from the scene.

MARILYN has been walking from one end of the stage to the other. The hobos disappear before she gets to the other end. She is oblivious to the odd bantering.

As she nears the vintage wooden sign hanging above the wall of the bar, "The Styx," MARILYN looks up into the night sky, or what little of it can be seen in the narrow wedge of the alley.

A strong wind blows from stage right, sending MARILYN's hair astray. Pieces of torn paper flutter down, as if lost snowflakes in the autumn evening. For a moment, the scene looks vintage classy—the pieces of torn poetry and the wooden sign stand out against the dilapidated alley.

MARILYN brushes the pieces of paper off her hair and nose with shocking apathy. She opens the door to the

bar. Loud music and multi-colored lights stream out from the other side of the stage set. (See Stage Notes.)

An OLD LADY suddenly pops out from stage right. She momentarily stops MARILYN from entering. MARILYN lets the bar door close, and the scene is again the darkness of the night.

OLD LADY

A rose for ye spirit, my young flounder.
(*She hands MARILYN a wilted rose.*)

EVELYN

(*Recites with eyes closed.*)
“How many Flowers fail in the Wood—
Or perish from the Hill—
Without the privilege to know
That they are Beautiful.” (*Credit: Emily Dickinson.*)

OLD LADY disappears as suddenly as she'd appeared. Simultaneously, MARILYN throws the rose away, as if she hadn't heard EVELYN.

MARILYN opens the door to the bar, enters, then lets the door close behind her.

Lights fade.

Scene 3: Strip Bar I

Inhabitants of strip bar frozen in a tableau. A smoke-screen blurs the scene; as the smoke-screen rises and the scene clears, the people burst into their usual motion, i.e., men wave money at strippers, strippers dance around stereotypical poles, the multi-colored lights flash, etc. (See Stage Notes for details!)

MARILYN looks distinctly different from everyone else—she looks as if the only person in the bar who's alive. This effect can be induced by having everyone else look less vibrant. Perhaps Marilyn is the only person with red cheeks, color on her face. To further dramatize this, the other strippers might be wearing grey-lipstick and pallid-vampire foundation. (They all wear similar gaudy showy stripper outfits, of course.)

MARILYN dances around a pole. Dejected-looking MAN, in an expensive business suit stands in front of her. Unlike the others, he's not mindlessly raving or waving dollar bills in his hand. MAN merely looks at her, with a lost look in his eyes:

MAN:

I kill people.

MARILYN:

Excuse me?

MAN:

I kill people. It's what I do.

MARILYN:

Uh... *(continues dancing)* We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, occupation—

MAN:

It's not that. No, no you have me wrong. *(Bitter laugh.)*

I don't actually kill people. Not literally, at least. No... *(Trails off with a bitter gaze.)*

Everything I do is perfectly legal—albeit warped, in a sense. Yes, yes... that'd have to be the case. You can make more money making the illegal look legal.

But, I don't like what I do. I hate it. God, oh how I hate it.

MARILYN:

Why? Don't you make enough money?

MAN:

(Long sigh.) It's not money. *(Pauses, reconsiders.)*

Well, it *is* about money. It's just that I don't care about it—I don't care about the money anymore. I used to care. I guess that's why I chose to do this. That's why I killed...

My wife tells me that I shouldn't see my actions as murders...

MARILYN:

Wife? *(Rather surprised, since men do not come to the bar talking about their wives.)*

Don't let your wife weigh you down—she's not here, is she? *(Looks around, slightly alarmed.)*

Men—men don't come here with their wives on their mind. They come to enjoy the *pleasures* of life, to see and experience all that their wives can't *offer* them. *(Makes provocative moves.)*

MAN:

(Ignores her provocative moves; continues absent-mindedly.) Yes, she tells me that if it weren't for me, others would have done it. It's... it's like a jungle. Survival of the fittest. I had to do it, or else... or else I wouldn't have succeeded.

I-I hunted talent. I scoured the world for flashes of intelligence, of brilliant ideas—potential threats. My job was to destroy the potential competitors before they even gained sense of their own potentials. To buy a budding company before it grows to rival mine. To end it before it started. To kill a living messiah before it's ever been born.

I-I had to kill them to succeed. B-but, what have I done?

MARILYN:

You've succeeded doing what you had to do. You're now rich and powerful, and they aren't.
(Casually sways her neck about the bar, as if making a reference to her surrounding. Casually and without much thought, despite the ironic profundity of her words:)
We do what we do, and... we are *wont* to do what we do.

MAN:

But, how did I become like this? H-how could I h-have...

Each time that I destroy a potential competitor, I feel as if I'm really killing myself...

I was once the person whom I've killed. I-I mean... It's—I don't know why. It must be just some inherent bout of arrogance. I feel as if I could have been the bright-eyed youth with potential, about to embark on a great enterprise. To start the first honest corporation, to be rich because I'm good at what I do—not because I know whom to destroy.

I was once like that. But, I figured out that such innocence would never survive in the world. It's a dog-eat-dog-world. And, I had to kill. I had to kill to eat—there were other dogs, bigger dogs doing the same thing, and I had to fight to keep my own place.

There was no way. No possible way... *(Moans, then covers face in hands. Cries.)*

The whole bar is suddenly silent. There is only the sound of a man crying, whimpering. Everyone is frozen in suspended animation—the other girls, the bidders waving money in the air, raving for MARILYN to come over to dance for them. The moment is literally at a standstill.

Lights in bar are already bar-light-dim, but dim a bit lower. Spotlight on MARILYN and MAN.

MARILYN:

Why are you here?

MAN:

(Looks directly at her.)

I-I am looking for tal... *(Trails off with the look of uncertainty in his eyes.)*

I don't know. *(He gets up and leaves.)*

After MAN exits, MARILYN walks over to the next highest bidder. A man in a distinctly white suit. As she bends down, he offers her a wad of cash, and a whisper in the ear. She nods and laughs coyly, but with a fakeness befitting a showgirl. She commences dancing around the pole, while simultaneously the music suddenly comes back on, at exactly the same place it stopped. Everyone's in motion, again.

Lights fade out.

Scene 4: Marilyn “Conjures” Evelyn

Lights fade on in the bar-scene. It’s after closing time, and most customers have left. The strippers go to little cubby-holes hidden beneath a bar-counter to take out their clothes. Ignoring the few remaining bar customers, all hopelessly drunk and unable to move, the strippers change out of their “outfits,” back to their regular clothes. Some are putting on a greayer shade of foundation—making even more pallid their already unnaturally ghastly complexion. MARILYN stands out in the middle of a bunch of strippers; her rosy cheeks make her look as if she is the only person alive. She appears to stare off into space. The strippers are all ignoring each other, either staring off into thoughtless space or mindlessly putting on bad ghastly makeover.

EVELYN still stands in her black box, as described in the previous bar scene. Her eyes are still closed.

MARILYN suddenly breaks out of her daze. She looks around her at her fellow stripper sisters. She looks bewildered, as if she’d woken up from some dream and can’t figure out why she’s here.

MAN

(Not present on-stage. Echoes from LEFT.)

But, how did I become like this?

MARILYN

(In an absent-minded voice.)

But, how did I become like this?

MARILYN looks around at the others, again with a look of bewildered surprise. The strippers continue doing what they were before with no break. No one seems to have heard her.

MARILYN

What if someone like me *wasn’t* someone like me? What if my life were different...

The lights suddenly go out. Emergency lights turn on. The girls do not react. BAR BOSS comes out from a door behind the bar counter marked “BOSS.”

BAR BOSS

Gotta save on the E-bill. Metro City G&E fees ain’t gettin’ any lower, an’ there’s only gonna be more o’yous workin’ here—which is like payin’ another hiked up Basin City sham bill. From now on, lights off quarter of an’ hour af’er closing—the lights are fer the customers, an’ usually the ones that matter are gone by now. The rest o’y’all. Well, y’all don’t matter.

MARILYN gets up to walk away from the gathered strippers. No one appears to notice her walking away. The other strippers continue doing what they were before, unperturbed by BAR BOSS's comment. Some drunken customers might be loudly snoring by now. A few girls have started smoking.

MARILYN

What if I didn't work for that miserly old fool? What if I had the perfect boss?

No one hears her.

BAR BOSS

An' y'all newbies, listen' up, 'cos I gotta tell you the shitload behind the long contract y'all gotta sign. *(He hands out a few piles of stapled paper filled with copious lines of text.)* Naw don both'r to read it, 'cos it ain't gonna do you no good. You jus' gotta know that it's six dolla's per hour, four fifty af'er union fees an' taxes. *(No reaction from the girls. He pretends as if there is the usual groaning and complaining associate with the announcing of such impossibly low wages.)*

Hey, I gotta be legit, a'ite. Now, this'd give y'all an incenti'tive t'show yer talent. Imma kinda like a records company, and y'all my artists. I ain't payin' you much, but hey, Imma givin' you the chance to broadcast yer'self. Publicity, aite. Gold shit. Imma like the gallery fer you to show yer art to the world, aite? That good'ol good'ol natural beauty o'yers. An' if the world likes yer stuff, ye'get a buyer-bonus fer da'night. *(Raises bushy eyebrows suggestively)*

Talent, aite? *(He slaps a smoking girl's ass, as he exits. She apathetically blows a puff of smoke in his face. He doesn't react to it, as he lets the door marked "BOSS" slam shut behind him.)*

MARILYN

(Monologue, aside.) What if I never signed that blasted contract? Would I still be here? Where else would I be? What would I be doing?

(She ambles towards EVELYN's box as she ponders the possibilities. In this scene, EVELYN's box serves as a mirror. As she makes eye contact with EVELYN, EVELYN's eyes suddenly pop open, so that the box shows a "real" reflection.)

Would I be showcasing *this* as art? *(She gives a bitter laugh, as she gestures at her body, while looking at herself in the "mirror," i.e., EVELYN's box.)*

MARILYN

Would I be selling my body for...

MARILYN looks at the bunch of strippers gathered together on one side of the stage, the side she'd walked

away from. Some of them have pulled off their long arm-length Cinderella-ball-gloves. Ugly syringe marks brand the niche in the left arm of several girls—the stigma of the heroin addict:

STRIPPER 1

Hero's gonna make mah night. (*Injects herself.*)

STRIPPER 2

This is the meaning of life. (Injects herself.)

MARILYN

Ephemeral pleasures... (*She looks at her "reflection," i.e., Evelyn.*)
But, what *else* is there to life? We live and then we die, we go from—

STRIPPER 3

Hero to hero. (*Injects herself.*)

STRIPPER 4

Mortal coil, no longer. (*Injects herself.*)

MARILYN

What if I could live as myself—my true self?

Lights suddenly go out in the bar. MARILYN stands in the middle of the stage. A faint eerie surreal spotlight on EVELYN; a solid spotlight on MARILYN. Darkness, all around.

MARILYN

Who am I? (*Trails off...*) I was born an orphan...

To no home, to no one... The lone child of the world...

A pale ghastly spotlight suddenly on the strippers.

STRIPPER 2

Well I was born to a broken crate,
All splintered up, not much like a box.

STRIPPER 3

And I, to a broken bottle—of drink neverending.

MARILYN

I thought I was doing a monologue.

STRIPPER 2

So you are.

Light on strippers suddenly blackouts.

STRIPPER 4

(Voice from the darkness.) We listen, and we are always here—we just don't always appear so.

MARILYN

Well, I was born an orphan.

STRIPPER 4

And, I was born out of thin air—foooP!

MARILYN

(Blatantly ignores voice by speaking away from it, towards the front of the stage—the audience.)
My mother died before I was born—her heart stopped, a prenatal complication, a second later, and I would have gone with her. My father, no one knows.

MARILYN pauses for a moment, uncertain, as if waiting for a stripper to interrupt her. It appears that she is alone, truly alone. MARILYN closes her eyes. She begins her tale in darkness:

MARILYN

The day I was born...

The Sisters at the orphanage envisioned a halo around my head. They saw a holiness I, myself, can't see. A divine birth, they called it. A miraculous conception. A miracle delivered. It was a miracle that I survived. A miracle that I continued doing so---a miracle that I continued surviving.

You see, my mother was a chronic alcoholic, and among other things, she held the same profession as my own. She was a stripper and a prostitute. According to the doctors, she contracted HIV prior to her death. But, my blood test remained negative, always. It was as if the disease had died with her, and... as if I was born to a new life, freed of her sins.

Sister Anne raised me. She was the librarian—or “The Guardian of the Scriptures,” as she preferred to be known. She read to me. She showed me the beauty and subtlety of language, and she asked me to echo back to her what I had heard. The first words I spoke was a complete line from scripture:

MARILYN

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

EVELYN

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

MARILYN

John 3:16. *(Long contemplating pause.)*

She gave me my first pen when I was three. And, I wrote. And wrote, and wrote.

It was Sister Fatima who first announced my talent to the world—the only world I knew at the age of three. She planned my first poetry recital. It was to an audience of orphans.

I painted the world through words. I invented new colors, new sensations. I made music out of mere

syllables. Through words, I wove a tapestry of existence... I finished my poems. They clapped, politely. But, I was left with an emptiness. That they didn't hear, didn't care. That they weren't there. That it was to a dark oblivion that I spoke to. A nothingness bereft of consciousness...

I would never get to recite my words again. Was it the Fate's cruel response to the arrogance and incisive judgment of my nine-year-old mind?

The next day, when the Sisters took us to the park... I wandered astray of the pack. I was kidnapped.

EVELYN

An orphan girl to disappear.
The shepherd cannot find his sheep.

MARILYN

Who would notice? I wasn't sure of my disappearance myself, either.

One moment I was in the park. The next, I was suffocating in darkness. The back trunk of some forlorn trunk. I, along with, the other girls caught wandering amock—ripped from our lives, forced into another kind.

For four years, I worked in a sweat shop. I was surrounded by the very mindlessness that I first saw in that poetry reading, so long ago. For four years...

EVELYN

The sheep worked for the fox.
It did its work for it.
The fox grew nigh on fat.

MARILYN

And then came the eve of my thirteen birthday. I knew from the disappearance of my older sweat shop sisters that I was to be sent off the next day. One needs not the rumors for a reason; there is only one endeavor of more monetary efficiency than the machinery that exploits the unpaid sweatshop workchild. The cruel labor of our lives had made us older than we were—coarser, more cynical, more eligible... I was to be sent off to become a prostitute. A girl pretending to be a woman.

I ran away, that faithful night.

EVELYN

The sheep did dream.
And it dreamt of leaving the fox.
To escape to the green pastures of its dreams.
The orphan girl dreams, too.

MARILYN

Perhaps I was the first to do so. There were no obstacles in my way. No barbed wire fences. No security. No armed guards to shoot me down, me, the expendable runaway sweatshop workchild. Perhaps I was the only girl who still knew that there existed a freedom outside the sweatshop walls.

MARILYN looks out into the depths of the audience,

with an extremely forlorn look. EVELYN starts crying, tears falling from closed eyelids. Projector shows this.

MARILYN

I stepped out into the streets of an urban city.

It was cold. Mercilessly so. And, I found myself starving. I fainted in the dark depths of an alley.

I woke up to a light. A bright light through the crack of a door. There was a large wooden sign above me.

I felt a welcoming wave of euphoria when I first saw it—it was the first word I had read in four years. In the sweatshop, we lived as mere animals. Illiterate, the lot of us. Some of us unable to speak. Most of us, unthinking, always, by sheer exhaustion incapable of thought. Doomed to stay ignorant, thus easily manipulated. Expendable, each of us not important, but needed in the same way that a fraction of a cog in the machine makes it run.

The fateful words I read after my long sojourn from WORDS were: (*Mouth agape in wonder.*)

BAR BOSS

(*Voice from shadows off stage.*) “The Styx.” Girl, you lookin’ at the sign of “The Styx.” You lookin’ on workin’ here?

MARILYN

The hunger gnawed at me, as the dimmest traces of my memories of a life long before stirred in me the concept undermining the modern world. The voice in my head told me that in the real world there was something called money. Money bought things. Money bought food. I needed food. Very badly. Very, very, badly...

EVELYN

On top of the world, I looked down...
I saw naught but an abyss everlasting.

MARILYN

Fate would have my life exactly the way it is. Free choice only to decide *how* I approach my destined career, but not to deny it.

I had no ID. I looked of age. The Boss had a fake one drawn up for me.

EVELYN

The date was wrong.
The time was wrong.
My whole life went by:
My youth stolen
By creed of a piece of paper.

MARILYN

They asked me for my name, and I answered “Marilyn.” But, the fake ID maker was part deaf, and he wrote down “Maria.” They made up my surname and they sped up the years of my life. In the flash of a moment, I became known as “Maria Haley, Age 18.”

MARILYN turns to the side towards where the strippers (still hidden in the dark), away from the audience.

MARILYN

Maria Haley worked with the other ghouls at The Styx, but try as she did, she couldn't become a ghoul. She learned the ways of the ghouls, and she became hungry no longer. She learned how to haunt, and she made a lot of money. She let the ghouls induct her into their coven, and she became a heroin addict.

More and more, she craved. More and more, she wanted. More and more, she lusted...

MARILYN pauses and freezes.

EVELYN

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all convictions, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.”
(Credit: W. B. Yeats, “The Second Coming”)

MARILYN turns back to the audience, regains motion.

MARILYN

And that was how it went, the story of my life.

*Lights turn on suddenly to signal the thought-change.
The bar-scene is again illuminated.*

MARILYN

No... I-I cannot imagine any other life. I cannot imagine myself in... (She looks at her “reflection,” scrutinizes it. Ponders for a moment. Beat.)

But... What if I had a twin? Someone like me, and yet *unlike* me. Someone whom was born to be me or... a version of me. Yes, a different version of me... One who lived a totally different life.

A nice life. She grew up in a cottage in the hills. She woke up everyday to the sunrise peering through the mountainside surrounding her, protecting her from... from the outside world. She grew up running carefree through wild country grass—green and tall and wavy in the wind. She picked daisies in the sun... And she wove crowns made of wildflowers in bloom. She was a princess of her world.

STRIPPER 1

There ain't such things as princesses anymore.

MARILYN spins from the mirror to look at strippers.

STRIPPER 4

I doubt there are stretches of idyllic storybook lands like that still in existence.

STRIPPER 1

Yeah, as I was sayin', the princesses an' all 'em royal'ers got staked by the people. First there was that socialism or commy sham. And then everyone figured out the joke was on them, so it all got replaced by this hoax called democracy. An' the wildlands, girl? You know that the metro you live in now's built on toppa one. They all gone, girl. Replaced by grungy hopeless places jus' like this.

MARILYN

(Startled voice.) So you heard me.

STRIPPER 1

Yeah, sista, we heard'ja. All of us did. We just don' always respond to what we see and hear.

STRIPPER 2

Perhaps it's better that way.

STRIPPER 1

Yeah girl, it's better to just phase out, let life go. You know the Energizer Bunny? Well, life is kinda like that. It doesn't keep goin' and goin' and goin'. It just goes for a while, and then it dies. That's life.

SMOKER STRIPPER

Oui, c'est la vie. *(Blows a puff of smoke.)*

STRIPPER 4

The point is that a perfect life like that can't exist in real life.

BONDAGE STRIPPER

(With Maniac-like passion) It's all about the torture, the struggle, the pain and, oh, the sweet, sweet paaaaaiinn. *(Beat. Apathetic voice.)* I'm leaving for my 2 AM—ahem—bonus-buyer.

STRIPPER 5

(With faint mockery.) Farewell my dearest Mistress Ivanna the Terrible.

SMOKER STRIPPER

(In an affected French accent.) A mon plus cher masochiste: bon appétit et adieu!
(Blows a very heavy puff of smoke and after it clears, it appears that all but the four heroin-addict strippers and herself remain.)

STRIPPER 1

Here girl, I'd let you jive on a deuce of my goods. *(Holds out to MARILYN a small baggy.)*

MARILYN takes a few steps lessening the stage-gap between the other strippers and herself. Stops in midstep. She looks back at her "reflection." Wavers between motion and stillness.

MARILYN

I...

STRIPPER 1

C'mon girl. It's black tar hero—straight from TJ. You know you want some.

MARILYN

(In a determined voice.) I... I believe she exists.

STRIPPER 1

Whatja talkin' bout now?

STRIPPER 4

Whom?

MARILYN

(Uncertain at first, but certainty develops as she confabulates.) My twin. My identical twin. The... the version of me that lived a different life. I believe it's possible. I believe it's possible to live the perfect life. A life away from all this. A life where a girl doesn't have to sell her body for money. A life where a girl doesn't have to put up with a nasty job like this, where she should be able to do what she truly wants to do. A life where she could be free to be whom she is, whom she was born to be, was meant to be—without having to worry about 'the world and all that.' The perfect existence—where she could be her true self, so that she could truly live—

STRIPPER 4

A perfect life like that can't exist in the real world. Think about it.

STRIPPER 1

Money buys ya'everything. Can't live without hero. Can't live without money. She'd hafta get a nasty job or she won't get da moolah. She ain't getting' her hero otherwise.
(Beat.) Y'know what? *If* she were free to do whatever she wanted *(mocking voice)* "what she truly wanted to do" she'd... She'd hafta live in a black box or somethin.' It'd be crazy.

MARILYN

(Whisper or in a wondering voice:)

A black box...

Yes. That's it. She'd have to live in a black box. My twin—Eve Lynn, that's her name—lives in a black box!

STRIPPER 2

All alone in a black box?

STRIPPER 4

Beyond a cloister and mere nunnery...

MARILYN

Yes... *(beat)*

The Madonna apart from others. I'm... *(beat)*

(Slightly uncertain voice.)

I'm going to find her.

SMOKER STRIPPER

Into the rabbit hole, we go...

SMOKER STRIPPER blows a huge puff of smoke. All strippers disappear when the smoke clears. MARILYN, who stands a distance away from the smoke-cloud, remains all alone on stage.

MARILYN turns to directly face the audience. EVELYN pantomimes, as if a mime stuck in a box.

MARILYN

(Quietly, but in a more determined voice.) I'm going to find her.

Lights fade out.

Scene 5: The Pythia at Delphi

Upstairs corridor of a luxury hotel—with an indoor imitation of a royal garden. Bright, vibrant flowers spark green fronds. Rose bushes near the room doors.

EVELYN's box stands in the middle of this garden. She appears as if a Renaissance statue, and there are several engravings on marbled pillars around her. One of them reveals the scene with the telltale words, "The Pythia at Delphi."

In the midst of this garden of youthful beauty, there stands an OLD LADY in suspended animation. She's partially hidden behind EVELYN's box, but, quite suddenly, she jumps out of the garden and onto the carpeted corridor floor.

The OLD LADY walks conspicuously across the stage. She holds a wilted rose in her hands.

The OLD LADY places (tapes/binds) the wilted rose to a long, conspicuously untrimmed outgrowth of a rose bush outside Hotel Room 2006. She walks across the stage; exits.

MARILYN enters.

MARILYN

A job of *this* life. *(Approaches door of Hotel Room 2006.)*

Wretched.

A wilted rose... *(Cups the wilted rose in her hand.)*

Lost in a Garden of Beauty. *(Speaks to the rose:)*

Multimedia projector shows the image of a pale rose, standing still. And then, quite abruptly, its time-spaced wilting:

MARILYN

“How many flowers die in the Wood—
Or perish from the Hill—
Without the privilege to know
That they are Beautiful.” (Credit: Emily Dickinson.)

The rose falls apart to pieces in her hand. As its petals fall to the floor, the multimedia projector shows a close-up of the faded rose’s petals falling. Blackout.

Scene 6: Death and An Epiphany

The scene is, once again, a bedroom—with mainly a bed and TV. However, its profligate opulence contrasts with Marilyn’s dilapidated tenement room. This is, after all, a five-star hotel—a palace away from home. The window drapes are open, and from the bright side of the tinted windows, one sees only the black oblivion of the night. Ambient bright light warms up the scene.

EVELYN’s box is crystal-clear in this scene, no veil; in fact, since Marilyn, the actress, does not appear in this scene, Marilyn may replace Evelyn in the box. Spotlight on EVELYN throughout scene.

MR. BLACKWOOD, a man dressed all in white, dims down the light (enough so that the actor’s features become indistinguishable from that of a stunt-twin’s). He takes off his dark-glasses. He stands perfectly still, a few feet away from the door. He waits.

The scene is silent and still for a few moments—as if time has stopped and might not start again—until... The sound of a key turning, a doorknob unwinding.

Marilyn’s SLUT-STUNT-DOUBLE enters. She wears a body-covering discreet trench coat.

MR. BLACKWOOD stands gaping at her.

Multimedia projector turns on suddenly. It shows a pre-recorded close-up of Mr. Blackwood’s face, mouthing the words, “Oh Lord, help me... I am a monster”—in-sync with Evelyn’s voicing of those words. MR. BLACKWOOD, on-stage, remains immovably still—mouth agape, but unmoving.

EVELYN

Oh Lord, help me... I am a monster.

MR. BLACKWOOD breaks out of trance. He walks over to Marilyn's SLUT-STUNT-DOUBLE, escorts her into the room.

MR. BLACKWOOD

Good evening, my dear. You look lovely.

They stop awkwardly in front of the massive bed taking up most of the area of the room. (The set should make it obvious that although this is a 5-star luxury hotel, this man can only afford its cheapest room: the walls and décor of it look of palace-like grandiosity, but it's just all in a very confining space.)

Spotlight on EVELYN brightens.

EVELYN

Marilyn's SLUT-STUNT-DOUBLE, with a bored expression, throws off her trench coat with no sign of triumph or grandeur, revealing a professional slut outfit. Perhaps silken lingerie, with an array of satin sashes... (so that even after Mr. Blackwood ravages her by tearing off her sashes, the play might still pass for PG-13)

So innocently, the maiden flower
Blooms, opens up her spring beauty to the
World, the fatal, fatal world... the ugly.

As EVELYN continues her poem, MR. BLACKWOOD ravages Marilyn's SLUT-STUNT-DOUBLE: he tears off all the sashes, acting like a male dog responding to a bitch in heat. Mindlessly, brutally, but mundanely, he runs his hands all over her...

A miasma of pollen, too rampant
Poison, the silent killer elixir
Too much, more than fate would allow the bud.

MR. BLACKWOOD drags her to bed. Lights dim to darkness. If possible, show silhouette of bodies writhing to some ugly one-sided-pleasure sex.

Over-pollination, the flower wilts:
She was never meant to take on all that.

MR. BLACKWOOD moans and grunts.

Marilyn's SLUT-STUNT-DOUBLE is silent. Her long hair dangles off her head, tilted off the side of the bed. Her eyes look up to the world, upside down. There is a strangely serene expression on her face. A faint spotlight on her head—bright enough to highlight her position, but faint enough so that her features are blurred.

Multimedia projector shows a pre-shot close-up of Marilyn's head tilted off the side of the bed (in Marilyn's SLUT-STUNT-DOUBLE's current position). Her expression is serene or nonchalant, as EVELYN attempts to describe the thing the scene lacks:

EVELYN

Love, monogamous: the one, true passion of my existence.
Of two souls entwined unto eternity...
The essence of the moment: fleeting, yet so great
As to transcend time.

Love, monogamous: the one, true feeling of my life.
Of two sentience linked to each other...
The essence of the moment: fleeting, yet so great
As to transcend space.

Marilyn's SLUT-STUNT-DOUBLE lifts her head up, slightly, as if she's heard Evelyn's lines. (Both the DOUBLE on stage and the pre-recorded close-up displayed on the multimedia projector should show this.) She smiles with a nostalgic look, as if she's not in the hotel room, but elsewhere, in some idyllic fantasy world... even as MR. BLACKWOOD builds up his sexual vigor motion in-sync with some of EVELYN's more rhythmic lines:

EVELYN

A whisper in the dark, a promise subject to lie.
She hears me. She knows me. She shares
My passion, my life, my body.

A phantom limb in the dark, a disembodied hand on my back.
A sense of missing, a tragic hurt, a wrenched heart,
A hollow core, an emptiness, a nothingness,
A deep dark oblivion, the black abyss that has become of the universe.
A sense of sinking, falling, a leaden weight, down, down, down...

Marilyn's SLUT-STUNT-DOUBLE, still upside down

over side of bed, shows a horrid expression on her face. (Projector shows this.)

EVELYN (cont'd)

A crippled body, bones shattered,
Its skull smashed, all its secrets revealed.
A helpless spirit disembodied,
Severed from the world for all eternity,
Voice no voice, word no word, end no beginning,
As if a message forever lost in a sealed bottle adrift in the sea,
As if a fated corpse forever locked up in an airtight black box.

(SLUT- DOUBLE covers eyes with hands in distress. Multimedia projector pre-shot syncs shows face up close.)

But, what of a world where you *cannot* lie,
Where you cannot shun, cannot deny, cannot reject
Yourself. That you can live as you are:
Unafraid of your love, your deepest passion.
Where you live apart from it, your distinction divine
Sets you above, away, from the mere mundane.
Where you are free to love, your distinction divine
Sets you above, away, from the mere mundane.
Where you hear your own words—my words,
Where you see your true self, cherish, accept it:
Grow into it, become it.
Where you never abandoned it,
Was never forlorn to the dearest one of all:
Where you *let* yourself love me.

(SLUT-DOUBLE slowly unfurls her hands. Multimedia projector pre-shot shows a look of wonder slowly spreading across her visage.)

MR. BLACKWOOD begins to quicken his pace.

Marilyn's SEX-STUNT-DOUBLE puts a finger to her mouth, striking a contemplating pose. (She is still upside down, hair dangling off her head over the side of the bed.)

What of a world where you made not that first mistake?
That first fall, so gently off that mountainside precipice.
Afloat in the air, the fog a succumbing miasma,
That slowly drags you down, downwards towards
That living death that is your hell on earth,
Those myriad lies, the demons you yourself created.

Where truth is truth, and your nature, yours, undeniable.
Where you live, *truly* live, where
You let no worldly army chase you to the edge.
Where you live, *truly* live, where
You stood your ground, knowing they cannot move you.

MR. BLACKWOOD is about to climax.

Marilyn's SEX-STUNT-DOUBLE looks as if she's received some sort of spiritual enlightenment—an epiphany of epiphanies. Multimedia projector shows this via a pre-shot close-up of Marilyn's expression.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

A whisper in the dark, a promise subject to lie.
She hears me. She knows me. She voices
The words from my mouth, my mind, my soul.

Multimedia projector suddenly blacks out. (There should now be only a spotlight on EVELYN and faint illumination on DOUBLE and BLACKWOOD, as described earlier.)

Fades in on projector: Close-up of EVELYN looking divine, perhaps with a halo around her head.

EVELYN

You've heard me. You've known me.
You see me.

MR. BLACKWOOD falls on top of Marilyn's SEX-STUNT-DOUBLE suddenly. He lies very still on her back. Deathly still, as if he's carried out his last act in life—the dying man's final viaticum.

Marilyn's SEX-STUNT DOUBLE pushes BLACKWOOD off her. His body falls limply onto the bed. She walks in a trance-like fashion towards EVELYN's projected image. She reaches out towards the projected image, to touch it. But, just as her hand is close enough to touch it, EVELYN's image disappears as projector blanks out suddenly.

Blackout. (DOUBLE is replaced by MARILYN)

Scene 7: Fate

MARILYN walks back to bed. She sits there, still for a moment. Then, she cocks her head in the air. The sense of something wrong. She taps MR. BLACKWOOD. No response. She shakes him. No response. She puts her hand to his nose:

MARILYN

Oh God, he's not breathing!

MARILYN slaps MR. BLACKWOOD. His head falls limply astray at an odd angle. White froth drips from his mouth.

MARILYN

Oh God... *(She fumbles with the bedside phone. Dials three digits. Speaks to the phone:)*

Hi, my name is Marilyn, and there's a... complication. This man I was sleeping with, he—er—he just stopped moving. *(Shakes her head impatiently as she listens to the phone.)*

No, he's not sleeping. I... I think he's de— *(She looks distressed. Pulls at her hair with free hand.)*

No, I'm not going to jump to conclusions. He just stopped moving, all of a sudden. And, when I slapped him to wake him, his head just went limp to one side. And there's this gross white froth dripping out of his mouth. *(Nods her head several times to the phone, still looking distressed.)*

Yes, I understand how anything I do might lead to further medical complications. I'd leave him in the exact same position—other than his head bent in a wry angle, I'd say he looks pretty comfy. I'm at The Royal Hotel on Everest Street. Room 2006. It's near *The Styx*, off Stygian. *(Nods her head a few more times.)*

Yes, I'm—I'm fine, I think. I'm okay. I'll try to remain calm... I'll wait for you guys...

MARILYN hangs up, sinks down limply on bed. Silence for a few minutes. She is lying on the bed, with her hair sprawled out, a kind of lewd abandon about her that disappears after a few moment. A look of lost in her eyes. (Multimedia projector shows the change in facial expression.) She forgets the presence of the dead man next to her, and she speaks her mind:

MARILYN

I saw my sister. So real—too real. More real than... than reality itself.
(Beat.) I'm going to find her.

I have decided to stop fearing it.

That... Obsession infernal:

Pen in hand, a piece of scrap paper in front of me.

I'd close my eyes. I'd float in the darkness,

The moment of nothingness suddenly replaced

By an instant of certainty, a rush of a feeling,

As if a holy communion with the divine, beyond...

And then the words would come, would flow, would bleed forth from me,

My mind as if an open wound, fountaining off ichor with some diabolical wild abandon.

And then the words would come, would flow, would bleed forth from me,

As if bespelled my hand would move, would glide, would fly...

By a force beyond me, a purpose divine,

The gift bestowed me.

I'd write and write.

Pen neverending.

That... Obsession infernal:

I'd no longer stop myself. I'd no longer hold back. I'd no longer shun my poetry.

I *will* find my long lost twin sister Evelyn:

There *will* be beauty and hope to light up this dark and forlorn world.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

(Uncertain voice.) It would be all-encompassing. If I let that obsession loose, I wouldn't be able to control it. I'd be like some puppet of the gods—the cruel fates: I'd write and write and write—and never be able to stop. It would be... Life-consuming. If... if I were to free myself of the world. To write only to write. To live only to live...

Loud rapping at the door. Sound of a low-quality radio receiver from right outside. The door is kicked down. A FIREFIGHTER jumps in.

FIREFIGHTER

How now, fair maiden thine?

Is that yonder gentleman befallen

The very one that ye called us in for?

(Skips over and checks BLACKWOOD's pulse.)

Nay, he breathes not and has no life's pulse.

(Puts hands to BLACKWOOD's heart.)

Nay, his heartbeat escapes me: his heart's stopped.

I prithee, fair maiden...

This man's darkest hours have long passed, for he is—

(Aside:) Faith, my firefighter's soul... I must tell.

Your betrothed—your beloved man... This man

Shall no longer walk the earth or take part

In all its beauties. There shall be no spring

For his pitied soul—he is no more!

MARILYN

(Gasps.) The Fates...

FIREFIGHTER

Now now, my dear. There is life after death.

This man has died, but you, yourself lives on.

His memories are all that remains' him.

He is survived by you and you alone.

Let your love for him transcend the body.

Let your love for him console—comfort you.

The Fates preach bitter lessons in cruelty:

The tragedies they weave for divine plan

Cut short the life of a man, blindly so—

For justice cannot be biased. She is

Blindfolded so that she delivers he—

And only he—whose time has clearly come

The sweet viaticum at the end of

This dream, which we so naively call life.

The Celestial Cycle must continue.

Its gears that turns time into millen'um,

Its machinery antediluvian:

A lone goddess churns its motor, turning

Turning, turning, her hands cranking, cranking

FIREFIGHTER (CONT'D)

The wheel that drives our lives onwards unto...
The tragedy of the moment: Young Love,
Ended too soon. His once bride, his once wife,
His once dearest... a widow made of she.

MARILYN

(About to protest that she's not his wife, nor a widow. That the firefighter has wrongly dramatized the situation.) But—

*Two policemen jump into the hotel room.
FIREFIGHTER sinks back into the scenery, perhaps
sitting still on an armchair.*

POLICE 1 AND 2

We have come.
By and by, flights of fancy through the streets,
A race through the gaps amongst wanton cars:
Sirens ringing, radio blasting—we come!

*POLICE 3 runs panting into the scene. Another one
follows behind him.*

*POLICE 3 stands staring at BLACKWOOD, mouth
agape:*

POLICE 3

Dear God!
Is this the face that launched a thousand ships?
(Turns to POLICE 4.) Dear Officer! Is this not *him*?
The one we have been searching for, ever so
Long... Amidst nightless days, scouring data
Continental, ubiquitous, for *him*—
Signs of his presence, *his* whereabouts hence.

POLICE 4

Aye, Officer. It is *he*, the very
One we have kept so dearly in our hearts.
The maniac killer of a thousand
Orphans. Pitiful, homeless, street urchins—
Nay, all that, but children nevertheless.

POLICE 1

The childkiller's dead. Thither, his body!

*POLICE 2 proceeds to chalking the outline of
BLACKWOOD's body. POLICE 3 snaps photos.
POLICE 1 approaches the body, pokes it. Checks for
pulse and heartbeat.*

FIREFIGHTER

Officers, dear, our man there is flat dead.

POLICE 1

All's well, then. For that fair maiden thither (*gestures to MARILYN*)
Shall not suffer the pains of murderous death.
Yonder serial killer is no longer!

POLICE 3

Hooray!

POLICE 1

(*To Marilyn:*) Dear Maiden, grieve not! For, it was either
He or you. If this foul creep survivith
This night, then you would not see the sunrise
Of day, most fair, most clear, for the safe world.

POLICE 2

Just this: He has died, and now you shall live.

*Two EMS interns run in. EMS INTERN 2 is a step
behind as he drags a giant electrocution machine and
gurney with him.*

EMS INTERN 1

How now? A man, too still!
Apprentice intern of mine, thou watch me
Resuscitate this dead body with the
Heavy thunderbolts of Zeus, All Mighty! (*Prepares to electroshock BLACKWOOD.*)

POLICE 1

If the law may interfere...
I must not allow you to revive him.

POLICE 3

Nay, for he is a grave man, more so than
The gravest man, for this man before you
Kills children for sport, jolly merriment.

POLICE 2

The law is in our hands. We want him dead.

POLICE 1

Nay, more aptly put: this man is already
Fallen, thus our job the easier, the streets
Safer—there's no need to bring danger back.

EMS INTERN 2

But, but... We are sworn to Hippocrates!
We must abet all, whether good or bad—

EMS INTERN 1

(To police.) Never you mind my young apprentice here.
He knows not what his crazy mind talks of.
We shall ignore the body, as you wish.
Not attempt to bring it back to dear life.
Instead, we shall set him on that gurney
And bring him back in a big plastic bag.

EMS INTERN 2 places a large body bag on the gurney. Then he begins to drag BLACKWOOD onto the gurney wheeled to the side of the bed.

EMS INTERN 2

But what of our Oath to our Profession?

EMS INTERN 1

There is none higher than that of the law.
(*More quietly, to EMS INTERN 2:*) And, these officers enforce, thus make it.

(*Walks away from EMS INTERN 2, towards MARILYN with the intention of asking her out*)
And you, my dear, a lone flower lost in—
(*Beat.*) What is your relation to this *foul* man? (*Points at half-wrapped BLACKWOOD.*)

MARILYN

I slept with him.

EMS INTERN 2

Number One! There is white froth dripping forth.

EMS INTERN 1

You *slept* with him? (Spits.)

EMS INTERN 2

His skin is much too pallid, and his body—
Too emaciated. His death, why now?

EMS INTERN 1

Why now? Why, t'is his hour, of course. But, then...
He seems fairly young, but his body frail—
Eaten away, as if by a force
Greater than life, stronger than he who's lost.
Took him from within... a disease in him!
(*Beat.*) It can only be—
Number Two, fetch the OraQuick!

EMS INTERN 2

Do you think? No, such evil cannot be.
The Fates...
They cannot be so cruel... Nay, this man has...
Already done his sin to this dear world:
Wanton childslaughter, and now this...

EMS INTERN 1

My years of night as days, working this shift.
My experience aplenty, my intuition my guide,
The twists and turns of this celestial plot
Oft involve *ugly* weavings of this sort.

(Ruminating voice.)

A man weeping beside his dying son.
I had come in time, and yet I had not.
The little boy's skin did burn, was blackened—
All of a sudden, of youth's crazy
Fancy, he had jumped 'to the fireplace,
To the depths of the bluest fire hence—
His dear father could not save him in time.
Alack, outside the room, in the hallway,
There was a clamorous sound, a wry scream
And then silence. His mother had fallen
Down the very flight of stairs she had trod
Day by day to fetch her dear son's breakfast.
She missed a step, and then she broke her neck.
Father, the sorrowful lone survivor,
Told me to call Sister on the other
Side of the world to tell her of this thing.
And while I faithfully kept back my tears,
To complete my necessary task full,
Father, in a sweep of a moment, the
Blink of an eye, took forth from the drawer
The proverbial gun, and he left me...
Of three deaths witness I in span of three
Minutes, hence, all's quiet aside from I.
Much that I have learned: my youth torn away,
My innocent idealism—that I
Might be able to help, to do great good:
Ease the suffering in this wretched world—
Severed, a part of me lost forever.

EMS INTERN 2

But I don't believe the Fates to be cruel. *(Administers the OraQuick test to MARILYN.)*

MARILYN

What am I being tested for?

EMS INTERN 1

It is the disease of sinners set forth
By the Almighty to clean this here world.

EMS INTERN 2

This here is the HIV-1 Rapid
Antibody test. Non-invasive. Quick.

EMS INTERN 2 takes a swab of MARILYN's tongue, then places specimen collector in a tube. He pricks her finger with a needle.

EMS INTERN 2

A drop of blood, a pinprick of crimson.
My test tube specimen is all complete.

EMS INTERN 2 mixes her blood in tube.

MARILYN

The ichor of mine falls:
Slowly, ever so slowly
Unto the test tube,
Where it is mixed,
The colors swirl,
And we all play
The waiting game.

Lights dim slightly. Silence and stillness for a few minutes.

EMS INTERN 2

Twenty minutes have passed. The test is done.

EVELYN

But, fate holds us
Not in suspense:
For we know already that
There is more darkness
Than there is light in the world—
However diligently the sunrise
Fights in its daily battles against the night—
A story may only end in tragedy,
The nature of the world
Must hold the result as—

The open drapes reveal the window to the world—daylight is near, sunrise is about to come.

The sun rises. Dawn streams in through the windows.

EMS INTERN 2

Positive.

MARILYN

Positive?

EMS INTERN 1

(Walks over to see result.) Yes, positive.

MARILYN

The Fates... they mock me.

EMS INTERN 1

Cruel, they are.

FIREFIGHTER

But *just*, as just as just can be.

The police's walkie-talkie goes off suddenly.

WALKIE TALKIE

“T minus 10. Terrorist with bomb threat on Peace Street. All forces gather around on Peace Street.”

POLICE 1

A ticking time bomb about to go wry.

POLICE 3

Tick tock.

POLICE 2

The lives of innocent helpless hostages.

POLICE 1

Entrapped in the building.

POLICE 4

The loyal secretary.

POLICE 2

Bound to this world.

POLICE 4

The honest CEO.

POLICE 2

Bound to this world.

POLICE 4

The janitor who actually cleans.

POLICE 2

Bound to this world.

POLICE 3

Tick tock.

There is suddenly a loud crash from the walkie-talkie.

POLICE 1

We protect and serve.

POLICE 2

But, we cannot save...

POLICE 4

... in time.

POLICE 3

Tick tock.

*The lights fade a bit. Spotlight on TV in hotel room.
The TV eerily turns on:*

TV NEWSWOMAN

The talent in the world trickles away
But, they're rarely talent, for they know not
Their shine, hidden luster of kismet:
Their core melts unto sewer depths, today.

Lights fade out.

AVE MARIA

ACT 2: The Awakening

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### Scene 0: The Lost One II

#### **EVELYN**

My name is Evelyn, and I have been lost in a black box for all eternity.

*Instant blackout.*

### Scene 1: The State of Things

*The scene shows Marilyn in her tenement room. Crumpled balls of paper are the latest specimen of spring flowers sporting her linoleum lawn. Her room is darkened, but there's a spotlight on her. Dark-circles beneath her eyes. She appears lost:*

#### **MARILYN**

I can't sleep! (*Haunted tone.*) My memories plague me:

#### **EMS INTERN 1 (VOICE)**

Positive, yes. It is so, and it is.  
My dear: By this time, a decade from now  
You will be dead. Yes, as simple as that.  
Perhaps sooner, but not later. Alas...  
The disease is fatal, as is the world.  
Its evil incubates itself in you,  
Infiltrates, permeates, overwhelms your  
Whole entire being—every cell made  
Unto Legion: The very essence of  
Your own transformed unto that of VIRUS!  
And you are forced to destroy yourself  
With your every breath, moment, life's short pulse.

#### **POLICE 1 (VOICE)**

Nay, but could he had more simply said this:  
The retrovirus infects and destroys  
The immune system—and then it's the end. (*Shrugs.*)  
(*Mutters*) Modern med schools. Students too well balanced.

**MARILYN**

I'm—I'm going to die!

**EMS INTERN 2 (VOICE)**

The test is positive, but it may err.  
Even the great Heavens do so when they  
Let flying stars become nothing but dust.  
Nay, they never meant for such tragedies.  
But mistakes do occur—there's always hope!

**EMS INTERN 1 (VOICE)**

Hope that the dear Heavens have Divinely  
Erred? Nay, but my young apprentice, he is—

**EMS INTERN 2 (VOICE)**

A Believer. The Fates—they cannot be  
So cruel. They cannot be. They just... cannot!

*The stage lights fade back on, as MARILYN stands up. Dim the memory voices:*

**EMS INTERN 1 (VOICE)**

*(Faint echo)* Oh, but they can. You know *naught* of cruelty.

**MARILYN**

The Fates—they cannot be so cruel... They can't!  
Not now. Not when I've gotten rid of that damn trash can, w-when I've finally managed to overcome my writer's self-annihilation. When I've thrown away my needles, my myriad stashes of hero. When I've finally decided to... decided to *let* myself write. When I've...

*The sound of the plopping of mail inside a dinky tenement mailbox right outside her door. MARILYN rushes to the mailbox. She holds the single envelope in her hand as if it's the Holy Grail:*

**MARILYN**

When I've... When I've received the first word of publication...  
*(Genuinely serious voice.)* Poetry.COM! Oh... Oh... they want to publish my poem in an anthology! A—and I only have to pay \$24.95 to pay for the plaque—and \$89.99 to buy the anthology—and \$349.99 to have my name engraved on the back cover—and \$4895.99 to become a Master Poet—ooh, and \$55,420 per month to join the Guild of Poets!

Oh! I knew that saving all that money instead of buying hero would come to some good.

*(Speaks towards the sky/ceiling.)* I'd always known that the fates weren't cruel... That fate would have something truly divine happen to me! My work—renown, read by actual people!

### MARILYN (CONT'D)

And more... That I would be able to live as a poet...  
To make a living writing—only writing and nothing more. Only the words and I—and... and...  
Evelyn... my dearest twin sister:

It seems that with every verse I utter, every verbalized meaning conjured forth from the great  
expanse of non-existence, every thought made solid, chiseled unto a written sculpture... I grow  
closer to her.

As if a floundering flower  
Finds, finally, the sunlight.  
Pabulum lost, but now reclaimed.  
Life lost, but now reclaimed.

The living death that is my life becomes a relic of a dark past I care not to remember. As if the  
old, dried skin of the caterpillar, left behind. Shed behind, never to be picked up ever again, as  
the butterfly soars, ascends up into the sky. Words alone, they fight the void that undermines  
meaning in life... and they win. Writing is:

As if a rare tonic  
To cure the ails of  
A life not worth living

As if the quintessential elixir  
Needed in order to live.

*(quietly)* Life is mere mortality, otherwise.

*A loud rapping at the door. The sound of scotch  
tape. The pound of a flyer slammed against the  
door. The sound of heavy footsteps walking away.*

*MARILYN goes to the door. She finds a "Rent  
Overdue" flyer.*

### MARILYN

Rent Overdue. Evacuation and/or repossession imminent.  
But, I won't use the money I've saved in my previous sinful life to pay for rent in... in this dirty,  
squalid place.

No, there wouldn't be any need for that. Soon, I'd be freed of this place. A life apart—a world  
across—away from this life fate never intended me to have.

I'd be a writer. I'd live in a luxury apartment—never have to work for Boss Charon ever again!  
I'd be my own woman. Never have sex with strangers for cash. Never... *(Trails off ad lib.)*

And, all I have to do is write. To bring to life the very words of my life...

*She picks up a pen. Writes. And writes. At odd intervals, balled paper fall from the sky, overstocking the crushed poems on her floor. The sky outside her window goes from sunrise to sunset to sunrise to sunset to sunrise to sunset to sunrise.*

*MARILYN, who now appears a physically pale and shrunken and with rather prominent dark circles under her eyes, walks to her bed, plops down for a few seconds. Then jumps back up, paces:*

### MARILYN

I can't sleep! I can't do anything but write. It's as if the words... as if the words are enslaving me! As if the wordsmith pounds not shape and form unto the words, *but* the words pound the smith out of shape and form. There is an incessant throbbing at the back of my head. There was, rather, but it grew unto a tsunami inside my mind, thundering down upon innocent thoughts, blending, whirling my stream of consciousness with the madness of a migraine, making fleeting my ideas with the crushing vengefulness of sleeploss... so that each moment grows apart from the other—the past becomes its own, the present becomes its own, and the future becomes its own independent entity... My memories become disjoint, my thoughts cluttered, I can't remember one thing past the present—I can't remember my past! I can't—

But then all of a sudden, in the midst of chaos, with formlessness my reality, senselessness my ontology, mindlessness my epistemology, as I'm suffocating in my own mental hell, choking, wheezing in a ponderous miasma of self-defeating thoughts, I'd learn to breathe.

Time would still be in its shattered pieces, the past askew on the other side of the room, as if he never knew the present, as if he never anticipated the future, as if he knew not of change, as if he believed that he would stay the past forever and ever—and that the world functioned according to his belief.

I'd live one moment apart from the other—the present, truly the present, as isolated from the past, the future. The present, as herself. The present as her own element of forever.

And, in that moment, I would find solace. (*She arrives at the window in her pacing. Looks out.*) An instant of clearness of mind, of thought—as if floating, but not floating, as if flying, but not flying, as if... as if the sense of being, purely being.

Of light, apart from it all. (*gestures at the window*)  
Of light, in the midst of night,  
Burns a trial unto daylight  
The sunrise of its own tyranny in the sky.

And, in the warmth of day,  
I'd have dim memories of last night,  
Wraiths of the scores of writs I wrote and wrote and wrote.  
And, just as my writing is my present apart from all, my writing connects me with it all.

### MARILYN (CONT'D)

And I'd find my memories in a sea of crumpled paper, crushed poetry. Slowly, I'd pick up my lost children, one by one, more and more, balls of wasted words in my arms. I'd save them, the pieces too many, a dry flood upon my floor, and I'd be the catcher in the rye...

With the strength gone from my arms, I'd steal momentum from the past, I'd wring energy from the future, and my hand would accelerate again, the pen no longer too heavy in my grasp—motion, my own, yet again. I'd put my words in its final form.

*MARILYN walks towards a Walmart bag in a corner with a box of envelopes inside. The sky outside begins to sunset.*

### MARILYN

And then, with dream-like slow-motion, I'd send them off by way of a ship in the guise of an envelope... on voyage... on pilgrimage to the land of the future. And, they would grow up to become the world...

But, in the present that I live in apart from the past and future, there would only be the darkness of night. A sudden blackness.

*Sudden blackout.*

### Scene 2: Posted

*A giant blue US Mail postbox appears in her room, replacing her bed. Be careful not to disturb the sleeping poetry all over the floor.*

*Yellowed streetlight spotlight on MARILYN, box, and crumpled balls of poetry:*

### MARILYN

And I would wander through trash-filled streets on a lone starless moonless night to find the mecca of my pilgrimage in the form of a giant blue box, a shade of sepia underneath the yellowed streetlight.

My package: It's the product of sleepless nights, eternal days lived unto a solo creed:

To live, breathe, *be* poetry—

A life of a poet—

A true poet.

Until death do us part. (*Kisses her package.*)

And with a sense of satisfaction, a fleeting moment of self-assertion, I'd free my work, and it would fly into the open mailbox... and one day, it might flutter into *your* hands.

**MARILYN (CONT'D)**

My work known, even to you.

But I, however... I am spent. I've concentrated the essence of life unto mere words—and it is as if a transfusion of ichor from my heart to paper, by way of the fluid ink of pen, dancing a number choreographed to the music of words, of meaning meld unto form through motion, of... of...

**EVELYN**

Sonorous echoes, through and through.  
Here, there, everywhere. Now,  
The words: the depths of their kismet  
Rings true unto the moment.  
Rings true unto the said word,  
Verbalized unto existence.

**MARILYN**

And I speak the final words of a poet beyond tired—of sleepless nights and eternal days too many. I have delivered my poetry to the blue beacon of the world. And now, I shall finally get to sleep.

*MARILYN plops down on the floor and sleeps on top of piles and piles of crumpled poetry. Lights fade out, except postbox stays under spotlight for a moment longer.*

Scene 3: The Blue Beacon

*MARILYN wakes up on her bed, in her room. (Giant blue US postbox is gone.) There is a small stack of large manila envelopes on the floor next to her. Further from her is the torn envelope from Poetry.com.*

*MARILYN gets up, steps on the envelopes. Picks them up in a dream-like daze:*

**MARILYN**

So it was all a dream... (Takes a few uncertain steps to find the Poetry.com envelope.)  
But, at least this is real—this beacon from the gods, this divine gift of publication, nigh!

*With a sigh, MARILYN walks to her window. She climbs to the sill, and it appears that she might jump out... Lights black out suddenly.*

*Lights fade on to the alleyway with the emergency metal staircases leading down from her window. This alleyway, however, is not dilapidated. The sun shines through the crack between buildings, showing that the floor is vintage stone-tiled. On the far side, there is a sign hanging from the side of the wall that reads, "Heavens above the Styx: A Café," and there are people sipping tea in outdoor tables. The sign also has a subtitle, "Live Poetry, Friday Nights."*

*There is the same giant blue US postbox she saw in her dream lying near the base of the staircase.*

*MARILYN makes her way down.*

**MARILYN**

May you find your way into the light. (*She kisses the manila envelopes. She drops everything off in the US postbox for real this time.*)

*MARILYN trips and falls as she backs away from the US postbox, as if backing away in veneration to a monarch. She catches sight of the Café Sign, as she's about to get up:*

**MARILYN**

"Heavens above the Styx: A Café... Live Poetry, Friday Nights."  
(*Beat. Whispers:*) Deux ex machina.

*MARILYN gets up, as she utters the phrase. She looks out into the audience and says:*

**MARILYN**

The gods wish me to recite words of my own to the world, but I...

*Lights fade out.*

Scene 4: Reality Undiscreet

*Lights fade on, at first misleading the audience into thinking that we're still in the same set. However, as lights brighten, it becomes obvious that this is the dilapidated alleyway of the strip bar. It is night.*

*MARILYN is in her same position relative to the previous set.*

*MARILYN throws down to the ground a bunch of papers, with "Payment Overdue" red-stamped on. She takes a few steps forward.*

*The HOBO denizen of the alley picks up the papers, scoffs:*

**HOBO 1**

I ain't gonna pay yo bills. They're for you.  
Go to! Quit dreamin' an' come down t'Earth.  
You gotta *work* in this damn world to live.

*HOBO 1 crumples the papers, throws the papers at MARILYN. HOBOS 2 laughs gleeful-maniacally and throws balls of paper from an Oscar-metal trashcan at MARILYN. It is as if her poetry's flying through the wind, raining down on her, once again... but in a different incarnation.*

*The two hobos laugh uncontrollably, falling into a giant trash bin/dumpster.*

*MARILYN trudges down the alley, apathetic. She reaches the side door of the bar.*

*The door suddenly flies open.*

**BAR BOSS**

Where you been, y'damn git?  
(Looks Marilyn up and down) Oh no, you think you just gonna come in here all o'a sudden?  
Af'er leavin' with no damn word? We was understaffed that night—da most busiest night of da year, an' you just hadta disappear that very damn night. Lazy irrespon'sibi'ble git."

**MARILYN**

Please...

**BAR BOSS**

Well, you'lade! You'd hafta dress out here in da alley.

*BAR BOSS bangs the door shut. Opens it, throws a sleazy outfit at MARILYN. Bangs door shut again.*

*MARILYN dresses outside in the alley behind a giant dumpster. The OLD LADY comes by and attempts to put a wilted rose in MARILYN's hair.*

*MARILYN pushes the OLD LADY away. The OLD LADY falls to the floor. The OLD LADY looks pathetic and helpless for a moment, and MARILYN is drawn to help the OLD LADY up.*

*The OLD LADY takes MARILYN's hand.*

*As MARILYN helps the OLD LADY up, the OLD LADY draws blood along MARILYN's arm, from MARILYN's heroin mark on downwards, using the thorns of the rose as a dagger.*

*The OLD LADY gazes at MARILYN with haunted eyes:*

**OLD LADY**

One fall, fatal.

*The OLD LADY cackles and disappears into the side of the alley.*

*MARILYN silently pulls on her long Cinderella-ball gloves. Her blood stains through the gloves. She doesn't react. She enters the bar.*

Scene 5: Strip Bar II

*The scene is exactly like Strip Bar I, especially with the patron beer-company propaganda, etc. Marilyn looks a bit paler and less vibrant in this scene to signify that her fatal disease has started to take over.*

*MARILYN dances the usual jig with her pole, but her expression shows a far-away gaze. She doesn't really react to the customers waving cash at her.*

*A man dressed all in white approaches her. He looks distinctly like the deathly pale BLACKWOOD. He stuffs a large wad of cash into her leggings.*

**MARILYN**

I'm sorry. I'm not taking any Bonuses for the night.

*The man looks at MARILYN blankly, as if uncomprehending.*

**MARILYN**

*(Indignant voice, eloquently:)* I'm not a prostitute...

*The man walks away.*

**MARILYN**

... Anymore... But, why am I here?

*(Aside.)* The river leads to the depths of Hades. Boss Charon is the unwitting raft driver, leading the ghouls deeper and deeper unto the whirlpool between myth and reality, the funnel to the nadir, the seventh circle.

*Scene darkens. Everyone but MARILYN freezes in tableau. Spotlight on MARILYN.*

**MARILYN**

And I... I'm here because I need to pay my bills!

But, I... I just rejected a Bonus Buyer... It's as if I don't care for cash.

No, that's not it... Not totally it. I might have HIV—I still haven't picked up the results for the confirmation test. I-it might not be false positive! It might be fatal... I didn't want to pass it on...

No, that's not it, either... It was the fact that... there was nothing but death in him. An emptiness in his eyes. A sense of loss, and yet a sense of uncaring for that loss. As if he'd died and never *lived*, never bothered to understand the difference between death and life.

*MARILYN freezes. Spotlight is still on her.*

**MARILYN (VOICE)**

*(from offstage, a coy fakeish echo:)* They come to enjoy the *pleasures* of life, to see and experience all that their wives can't *offer* them.

*MARILYN un-freezes. She takes a sweeping look at the bar around her, still frozen in tableau. Horrific expression:*

**MARILYN**

A living death... This bar is... is the exact representation of a living death!  
I can't stay here. I-I don't care about my bills. It was a fall to come here in the first place.

**MARILYN**

A fatal fall.

**OLD LADY**

A fatal fall.

*Bar scene suddenly goes back into motion. The crowd of men surrounding MARILYN step back.*

*MARILYN screams as she runs out.*

**STRIPPER 2**

Tragic...

**STRIPPER 4**

... beauty.

*Sudden blackout.*

Scene 6: Lost

*Dark dilapidated alleyway again. It's strangely quiet. HOBO's and OLD LADY have decided to go begging in the park. MARILYN's lost, all alone. She sits on a trash can.*

**MARILYN**

But, the tragedy is that the world is just so...

No. It can't be like that. It can't be because even if the Fates are cruel, there's the fact that Evelyn *exists*. I... I can see her even now. (*Closes eyes.*)

the semblance of my twin sister:  
she stands tall in the middle of the void  
she brings forth a light, all-encompassing,  
wrought of the radiance of her heart,  
glowing brightly with the strength of her spirit.

and there's a surreal contrast between her  
and the black box that is her world.  
and there's a surreal contrast between her  
and the nothingness that surrounds her.

as if she is beyond mere matter  
as if she is beyond the everyday  
beer and swine and sweat and grief  
as if she is beyond the ordinary  
cycle of things: her life apart,  
her life as herself, her freedom to live  
an existence more real than reality itself.

How can such beauty exist in a world so ugly? Surely Evelyn's existence must come before all else. She *has* to exist! Yes, she has to exist!

Because...

### MARILYN (CONT'D)

how can I, a mere urchin of the world,  
decreed to live off the droppings of others,  
condemned to live the shadow of a life...

a harlot of some forlorn brothel,  
who spends her time in darkness,  
asleep by day, a legion of the night,  
her thoughts unseemly, soiled  
by the rotten puke that  
metamorphoses unto acid rain  
that burns through her vision,  
distorts her sight such that  
she become myopic and sees  
only the rampant decay, right  
in front of her, behind her,  
to her left and right,  
above and below,  
all around, neverending...

how can I, one such as myself,  
conjure *her*? how can I,  
from the depths of my mind,  
the nettles of a mere prostitute,  
conjure forth such a poignant  
incarnation of beauty,  
awe and wonder  
so compelling that...  
I myself can only conclude that  
*she has to be real!*

For, I could not have created her. No, I could not have...

### MARILYN

Nay, but she seems more real when I think of her through words... Could my poetry be the way to her? Could this be the clue the good Fates have bestowed to me so that I might find my sister? (*beat*) Yes, that has to be it. Just as every entity is born with a purpose and a means to achieve it—a weapon to fight against all that are contrary to that purpose. Just as wolves are born with fangs to defend their realm, just as birds are born with wings to escape such predators—I was born with this ability to spew out masterpiece statues wrought of words... so that I could find my long lost sister. (*contemplating pause. Serious, dedicated tone:*) Eve Lyn: Through the power of WORDS, the secret battle of VERSES, I'm going to find you.

*Sudden blackout.*

Scene 7: Escape from Hades

*MARILYN enters her room from her window. (She climbs up through an emergency exit, i.e., the foldable metal-frame staircase along the side of the tenement tower.)*

*Her room appears to have been evacuated. Other than her window and the floorboards, the room is an empty stage.*

*MARILYN holds in her hands a large expandable portfolio. It is empty.*

*MARILYN walks straight to a floorboard in the center of the room. She lifts it. She takes out her poems, hidden in the floors of the tenement tower. She puts them gently into her folio.*

*MARILYN walks to her door. She turns the doorknob, about to exit. The door is stuck. She kicks at the door. The sound of a padlock falling on the other side. The door opens. MARILYN walks through. She does not turn around to see it, but there is a giant sign that says “REPOSESSED” and there is also a broken padlock on the floor. MARILYN bends down to the floor mat by her door. The sets from now until Scene 16 may take on an essence of surreality—whether through a smoke screen or whatnot.*

*There is a small wad of hundred dollar bills hidden beneath the mat. MARILYN picks them up.*

*She EXITS.*

Scene 8: The Pits

*MARILYN spends the night beneath a typical inner-city concrete and graffiti bridge. For her, this night is one of non-stop writing despite wind and sleet and rain. Writing is her only solace. Intermittently, the austere silence between her words is broken by the rampant cries of the night—the moans of wanton women drunk on the bridge, the cars and trucks that speed by, sending the whole bridge rumbling, so that it seems the bridge might fall...*

## MARILYN

Dark night reigns in the sky:  
I sit below the whole weight of the world.  
The shadows of phantom giants  
Threaten to topple over,  
To engulf me in a sea of nothingness,  
To wash over me, to bury  
Me under ocean depths,  
So that I, too, become  
Mere memory's wraith.

Flickers of light challenge the night:  
Cries from strangers  
Standing under  
Streetlights, far away,  
Push away the quiet nothingness,  
Become telltale signs that  
I am not alone—there is the world,  
That they exist, and I have  
chosen not to be one of them.  
They remind me of my task  
At hand. They remind me of  
The reason why I must continue:  
My sole solace in all the world...  
The words which I jot down,  
The verses I draw forth from the void  
Closing in on me, a swirl of  
Night around me to remind me of  
The task that must be done,  
The words that must be written,  
The poet who must find her way  
Out of the oblivion beneath the world—  
The writer who strives  
To make writing her life.

I write for Eve Lyn,  
Her radiance of soul,  
Her embodiment of all that is good,  
The joy and wonder  
That overwhelm me  
When I look to her beauty  
For guidance, for hope,  
For the momentum to go on,  
Pen neverending,  
All because of her,

**MARILYN (CONT'D)**

The belief that life is greater than just this,  
The certainty that through writing I can escape this,  
The anticipation that through words I will find her.

*The derelict lurkers of midnight materialize: The set  
rotates a quarter turn, as the moon makes its way  
across the sky. The hint of dawn glows in the air.  
The weight of the night hangs heavily:*

**MARILYN**

Legions of words: they bask in the  
Fading twilight. So many, countless.  
Their form merges unto that of the paper  
And each other, they blend in,  
Melt, meld, disappear unto a clash  
Of meaningful meaninglessness...  
They are dead when they are written,  
For the poet forgets them,  
Having entrusted her memories  
To paper and ink, when  
The medium lacks fidelity.

And, here I am with words  
That I have spent the night writing,  
Verses that I have  
Spent the time of my life  
Weaving... All the while  
Working without knowing,  
With only the tenacity insurmountable—  
That of a seastar clinging to the shore  
To escape the ocean and its vast span  
Of nothingness—just writing  
Without regards to means,  
The fact that I do this,  
Hungry, dirty, homeless—  
A derelict underneath an unkempt bridge.  
I, the unwanted, my words.

I write despite that,  
I cling to the seashore despite that,  
I escape the ocean because of that.

*Daylight breaks. Sunrise starts. The night sky  
disappears in a wash of vermillion. The noise of the  
night die away. Silence.*

**MARILYN**

But I have spent my life writing,  
And I am old now, tired,  
I must achieve the inevitable ending,  
To sleep, I go...

*MARILYN falls asleep beneath the city bridge. The events of the day near the bridge occur fast-forward. The sun moves across the sky. The set rotates a quarter turn back the way it was before at night: the lurkers of midnight return. The darkness of the night descends across the sky, but the darkness freezes on the verge of sunset, the backdrop vermillion. The noise of the night begin.*

*The image of a car is projected to speed across the bridge. Car windows are open:*

**HIGH-PITCHED VOICE**

Friday night, yippee!

*Sudden silence. MARILYN wakes up.*

**MARILYN**

Friday night? The night  
Has come. To the meaningful Heavens, I go to read  
To the world anon.

*MARILYN exits. Black out.*

Scene 9: They Would Have Heaven Above The Styx

*MARILYN walks down the alleyway of “Heavens Above The Styx.” It is the clean and classy version of the alleyway of “The Styx”—architecturally, it’s the exact same replica of “The Styx.” The sky is on the verge of a winter sunset, and although there are the same vintage café chairs and tables outside, no one is sitting out in the cold. On the sign, there is a splotch of mud from the rain that almost blocks out the words “Heavens Above.” MARILYN disappears through the side door beneath the sign.*

*Silence for a few minutes. The audience wonders why the scene hasn’t blackout’ed. The reader wants more action, and the actor is busy axing out this section with his trusted black sharpie.*

*The door suddenly flies open. MARILYN topples out. A loud booing streams through the door. A glass flies out, breaks, barely missing MARILYN.*

Scene 10: Advice in the Dark:

*Dark, clouded, moonless night. The few passing cars make wraith-like shadows in the alley. Haunting rings through the air.*

*EVELYN is crying.*

*It begins to rain, quite suddenly.*

*MARILYN stands alone in the alley. The rain flattens her hair. MARILYN is unmoving.*

*A HOMELESS POET appears suddenly out of the gloom. He looks like HOBO 1.*

**HOMELESS POET**

Didn't appreciate your work, did they?  
Forced you out and sent your soul crashing,  
Divine words fallen; what else did they slay?

*MARILYN is quiet. Still unmoving.*

**HOMELESS POET**

You wrote down the meaning of life on a  
Piece of paper. Modern Prometheus,  
That you are... But have you forgotten it?  
That men can't treasure the light of the gods...  
They haven't the tastebuds for ambrosia.  
They aren't fit for what you've brought to them...  
(*Haunted voice.*) None of them are. They are but fit for Styx.  
(*Beat.*) You ought to see the world. Much to see there.  
(*Immensely saddened.*) And much to learn there, too much, the burden  
Of cruel reality unrelenting.  
But, you must learn it there... where the masters have:  
Paris, France, the countryside, Venice, Rome.  
My dear, you must first see and know the world:  
Understand through your own eyes, its people.  
Know why it must be so... That it can't be!

**MARILYN**

But, I write *not* of the world!

### HOMELESS POET

Ah, my dearest, but what *can* you write of?  
You are born into the world, forced in it.  
It is your reality: All you have.  
All your experiences are drawn from it.  
And you must live *in* it, no matter what,  
However dreadful it may be, you must.  
And, you will find your answers in the world:  
You'd learn the truth from raw reality,  
Cruel teacher that it is, whose taught me such. (*Waves hand about his rags.*)

### MARILYN

So the world holds all the answers to the questions of my life—and it is to be my teacher of poetry. I shall go into the world.

*HOMELESS POET* nods at her in acknowledgment, looking grimly sad. Simultaneously, an *OLD LADY* appears out of nowhere. She carries a wilted rose in her hand. She edges close to *MARILYN*. She places the wilted rose in *MARILYN*'s hair.

### OLD LADY

A rose for ye travels, an' ye shall see  
What the world has to tell you about words—  
And ye shall know the meaning of Artist.

*MARILYN* limply drops her portfolio into a giant puddle. The portfolio is soaked. *MARILYN* walks away with the wilted rose in her hair. Lights fade.

### Scene 11: Insurance at the Cost of Life

*3 or 4 AM-ish clouded sky, moonless night. Dim lamplight. MARILYN sits alone at a bus-stop.*

### MARILYN

I wait here in the dim lamplight. Alone, by myself, about to face the world.  
I don't want to face the world, though. Nay, I sit here because I am now poor—one step from being in rags and begging. I have barely enough money to afford a plane ticket to Paris. That wad of cash I found under the carpet—it was nothing, really. So little money that I saved. So little money that I have left. I can't even afford to purchase multiple bus tickets! I have to wait for the direct bus to the airport—and it only comes once a day! Basin City busses never come on time—they might be three hours early, a week late, or even a year behind!

*The set brightens, the hint of dawn across the sky.*

**MARILYN**

I have to let the time of my life pass away to wait to face the world...

*Silence. Then, footsteps approaching from offstage.*

*MARILYN stands up, looks offstage.*

*The sun also rises.*

*The sunlight makes a halo around the head of a woman approaching from off stage. The light brightens so that her silhouette becomes a blinding smear. An instant later, it becomes clear that she is a MOTHER holding the hand of a CHILD. They walk into view. (Perhaps use multimedia screen to convey this. Fade image as they come into view.)*

*A hobo, whose presence is given away only by the brightened stage, sits across the street sketching them with charcoal and a Strathmore artpad. The CHILD (a boy) is fidgety; it looks like he wants to run away. The MOTHER looks deathly calm.*

**CHILD**

But, mother, why? (*looks at Mother anxiously.*)

**MOTHER**

Why what, dear?

**CHILD**

Why can't I take art lessons anymore?

**MOTHER**

Oh, silly goose, we've had this conversation before.

**CHILD**

But, I still don't understand! (*On the verge of tears*) Why did you and dad throw away all my paints and brushes—and even my easel? I-I found them in the big trash can outside, and I picked them up and brought them back. And all I wanted to do was finish my painting! But, when I got back, I found that it was gone! And I looked everywhere for it! I couldn't find anything. I couldn't even find my sketches! What... what did you do to them?

**MOTHER**

Why, dear, I simply threw them all away. (*Pats Child, lightly.*) All those silly childish drawings of yours. They're all gone now! You're all grown up now! Remember where we're going today?

**CHILD**

*(Quietly, holding back tears.)* Yes.

**MOTHER**

*(She straightens Child's bowtie.)* Now, you're going to ace that magnet school exam today. And we're going to make a great impression on that interview—we'd be the first to arrive to show our dedication! You're going to get into the special middle school for math and science. Yup, you'd get into Patrick Henry Middle School for the Gifted and Talented, all right. And then, you'd be guaranteed entrance to the magnet high school. And from then on, you'd be a star. You'd go to a top university, graduate with an engineering degree... It's the way to go! It's the sure-thing insurance to the good life!

**CHILD**

But, I don't understand why you won't let me draw anymore...

**MOTHER**

We've had that conversation before, dear.

**CHILD**

But, I don't understand it!

**MOTHER**

All right, dear. I'm going to tell you all of it this time. You're a big boy now, and you ought to understand it.

Look at that hobo across the street. What's he doing?

**CHILD**

*(Scrutinizes man for a moment.)* Sketching. Charcoal. Rough outlining on Strathmore paper.

**MOTHER**

Um... yes. The point is that he's drawing. He's an artist.

**CHILD**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

He draws, but he can't make a living out of that. *(Pause.)* Remember the homeless man in the park? The man who sketches on the back of fallen flyers?

**CHILD**

Yes?

**MOTHER**

Those were some pretty pictures, weren't they, dear?

**CHILD**

Yes!

**MOTHER**

But, his pictures won't feed him no matter how pretty they are. No one cares about art now. It's a fact. Just look at the world around you. (*Beat.*) We fear you would become an artist—and starve.

**CHILD**

Is that why dad tore up my paintings of the Virgin Madonna?

**MOTHER**

Yes... you see, your father, himself, had to abandon his art, too.

**MARILYN**

Why?

**MOTHER**

Excuse me?

*CHILD looks at her with tear-brimmed eyes. A specter of hope looks out at her desperately.*

**MARILYN**

Why can't he become an architect? A designer. A good-paying job with art as a part of it.

**MOTHER**

Because it is a *sin* to dilute one's talent. One must either cherish it in full or abandon it completely. One cannot accept the gift of the Gods and not use it as it was meant—in full and in its pure form. He had to choose between life and poverty—he chose life.

*A lost-looking teenager who looks like the boy child walks across the stage, between the folks sitting at the bus-stop and the audience.*

**CHILD**

(*Aside.*) They... they were pictures I saw in my head when the reverend read from the bible—when the choir sang gospel... *Ave Maria*... I wanted with all my heart to show the world the visions I saw in that moment when—

**MOTHER**

He must sever himself completely. *Now*. Lest he ends up a prostitute to art. No, that day must never come. He is to choose *life*, now—so that he won't wind up in the depths of the hellfire that is the life of an artist. He must reject the offering from the Gods. Sacrifice it completely. Turn away from his art forever. It is the only way he can live.

**MARILYN**

But—

*A bus roars to a stop in front of them. MOTHER drags CHILD onto bus quickly. Bus leaves.*

**MARILYN**

But, he would end up living a living death... his essence as bestowed him from the gods sacrificed—nay, his core and passion wrenched out. The bleeding wound from his severed heart forever a stigma that only he can see, feel—a raw pain in the depths of him destined never to heal. Depression as his soul, drudgery as his world—why?

*The bus that goes straight to the airport drops by. MARILYN gets on it. The bus stop is empty. On stage, there is now only the hobo across the street sketching a still life. Lights fade.*

Scene 12: On the Wings of Time

*MARILYN boards a crowded plane. Apparently, the plane's overbooked, and thus MARILYN is upgraded to First Class. The stewardess, who is the OLD LADY in the uniform of a stewardess, guides MARILYN to First Class. MARILYN sinks into the chair without taking note of her environment. There are only three columns in the first class sector, two seats in each column. The other passengers should be in shadows.*

*MARILYN does not notice the man sitting next to her. MARILYN closes her eyes. The stewardess pantomimes in fast-forward-motion the "safety protocols," and the plane begins rumbling in upward ascent. MARILYN opens her eyes when the plane has reached its required altitude and has become still, again. The man next to her taps her, gently. The man is an ARTIST. He looks like the adult version of the CHILD in the previous scene. MARILYN turns and takes a surprised jump.*

**MARILYN**

Oh my god!

**ARTIST**

I was about to say the same thing. I've seen you before!

**MARILYN**

I... I... I've seen you before, too! Just a few hours ago—It seems like just a moment ago, you were this child, about to be forced into a life devoid of art—your mother had an iron grip on your education, and she was convinced that it was either art or money.

**ARTIST**

No, that's not the context in which I remember you.

**MARILYN**

No? But, it was just a few hours ago...

**ARTIST**

Yes, time does fly by, does it not? (*Beat.*) But, it was in a different context. You were one of the nude posers for the human drawing course I secretly took.

**MARILYN**

I was?

**ARTIST**

Yes. Do you remember? (*Aside:*) I, the child of a mere twelve years, lost in the middle of a field of giants. The mind of an artist trapped in the form of a child—a stubborn, determined child who struggled to remain true to realism even as he kept sliding off his chair, his feet dangling in midair, the fall always abysmal. My figure too slight, I disappeared...

**MARILYN**

No... I don't believe I remember you. But, I'm happy you got to draw. I'm happy you held onto your art, albeit you had to do it secretly. But, why are you on this plane?

**ARTIST**

To France, ma cherie. To paint Paris, the streetside. To observe people and understand human nature from the discerning eye of a scholar incognito as an artist. To find real-life subjects to paint and immortalize by means of a telltale brush. To do what I cannot do here, of course. To find the world I thought never existed. To find it all in Paris!

**MARILYN**

I, too, go out into the world. But, I go not to see its people—for I have seen enough of them and their likes! Rather, I go into it by word of a master poet—I go into it to find the meaning of “artist.” I go into the world to find my answers in life. The world is where the meaning of life is held. The world holds the secret to what shall make me a writer. The world holds the secret to what shall cure me of my melancholy. The world holds the secret to my long lost sister, my twin Eve Lyn—the Madonna who lives in a black box of her own.

*The OLD LADY, dressed as a stewardess, comes by  
and takes the wilted rose from MARILYN's hair.  
Neither MARILYN nor the ARTIST notice this.*

**ARTIST**

Yes, Paris, the mecca of freedom—where we artists can be as ourselves—truth—where we can pursue the depths of our soul and escape the fear of self-discovery—beauty—where the grungy tenement world devoid of wonder is filled to the brim with the fantastic—and love—Yes, love... Art, the love of mine: where brush strokes defy time itself, capturing the moment, both its form and essence, the feel of the instant, solidifying what was meant to be a fluid flow, transforming sound, motion, and all events into images—a painting. The kismet to challenge reality itself by melding it into your own form, recreating it in the image inside my head...

*The MAN (whom we've met in the first Bar Scene) walks by. He makes momentarily eye contact with MARILYN. MARILYN jumps as she recognizes him, but the MAN does not make any sign of recognition. The MAN stares at the ARTIST with a look of talent-lust in his eyes:*

**MARILYN**

He wants to steal your soul.

*A horrified look spills upon the MAN's face. He rushes away to the lavatory, at the end of the first class sector. One possible idea for the lavatory involves a miniature rotating set. From one side, it appears to be a room with a door. But, on the other side, it's see-through. After MAN bangs the flimsy plastic airline lav-door shut, the set turns, and the audience can see into the lavatory. MARILYN and ARTIST have their spotlight off. All except the MAN in the lavatory are in darkness.*

*The lavatory mirror is actually a multimedia projection screen. In its "normal state," it shows the reflection of MAN, which can either be live, fed in by a camera by the sink, or pre-shot.*

*The MAN rushes up to the mirror and asks the Mirror, Mirror, on the wall:*

**MAN**

What's wrong with me?

*MAN's reflection melts into a memory. The multimedia projector shows a surreal conversation he had with his business associate, WOMAN, while the man stares out into space at his memories:*

**WOMAN**

Have an apple.

**MAN**

Why, thank you. (About to take a bite.)

**WOMAN**

I want to sin with you.

**MAN**

Um. Excuse me?

**WOMAN**

I'm in the mood for killing another living messiah today.

**MAN**

Ah.

*MAN splashes water from the sink onto his face. The image on the mirror clears, as if it's being washed away. Memory fades, and MAN's real reflection returns. The lavatory set turns back so that the walls are opaque. He leaves the lavatory, returns to the lobby of the plane. He goes back to his seat, next to WOMAN. WOMAN has a look about her that makes it obvious that she is evidently not MAN's wife.*

*Lights on in that portion of the plane. (Lights remain off everywhere else.)*

**WOMAN**

Say, Adam, ever heard of AeonGenesis?

**MAN**

Wh-what?

**WOMAN**

AeonGenesis, you remember that budding biotech company set the middle of nowhere—some forlorn African jungle?

**MAN**

Yeah, there are a lot of biotech interests set in such locations. It brings opportunities to a disadvantaged people and may help eliminate the third world.

**WOMAN**

*(Sighs, irked that she has to remind him of this.)* AeonGenesis, the startup with the preposterous goal of finding the cure for AIDs in *this generation* so that they can, quote, “free the world of the disease that kills the world's people from within,” unquote?

**MAN**

That's awfully generous of them to save the world's people.

**WOMAN**

*(Sighs angrily.)* The non-profit with exclusive access to the prostitutes in Africa who developed immunity against AIDs?! *Now*, do you remember AeonGenesis?

**MAN**

Not quite.

**WOMAN**

*(Sighs with impatience bordering anger.)* Okay, whether or not you remember AeonGenesis or not, I have news for you. Word on the undervine is that they've found it.

**MAN**

*(Voice of wonder)* They've found it? They've found the cure?

**WOMAN**

Yes! And, I've checked! Can you believe it? Of all the unlikely odds they had to go against. *Both* my stock analyst and fortune teller told me that their mission is extremely unlikely to succeed in this generation. And yet they, the nerve of them, the fools—

**MAN**

Just mouthing words of bravado like lost poets... But, lost no longer! They've found the cure!

**WOMAN**

*(Very angrily)* Don't you understand? This means that our stock interests are in danger! Remember all those AIDs "medicine" companies, which Krapware Software funded? The so-called billion-dollar we put into "R and D?"

**MAN**

Yeah, that was a total joke on the shareholders and board of "trustees" who'd never get their share of trust. *(laughs at his lame pun)* How can anyone with half a brain in their head still believe that there's any more "R and D" in classical software? How can they still believe it once the reports show that we're actually making money off this particular "R and D" investment, when—

**WOMAN**

*(Smacks her hand against head.)* The point is that we have interests in those lesser companies. Very significant interests. *All* of them will die when AeonGenesis goes public—

**MAN**

Or when word on the undervine becomes shout and the everyone else finds out. *(beat.)* Eve, why don't we swap interests—trade all our stock from the lesser "medicine" companies and put them all into Aeon?

**WOMAN**

*(Yells loudly.)* Because. They. Are. A. Non. Profit. Organization. You can't buy Aeon stock!

**MAN**

Ah. Now, our other biotech stock can't compete with them at all! They're rezzing free. *(Shrugs.)* Bribe them.

**WOMAN**

You can't bribe them!

**MAN**

Why not?

**WOMAN**

They're... they're (*laughs maniac-uneasily*) they're one of those unconventional consortiums. They claim they live up to this ideal, that they won't step down from it, that they won't have *anything* to do with us, that they won't quote "sully their divine souls with the mud of the river Styx," unquote.

**MAN**

(*Look of great admiration in his eyes, as he looks off into the darkness of the audience.*) So they're one of those rare companies that actually live up to their word—all the way, huh?

**WOMAN**

No! They're one of those rare menaces—like google—which prance around like dumb sugar plum faeries, scattering goodwill, altruism, benefits for *all* of humanity, with the ulterior motive of wiping *us* out.

*The stewardess (OLD LADY) comes down the aisle with a cart full of pudding-like substances. It is apparently a first-class snack. She appears to be trying to convince the patron in front of Man and Woman to try the crème brûlée she's serving.*

**MAN**

Eve, I don't think—

*MARILYN's spotlight turns on suddenly. But, it's obvious that MARILYN's in control of her own light. Her hand stays upraised momentarily to show that she herself flipped on the airplane night-light. MARILYN looks anxiously at MAN and WOMAN on the other side of first class. The duo do not notice him, and the woman mouths cruel divine fate a la her plan:*

**WOMAN**

We have to kill them!

**MAN**

Why... why can't we just buy them? Like what we usually do? We can offer them a sum they can't refuse. We'd just reference it as a "necessary R and D expense." We have the power to offer them the biggest number we can think of—after all, we're *KrapwareSoft* company executives... The power we have over our company, and the potential monetary resources of our company—it's more than a goldmine... it's like a magic goldmine. We can even create money out of thin air if we wanted to—offer them a gazillion trillion *Krapware* "bonds."

**WOMAN**

Wake up, Adam. We *have* to kill them. The living messiah *has* to die, and there shall be *no* Easter. *Think* about it. We've come *this* far. We have *everything* to lose. We *have* to kill.

**MAN**

I... I don't want—

**WOMAN**

You have no choice.

*The OLD LADY stewardess pushes the cart to them. The cart appears to be full. Apparently, none of the passengers seem to want this first-class snack. She holds up the crème brûlée in a clear bowl.*

**OLD LADY**

*(Perky voice.)* Crème brûlée? You know you want it. You can't resist the temptation. You have it in you. The infernal craving, the dire lust, the sheer, utter, *raw instinctual* want for it. *(Solemn serious, slightly menacing voice. Eerie.)* You have no choice.

**WOMAN**

You have no choice.

**MAN**

I... I have no choice.

*The OLD LADY puts a wilted rose in MAN's hair and hands him the crème brûlée. All lights fade, including woman's and OLD LADY's—but, keep the MAN's light and MARILYN's light on for an instant longer, and then:*

*Sudden blackout. Curtain. Intermission.*

Scene 13: Paris, As If In A Dream

*Paris, seaside. Multimedia projector of a beach in the background with crashing waves in the distance. Sound of waves lolling, seagulls cawing. The beach is deserted. Between the audience, and the background, but still quite upstage, there stands the ARTIST—surrounded by a few dozen paintings of his on display. The ARTIST is busily working on a new scene. His head keeps looking up from the easel towards EVELYN, in her box. He seems to be painting EVELYN.*

*There seems to be the sound of a solo violin playing a cheerful classical melody.*

*Further downstage, there are garlands of roses adorning the windows of vintage little shops. However, the audience sees only the windows of these shops, i.e., the glass and logo names of the little shops. The glass of these shops separates the audience from the stage; it is as if the audience is looking out into the streets of memory's Paris from inside these little shops. There is a door on the side. There is a small vintage stair-way built so that MARILYN can easily climb on stage from the audience.*

*MARILYN walks down the center aisle in the audience. MARILYN calls out at the ARTIST, causing a stir amongst the audience, myriad heads turning back, surprised to find a seemingly misplaced actress. (EVELYN disappears, perhaps through a trap-door behind her box.) Simultaneously, a sudden downpour of rain begins on-stage. Thunder, lightning, and all that, if desired. MARILYN runs down the remaining length of the aisle. She rushes to the door, opens it, quickly, to prevent the rain from splashing onto the audience. She enters the vibrant streets of Paris in rain.*

*The paint on the paintings on display has already started to melt. MARILYN looks directly to EVELYN's box:*

### **MARILYN**

She's gone. My sister, she's...

*MARILYN, whose back partially faces the audience, looks at ARTIST hopelessly. The artist turns his easel around for both the audience and MARILYN to see. His painting has captured EVELYN's essence completely.<sup>1</sup>*

### **MARILYN**

(awe-struck) Ave Maria...

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<sup>1</sup> Part that I edited out: A sudden wind sends a smattering of paper flying in the wind, upwards towards the top of the stage. A bright light comes from above, drawing the audience's attention. The painting is reflected sky-wards, so the image looks like a miracle in the sky.

**ARTIST**

She lives in you.

*Blackout.*

Scene 14: Paris, Real

*The painting of EVELYN has been replaced by a smeared wash of colors—EVELYN has melted like all the others.*

*MARILYN is drenched in rain. ARTIST appears to be slowly suffocating, drowning in his downfall.*

**ARTIST**

She's gone... I'm lost. I'm... All my work—the paintings immortal, now ephemeral! All my life—the belief that my work was greater than me, intrinsically destined to live on beyond me... so that one day, a lone soul in the far distant future might look to my art and find beauty in a world long stripped of such... all my dreams—failed! Everything I've ever lived for—gone, in the blink of an eye, a wash of pitiless rain—a brutal force of nature.

**MARILYN**

Cruel fate. (*Closes her eyes in the rain.*)

**ARTIST**

But soft rain... It is but the natural course of events. Part of a cycle. A periodic occurrence greater than me, greater than any single individual. Weather! *Weather* to wreck the slings and toils of life!

I am but a mere man. No more favored by the gods than any other. There is no such thing as fate. It was all a silly misconception. It was just man's arrogance—*my* arrogance. That I, out of the countless billions of others, would be singled out, "bestowed the gift of the gods." Who am I to make such a claim? No, not I. I am but a mere man.

A mere man subject to the natural course of events. A force of nature beyond my control, beyond any man's. A mere man. That I, too, am part of the cycle. I, too. (*begins to walk towards the crashing multimedia-projector waves, the background deep upstage.*)

**MARILYN**

(*Opens her eyes suddenly.*) Where are you going?

**ARTIST**

Nowhere and everywhere. (*solemnly and grimly at first, then lightly.*)  
To the ocean depths forlorn,  
The place which all men spend their entire lives seeking,  
But doomed to never find it in life. For, it simply can't be found in life.  
I am to find it. (*lightly, matter of factly, casually.*)

*The lights begin to fade, so that blackout occurs when ARTIST is a few steps from background of ocean of crashing waves furthest upstage. It is now completely dark.*

**MARILYN (VOICE)**

Wait, don't leave me. Please...

*Scene brightens. Same street. Dry, bereft of rain, the cycle having halted for a long long time, the garlands of roses have wilted. The paintings are now all gone. Clumps of trash clutter the beach. Shop windows are gone, replaced by cracked shards of broken glass.*

*MARILYN sits huddled on the street, crying. There is a hobo next to her. Instead of introducing HOBO N, this hobo has a distinct name. She is THE CHINESE GIRL.*

**THE CHINESE GIRL**

Why do you cry? There is enough sadness in the world so that you shouldn't need to cry. Sadness is just a constant milieu neverchanging, like a low hum in the air. It's something that all in this era were born aware of. As we grow into this world, we become immune to it. So that sadness, no matter how great, never gets to us.

**MARILYN**

It's not the sadness. It's... it's the tragic beauty. My... my friend, the artist. He... He just killed himself! H-he walked straight into the ocean as if some perverted Kate Chopin character.

**THE CHINESE GIRL**

Sadness, nevertheless. It is not the event that matters but your reaction to it. And, it is sadness.

*A FRENCH STUDENT suddenly walks from stage left to right, as she's shouting into a cell phone. Simultaneously, an American EXCHANGE STUDENT walks from stage right to left, as she's shouting into her own cell phone. There should be pauses, as if each is listening in to the other end of the phone. Their sentences should echo each other, as if the American EXCHANGE STUDENT is translating. But, they've never met each other before. Their paths meet in center stage. They glare at each other, hostile strangers, in need of projecting their rage at any who cross their way. They do not respond when, later, on cue, THE CHINESE GIRL hobo asks them for alms.*

### **FRENCH STUDENT**

Mes données tout allées! Rien gauche. Tout allé! Tous. TOUS! Mon lecteur de disquettes tres stupide. Dans le clignotement d'un oeil, tous mes travaux est détruits. C'est la plus mauvaise chose jamais. Je ne peux pas croire ceci! Je NE PEUX PAS croire ceci! Ceci ne se produit pas! Je NE PEUX PAS LE CROIRE!

### **EXCHANGE STUDENT**

My data's all gone! Nothing's left. Everything's gone! All. ALL! My stupid hard disk drive. In the blink of an eye, all my work is destroyed. This is the worst thing ever. I cannot believe this! I CANNOT believe this! This isn't happening! I CANNOT BELIEVE IT!

### **THE CHINESE GIRL**

Of frozen silhouettes—  
The semblance of a nun  
About to step out of her cloister—  
Doomed never to do so.  
The sudden explosion of Vesuvius.  
Pompeii, its citizens become  
Statues of ashes,  
Personalities destroyed,  
Memories forgotten,  
Tasks eliminated:  
Lives immediately annihilated.  
The sudden explosion of the atomic bomb.  
Nagasaki, its citizens become  
Mere shadows on a wall,  
Memories forgotten,  
Tasks eliminated:  
Lives immediately annihilated.  
The sudden realization that my writing is ill fit for the world...  
That I write of a different time,  
An age long dead; an age that hasn't come.  
That I write for a different audience,  
A ghost; the reader who will never exist.  
That I write the words that come to me,  
But I write the words that  
No eyes but mine  
Will ever see...  
That I write the words that I believe are true:  
I write what I see, and I write...  
With a terrible haunting:  
The sudden knowledge that my stories are to become embalmed,  
Their brains torn out of their story skulls,  
Their eyes stabbed blind unto darkness eternal—  
Beyond story,  
The beating heart in its core,  
Still pumping, still struggling to

Circulate ichor to a body,  
Essence too quickly drained.  
Organs taken out of a living, breathing, being,  
To be stored in urns, mere chamberpots—  
The pieces of my stories,  
Mummified alive in memory,  
Their story souls screaming,  
I, unable, to do anything about it.  
My stories become mere relic,  
Forgotten before they're known,  
My words ephemeral,  
Lost in the midst of a history no one knows.  
Like Pompeii... Like Nagasaki... Like my abandoned works...  
For a writer such as I has no place in the world.  
And, bereft of my passion, I am wounded,  
Having willfully sacrificed my writing,  
I live now at the mercy of the world—  
*(Bows down to beg the streetwalkers for coin.)*  
The alms of others whom the gods  
Looked not upon,  
The pity of others who were  
Never cursed with the Gift,  
The disgust of others  
Who will never understand  
The meaning of sacrificing one's talent,  
Of choosing to live in the world,  
But without a means to live.  
*(Holds out begging hat to empty air. The streetwalkers have already exited.)*

### MARILYN

Why—why are you telling me this?

### THE CHINESE GIRL

To help you accept the sadness all around. So that no matter what happens—even if they tell you you're just dreaming, even if they take away your poems, even if you lose it all, even if *you* find that your dreams are not to be, were *never* to be, even if you have very little time left in the world to discover it—you will not lose... You will not die. You will live. You will live on.

*MARILYN has tears in her eyes.*

*Lights fade.*

### THE CHINESE GIRL

The poetress eternal.

*Blackout.*

Scene 15: Crucification

*Lights fade on so that downstage becomes visible first before upstage. MARILYN stands downstage, her back to the audience. She gazes up at the many empty windows of a tenement tower in Paris. THE CHINESE GIRL stands besides her.*

**MARILYN**

But, what if I sacrifice it completely? That I were no longer to prostitute my talent. Give back the gift of the gods. Shed my distinction divine, let myself fade into the world so that I may live in it.

**THE CHINESE GIRL**

Then it is a living death that you would live in. Your core torn out by your own free will, the part of you that defines you forever lost. As if a soulless body, you will wander the earth seeking the essence you know exist—existed—but which you have not, which you have become forlorn to. Day in and day out, the minutes of your life will blend together so that you cannot tell the difference between night and day, the years will fly by, and the emptiness within you will eat at you, gnaw at you with the lust of voraciousness oblivion, until you, too, become nevermore. Child, you cannot give back the gift of the gods!

**MARILYN**

I don't believe you. I believe in free will, that the Fates are not cruel!

**THE CHINESE GIRL**

*(Gravely.)* You cannot reject yourself. Observe:  
I hereby free myself of my nature. I return my benison from the gods, to the gods, my way with words, mine no longer. I release myself from this life—

*A HOMELESS POET runs charging in. With a look of divine rage, he accuses THE CHINESE GIRL:*

**HOMELESS POET**

You wretched witch. Your infernal words. Your...  
Celestial lies: false hopes, you wrought in me,  
Ones that lifted the grayness of the world,  
Brought back wonder and a fast will to live,  
But ones that had me fast trapped in a cage—  
A world not quite the real. Machinations,  
Yours, to have fooled me so, that I believed,  
That I had my hopes butchered, sautéed, and  
Served a la carte to the deadliest foe:  
I went out into the world with my words,  
And I discovered that the world wanted  
Not my words, none of it. I, too, ill fit,  
Hypnotized by your infernal spell, I  
Stood nude before the world, and I let them  
Sully my verses, my body helpless.

*(Have some sort of Gothic music playing in the background scored in sync with HOMELESS POET'S speech and climaxing in his forthcoming actions.)*

### HOMELESS POET (CONT'D)

Everyone and no one, the blind masses,  
They destroyed me. And, you were the one who  
Told me to share my poetry with the world.  
Even when you yourself already knew.  
Grim fate ahead of me. Exactly yours.

Vendetta, I swore in name of the soul  
The world has stolen from me, the path which  
You pushed me down towards. The one which ends  
(*HE pulls out a dagger. Stabs THE CHINESE GIRL in the heart.*)  
Now! (*HE pulls out a gun & shoots himself in the head.*)

### THE CHINESE GIRL

A dagger to the heart, the gods' response to my presumptuous return of the gift I cannot give  
back. This life no longer mine, the instant I let go of *it*, the talent mine no longer... I reincarnate.  
(*Dies. Silence follows; end of Gothic music.*)

### MARILYN

My eyes do deceive me. This cannot be.  
Deus ex machina, I do not believe.  
It is all just a big coincidence...  
(*Cries, whimpers, hands over face.*)

*A solo light aglow from the center window on the  
top level of the tenement tower. The sound of a  
music box, the notes of wonder. The silhouette of a  
woman comes into view in the window. The window  
curtains are unfurled; the shadow turns into a nude  
woman who looks like EVELYN. MARILYN unfurls  
her hands and slowly looks up.*

### MARILYN

Eve... Eve Lyn?

*The woman who looks like EVELYN does not  
respond. The woman disappears momentarily and  
returns with a wire-hatched trash can filled to the  
brim with pieces of torn paper. She dumps the paper  
out of the window. The pieces snow down as if a dry  
rain. MARILYN is covered with the frost of torn  
poetry.*

### MARILYN

Evelyn!

*The woman still does not respond. Instead, another window in the tenement tower is aglow with light. Another woman who looks like Evelyn comes to that window. And yet another window comes aglow with light; and yet, another woman who looks like Evelyn comes to the window. The silence of the moment ends when every single window is aglow with light and the image of a woman who looks like the nude Evelyn. All at once, the women each raise wire-hatched trash cans filled to the brim with pieces of torn paper, and they dump it all outside their windows. A blizzard of torn poetry rains on MARILYN. (Gregorian chant fades in.)*

*MARILYN's arms are outstretched, and she stands in the shape of a human cross. She stands deathly still for a moment, and soon, she is covered by a snow of torn poetry.*

*She moves, suddenly, then holds out her arms towards the sky above the tenement tower. As the snow unsettles, it becomes evident that her wrists are bleeding in stigmata. She cries out, not in pain, but in an immense joy.*

*Momentarily, as the Gregorian chant climaxes, she falls to the ground. She lies deathly still.*

*Real snow rains down on her to signify the passage of time. MARILYN becomes covered in snow.*

*POLICE 1 and POLICE 2 come in.*

**POLICE 1**

Stigmata.

**POLICE 2**

Another?

**POLICE 1**

Aye. But, of no worries, dear partner, mine.  
She is merely an urchin of the world.  
Her death, an end to the constant pain of  
Her assembly line life, bereft of core.

*Blackout. Smokescreen, if used, clears.*

Scene 16: Stark Reality

*Lights brighten to the dim twilight of a dilapidated alley. A huge dumpster sits centerstage. There is just the scenery: the luridness of the alley, its forlornness, its lifelessness. No motion on stage for several moments. Absolute silence.*

*A single wilted rose hangs in the air, then falls from above into the dumpster. A wind befalls a smattering of torn poetry. A dry snow falls.*

*Suddenly, there's the sound of a rasping gasp, then a choking cough. MARILYN wakes up in a dumpster in the alley outside her tenement tower.*

*MARILYN's head peeks up from the front side of the dumpster. She rises. It becomes evident that there is a "REPOSSESSED" notice taped onto her. She falls.*

*Silence again. No motion. The world sits still in anticipation. The multimedia projector suddenly blares to life, shedding a surreal light.*

*The projector tells a story of the events preceding this bereft of words:*

*MARILYN enters through the window from the emergency staircase. She makes a few staggering steps to her front door. Bending down, she lifts the mat to find that there is no wad of emergency cash stowed beneath. She staggers to the middle of her room. She looks under the floorboards, but she cannot find her poetry. She backs away in horror. She falls to the floor.*

*MARILYN lies unconscious in a heap in the middle of her evacuated room. MARILYN's landlord finds her sprawled on the bare floor. Landlord tapes a "REPOSSESSED" notice on MARILYN's chest. He lifts her in his arms. He carries her out of her room, through her window. He carries her out into the night.*

*On top of the world, he stands with a look of dire apathy. MARILYN stirs in his arms, and he lifts her over the edge of the metal-frame staircase. He drops her. MARILYN falls, landing in the dumpster.*

**MARILYN**

Darkness, darkness, all around. It is cold,  
A cold beyond any, a piercing ice  
That freezes the marrows in my bones, kills.  
The lone light in the distance forlorn shines,  
Beckons me away from Eternal Moor:  
As if a tragic butterfly, flutters  
In the sky, flies to a glow unnatural,  
Not the sun, as fool Icarus might have,  
But the light of an alleyway bar sign.

Bereft of money, identity, hope.  
The light of “The Styx” is my only dope.

*MARILYN walks into the light of “The Styx.”*

Scene 17: Strip Bar III

*Lights on in the strip bar. Dim. It’s after-hours, thus the emergency-lights are on. The BAR BOSS walks out of the door marked “BOSS.” He has a bottle in his hands, but its top is sealed on, and the precision of his walk makes it obvious that he hasn’t started drinking yet. He sits down in the midst of a bunch of gathered strippers. He sets the bottle down. He looks at MARILYN, who stands a distance apart from the crowd.*

**BAR BOSS**

Maria.

**MARILYN**

Charon.

**BAR BOSS**

Where you been?

*MARILYN is silent.*

**BAR BOSS**

*(Impatiently.)* I asked, where you been? *(He pauses too briefly for a response. Thunderous boom:)* MARIA, WHERE YOU BEEN?

**MARILYN**

(*Non-chalantly.*) College.

**BAR BOSS**

(*Bursts into lewd laughter.*) Nah, you ain't gonna lie to me. I know where you been. And it ain't college. Nah, you ain't the type. You been gone sinnin' like the slut that you are—you been writing and you been idle dreamin'. You been bad, an' I know it all.

**MARILYN**

I went out into the world to learn—

**BAR BOSS**

I heard 'bout them poetry readings uptown at the Heavens. Yeah, I heard 'bout em. You prancin' around to some boor-jersey name like "Marilyn Holloway" an' pretendin' like yo someone you ain't. An' that damn trash you been lettin' outta your mouth, the gutter poem you called "Evelyn." Yeah, I know all 'bout that. Hell—I even know that you got boo'ed an' then thrown outta the Heavens for readin' that shit out loud.

**STRIPPER 1**

Girl, you read poetry out loud? Crazy. You know shit like that ain't supposed to be read out loud.

**BAR BOSS**

Quiet, you. I wasn't done. So you left us all o'a sudden last time—right in the middle of our busiest night jus' so you could go out into some damn café an' read shit like that out loud. Hell, Maria, who do you think you are? (*Pause.*) Who the damn fuck do you think you are? You leavin' us all of a sudden, embarassin' my establishdishment like that, an' then comin' back in as if the whole damn event never happened. (*Pause.*) Who the damn fuck do you think you are?

**BAR BOSS**

You think you're some sort of poet? You think you're some kinda writer? You think you're some sorta modern Shakespeare? You think that? You really honestly seriously fuckin' do? You damn foolish idiot. Nah, you're just some useless git who'd waste my time with words. You some dumb wanna-be dreamer, goin' for what's gotta be the world's stupidest dream, prancin' around goin', 'I wanna be a writer. O-oh, I wanna be a writer.' Why you's nothin' but some dumbshit fickle slut!

*MARILYN turns away and walks towards the exit, struggling to keep her composure.*

**BAR BOSS**

You's always comin' back, an' you's always leavin' early—thinkin' you'd be flyin' off to the Heavens. Dumb git, well you know what? I own the damn Heavens. An' honestly, it's a dumpshit. Imma gonna make it into a strip bar just like I did this one. Yeah, you know? This place usedta be a café, with all 'em dumb boor-jersey idiots sippin' tea and talkin' 'bout shit like how fate rules a person an' there's no damn free will. Yeah, so I'd show 'em free will. How 'bout I kick 'em all out, dump 'em outta Heavens, straight into The Styx. Yeah, it'd be a strip-bar uptown. Imma gonna make money.

*MARILYN leaves, closes door.*

**BAR BOSS**

*(Mutters.)* Idiot git. Damn slime. Too sissy an' without a backbone. Fickle as quicksilver.

*Fade into blackout, with lights dimming out in a circle around BAR BOSS; lights stay on BAR BOSS for a moment, then blackout.*

Scene 18: Silent Exit

*MARILYN is sobbing alone in the alley. It is dark. The light of the bar has been no solace to her.*

*A slice of light cuts across the darkened alley. The side door of the bar opens. STRIPPERS 1-4 file out.*

*STRIPPER 1 goes up to MARILYN, hugs her. The other strippers except STRIPPER 2 come close.*

**STRIPPER 1**

We're born into this life. We do what we gotta do...

**STRIPPER 3**

You oughtn't let Boss Charon's words get to you.

**STRIPPER 4**

Aye, you really shouldn't let him get to you. After all, we're sirens. *(Gestures at their outfits—uniform, the bare claddings of sirens.)* Our lurid beauty mesmerizes, attracts, and we go beyond Medusa. Our hearts are of stone, and thus we do not let the possibility of nostalgia get us. We're not sissies who turn men into stone. We enchant men with our allure, and we lure them off, send them falling down some deep, sharp, chasm. We let them die without pity. We care naught for men. We care not for this world. We are of it, and yet we are apart. We are...

**STRIPPER 3**

As ourselves. Even if we had stone statues of men we conquer, we'd shatter each and every single one. No regrets.

**STRIPPER 4**

Every man falls prey to our trap. His arrogance sends him sprawling helpless into our bosoms, the deadly fangs, the eye of the tiger. He gains a false sense of command, as he rides the wild stallion—and he thinks, for a moment, that he's tamed the beast, gained control of a passion stronger than his will ever be. And, he lets us into his heart. He lets us tear away a part of him. Secretly, in the dark. The more he comes to us, the more of him we gain. And, piece by piece, we gather him up. We devour him, core and all. We savor him, then we spit him out. It is onto the next course, that we go. On and on. It is our way. Our way...

**STRIPPER 1**

We do as we do; we are wont to do what we do. We're here because we got nowhere else to be.

**STRIPPER 4**

But, it is with a purpose, all this. Yes, a purpose. A lust. An infernal desire *not* for pleasures of the flesh, but for the souls of men. It is our secret vendetta against the world that's cornered us so, condemned us to this work of women. The power-hungry man returns home, relaxes, lets go, knowing that he's made the world in his image—that women are in the grungy pits, striving as if cockroaches for dimes and nickels, that the woman he pins beneath him is helpless, a slave of his every command—only to find that that very woman owns every single piece of him. Slave becomes master, and she devours him as if a piece of ugly meat—that is the essence of our task, the greatness and the pettiness all wrought together, one big sticky ball of the world's kismet and desire. *This* is why you should not let his words get to you. You chose this path because you wanted to step out from the world—yet remain in power in it.

**STRIPPER 3**

And, you have become a well-tempered ghoul. (*Softly*) You know we're trapped down here, but we can still force them to their knees, tear out their hearts, bleed them dry, and make them cry.

**STRIPPER 1**

Girl, your heart's made outta stone. Nay, damn kryptonite. Charon can't break it.

**STRIPPER 4**

Now, stop crying, and pull yourself together! (*Pushes a handkerchief into MARILYN's face.*)

*Silence now. STRIPPER 2, who has been standing a distance away contemplating all this, comes forth. The other strippers make way for her, backing up a distance away from MARILYN. STRIPPER 2 and MARILYN stand face to face. STRIPPER 2 edges close, kisses MARILYN on the mouth sensually. STRIPPER 2 backs a small distance away.*

**STRIPPER 2**

Let me tell you the story of my father.  
He—he was a mafia boss—filthy.  
He ate a human head a day—literally—  
Until his hey day: my arranged marriage  
To his rival, his attempt to bridge our differences  
By joining the two warring families.

But, friend Montague was no friend—  
The opposing power took advantage  
Of our blind trust in them—Now that our two  
Families are *truly* alike, as one.  
They killed him, decapitated him, took his whole  
Head off. My fiance's father ate it.

**STRIPPER 2 (CONT'D)**

That night, the faithless Romeo raped me—  
A boor, a mere moor: a shade of evil  
Darker than the night...

The body of a young man.  
The body of his father.  
Two dislocated souls were found dead by the fountain—  
The grand decoration of my home, no longer.  
A bloody mess.  
I had watched *Him* die, the way I'd expected my father to die.  
To die choking, then sputtering, spewing out  
All the evils of the world—his crimes—  
As the bleeding ligaments of his cannibalistic fetish  
Flow out from him as if a new fount:  
No longer a maiden, I did the very thing I'd  
Despised my father for. I killed,  
Brutally, for no great purpose, no ends  
Other than the petty one, the one I  
Cared for no longer: the family honor.

The next day I found myself failing in the Woods.  
Perishing on the Hills, on my knees, head to cry out to Heaven.  
I realized it was too late.  
I couldn't go back.

I went into the city,  
The maiden no longer.  
I went into the city,  
And I let myself die.

I became what I am:  
The maiden-crone to sell my soul  
To live days of hellish hurt,  
To live nights of hellish sin.

I accepted the punishment  
For a crime I cannot undo,  
For the evil in my blood,  
The heritage I've run away from.

*Lights fade out.*

*Stripper 2 is replaced by the Old Lady dressed in  
Stripper 2's outfit.*

*Lights on.*

**OLD LADY**

And I grow old doing my job,  
My punishment eternal,  
The work of soulless women  
Who have naught left but their bodies.

*Lights fade out.*

*The Old Lady is replaced by Stripper 2.*

*Lights on.*

**MARILYN**

That wasn't your father's story. It was yours.

**STRIPPER 2**

Is it? It's my own tale, all right. My quest for sense and meaning in life through self-imposed punishment. It's a path that's been lived by the pious. The flagellants. The monks in Kiev who bury themselves in the earth to resist... But, I am far from holy, and thus I will stop deceiving myself in life. There is no longer a point to my living a life of self-punishment...

But... it's also your story. I'd let you think about it while I die. I've finally earned enough to buy it on the streets. 10 ounces of Potassium Chloride.

**STRIPPER 3**

KCl? You're lacking electrolytes in your body? Girl, ever heard of Gatorade?

**STRIPPER 1**

**STRIPPER 4**

The death row injection? The one that convulses your heart, and...

**STRIPPER 2**

Dunno and yes, but I'd pass on Gatorade. KCl's going to be my new hero. You see... I've decided to quit this mortal coil, and... I'd like to do it the hardest possible way. (*Quietly, a whisper to herself, as she injects herself with KCl. She purposefully misses a vein, injecting directly into her muscle.*) The way that'll hurt for forever.

**MARILYN**

But, you don't deserve it! You...

*STRIPPER 2's eyes bulge. Body convulses. She is beginning to suffer a slow, extremely, painful death.*

**MARILYN**

The poison enters: it flows unto her essence.  
It works its way against her life,  
It squirms through her body  
By way of her founts of ichor,  
Her bloodstream turned unfaithful  
To deliver not pabulum,  
But a killing force.

As if the great wooden horse,  
That fell a mighty citadel,  
The poison worms its way through her,  
A self-imposed punishment,  
So she says...  
To destroy, purely to destroy...  
Utterly to destroy, to wreck  
What could have been great—

**STRIPPER 2**

*(Dying breath:)* To topple an empire,  
End the legacy of a family no longer,  
To escape cruel fate once and forever.  
I—

*STRIPPER 2 falls to floor.*

*STRIPPER 1 crosses herself.*

*STRIPPER 3 prays.*

*Stripper 4 turns away.*

*MARILYN cries.*

*Long silence.*

**MARILYN**

A life. Merely a life. Ephemeral. To have life to live and not wish to live it... It's...  
It's the same mistake I've made... Oh... But now, it's too late... *(Freezes between STRIPPER  
2's fallen body and EVELYN's image.)* She's dead.

**STRIPPER 4**

I... I have to leave. This place *really* isn't for me. I dropped out of my English Lit major to fight  
against male chauvinism and to see the world, but this... This *isn't* the world—it's a reality too  
concentrated, it's too pure yet too impure. I-I can't describe it. It's... I gotta leave.

*STRIPPER 4 leaves. STRIPPER 1 and 3 remain huddled together. MARILYN stands apart from them. STRIPPER 2's body still on floor.*

**MARILYN**

I... I, too, have to go. I need to find her.

**STRIPPER 3**

W-who?

**MARILYN**

My sister. Eve-Lyn. *(She begins to leave.)*

**STRIPPER 1**

W-wait!

**MARILYN**

Yes?

*STRIPPER 1 draws MARILYN close. Quickly, STRIPPER 1 draws out a dagger. Slices MARILYN's palm, and then her own. STRIPPER 1 presses her palm against MARILYN's.*

**STRIPPER 1**

We are blood sisters. Bound together. Fates intertwined. You cannot defy fate—you cannot defy this life. You cannot deny reality. Girl, you gotta get real!

**MARILYN**

*(Horried.)* I have AIDs.

**STRIPPER 1**

*(Silent for a while, solemn.)*

I, too.

*MARILYN runs out. Lights fade on Strippers 1&3.*

Scene 19: Escape, the Artist Condemned

*MARILYN is one of many people of tattered rags aboard a large dilapidated ship. It is a convict ship, for runaways, deserters, and the blacklisted—artists who do not belong in this world. Again, she is easily spotted because she is the only person with rosy cheeks, a natural complexion on her face. Everyone else has grey complexions.*

**HOBO 2**

*(Looks out into the sea from the edge of the ship.)* Oh, I go into the world with hopes that I might be able to paint again. *(Turns towards the audience and HOBO 1.)*

**HOBO 1**

And I, that I might be able to write again. The luxury of... words... words... words of my own.

**MAN**

And I, to mourn the lost of my brother.  
A man such as he, a world such as this.  
He could not exist in this world, alas.  
And I... I did not help make it easy.

**MARILYN**

But... you lived off him.

**MAN**

Yes, and now I have lost my sustenance.  
He died a tragic death. And, I let him...  
killed him...

**HOBO 1**

It is a tale of fighting Gemini.  
Two twins, alike in genes, but unlike in  
Disposition: one an artist, and the  
Other, fated to become a man of  
Wealth, not of his, but of those he'd stolen.

Brother, the artist, grew up in pure bliss,  
For he saw color in the greyest world,  
Breathed life into arid grunge fields of death.  
He made the world in his image, with  
Paint derived from his ichor, thus his world.

Brother, the other, grew up neurotic.  
He desired the thing he could not have:  
An essence he'd sacrificed to his lust:  
Talent, the stuff of IPO's success.  
He scoured the world to devour all talent.

**MAN**

*(Expression degrades from neutral remembering to horror.)*  
He was innocent. Completely so. He...  
He cared not for all the money in the  
World. He cared only for his art, and he'd...  
He'd merely been painting, when they caught him.  
Completely innocent, completely so.

### MAN (CONT'D)

It was the first painting of his that reflected not the world made in the image in his mind, but the world as itself. The painting of the slaughter. The sheer realism embedded in mere brush strokes. The semblance and essence of the moment—immortalized for all time by way of a painting. An image of horror, blood, and gore. Of innocence lost, the children fallen, mulled over by a force greater than death, a malevolence far greater than life.

It was a day of history. June 4, 1989. Tiananmen Square. I was there negotiating a business endeavor that would have secured us the unpaid labor of thousands of little hands—the dear children of big businesses. My brother, he was there as a streetside vagabond. An observer with overgrown hair, faraway eyes, and a face too sun-burnt to reveal his racial identity. He painted with the strokes of a demigod; he rendered truth on paper with a talent too divine.

Although, through cameramen who sacrificed their lives for that of truth's, the gist of the massacre lived on to horrify the world, my brother's truth did not. Nor did he...

After those enslaved by the government cleaned up the streetside gruel made of the once-bodies of college protesters too idealistic, my brother's truth fell prey to the wrong eyes. The same malevolence that had sent the tanks against the children became the ones to decree his fate.

### HOBO 1

Brother, the Artist, painted the world's truth,  
For no audience, other than himself  
And his great insatiable nature,  
To let his paintings devour him, always.

But, in Darker Circles, his vision failed:  
He could not recast Hell as Heaven, and  
His brush fell prey to the truth of time,  
The essence of the moment he could not  
Undo, redraw in his own mind's image.

They took him for a heretic, a fool  
Naïve enough to render truth by paint,  
Image so the crime to humanity,  
As a piece of art too realistic  
To let pass the eyes of judgment nigh.

### MAN

The Chinese government official put in charge of his “hearing” was a master sadist. They called him “Bob.” It was rumored that he was schooled in the ancient arts, long forgotten, left behind for a darker time no one cared to remember—the torture rituals of a different dynasty, one where torture was the only key to truth that can save entire cities from siege. In those times, the precise art of inflicting just the right amount of pain was merely a means to a noble end—the sacrifice of the well-being of a certain individual in return for the livelihood—and life—of entire cities.

But, in this era, *that* art of truth became the art of lies—the art of snuffing a man, memorably.

**HOBO 1**

Bob, the master sadist, had witnesses  
In the cruel trial of brother, the Artist.  
He wanted no one to forget the scene.  
He wanted to make sure they know  
The immense, undeniable power  
That was synonymous with government.

He showed those gathered the second sight  
Of brother, the Artist, and those there saw  
The immense, undeniable power  
Wrought in the form of abject truth eschewed  
In his painting. And, although they saw the  
Hand of god, in his strokes, they feared for him.

**MAN**

Bob, the master sadist, tortured my twin...

**HOBO 1**

*Heartless, merciless, cruel beyond all hope:*  
First, he announced that the heretic's hands—  
*Unkempt, soiled, foul traitors to the nation—*  
The tool that wrought libel to the nation—  
Were to be chopped off, fed to the mongrels.

*Heartless, merciless, cruel beyond all hope:*  
Next, he announced that the heretic's mouth—  
*Unkempt, soiled, foul traitors to the nation—*  
The tool that would allow him to speak, scream—  
Was to be knit tightly shut, forced closed, hence—

*Heartless, merciless, cruel beyond all hope:*  
The heretic's eyes, from which he sees world—  
The light from his eyes, which guides his gone hands—  
*Unkempt, soiled, foul traitors to the nation—*  
The tool from which an artist sees and draws—  
Was to be put out forever darkness.

**MAN**

They made me do it. Yes, yes... They made me....

**HOBO 1**

Bob, the master sadist, unplugged champagne,  
The honors passed to his brother's keeper,  
Brother, the other, was given the task:  
He plunged the opener into brother's  
Eyes. First one, and then the other.

**MAN**

It was for the sake of international diplomacy. It was for the purpose of longevity—of my company, my life.

It was either me or my brother.

I had no choice.

**HOBO 1**

Little balls of blood-soaked pain fell to the  
Floor, from the ends of champagne openers,  
Twisted metal unto darkness divine,  
And brother, the artist, could not cry out,  
For his mouths were sealed, by decree of Bob.

His sight lost, his life became one final  
Blazing instant of infinite pain, and  
Then Bob laughed in an ugly, ugly glee.  
He motioned for the blade to come crashing,  
Crashing down on the life of an artist.

And, all became darkness, forever more.

**MAN**

They let me go because they'd already killed me. I'd died when my brother died—I had lived off his talent. I'd lost my source of sustenance, and my time became limited.

But, I adapted. I found other sources of talent, other minds of greatness to devour, whilst fine-tuning the art of raising a corporation unto that of a worldwide enterprise—by means of legal destruction of all competitors. I lived off these occasional flashes of brilliance, like a vampire I depended on them—I lusted for great minds, and I sucked them dry, then left them to die, a pile of dust, useless, essence drained.

And hence I live, a life, but not much of one. A living death, the consequences of my great betrayal, forever mine to repent for. And I, devoid of free will, a puppet of the fates, too cruel.

*Blackout, spotlight leaving MAN a moment later.*

Scene 20: The Siberian Train

*MARILYN is aboard a train. She holds a large folio close to her chest. A MANIAC sits across from her.*

**MANIAC**

You hold that folio to you as if it were the dearest thing in your life.

**MARILYN**

Yes, it holds the most precious jewels of my life... my poetry.

**MANIAC**

Poetry, ha! The direct route to starvation and grief. Quit it. Go out and get a real job.

*MARILYN smiles, but does not respond.*

**MANIAC**

*(Beat. Maniac, talent-lust glint. Holds out gun.)* I would have that folio of yours. I would take it and claim it as *mine*.

**MARILYN**

I would choose poetry rather than life...

**MANIAC**

Then, that shall be it. *(He shoots her.)*

*There is now a gaping wound in her portfolio. Blood oozes out. MARILYN lifts the folio onto her side. It becomes evident that MARILYN is not bleeding. Only her poetry is.*

*The bullet does not penetrate the thousand sheets in MARILYN's folio. (The folio is as if a shield in front of her.) Her poetry saves her.*

*The train speeds by a frozen chasm.*

*MARILYN drops her dead poetry into the chasm.*

*MANIAC screams.*

*Silence, then the MANIAC recomposes himself. He plans his new mode of attack:*

**MANIAC**

Why do you write? To be remembered? Ha! You know it's all a mind-op right? The whole thing of being "remembered" as a part of "history."

It's a conspiracy amongst the historians—they who *rewrite* history. They who are lacking in all things in the realm of talent—thus, they choose not to live in the present, but delve into the past, unto other lives, greater lives. And, if the greatness does not blind them, they may salvage it—to bring to the present of a future era the semblance of your existence. *If* they like you, *if* some decomposed undergrowth in the jungle likes you—and if this foliage chooses to waste his life on studying yours—then, perhaps, you might be remembered.

**MARILYN**

*(Close to tears)* Great men have died as if trees falling alone in a lifeless forest—their greatness ephemeral, not known to a soul after their passing, if even in life. But I... I care not that lesser knaves outwit me in the memories of forever. I... I care only that I have lived a life—a life worth living.

**MANIAC**

Understand that your fate rests on the whim of lesser souls. There is *no* greatness if they can't see it. There is *nothing* if they *choose* to forget you. *Nothing.* *(Pause. Train stops.)* Good day.

*MANIAC exits.*

*MARILYN waits a moment before leaving the train.*

*Blackout.*

Scene 21: Train Station

*MARILYN steps into a Siberian train station. The scenery in the distance is bleak, of grey snow. Nearby, amongst a throng of station people—the ARTIST, the MAN, the STRIPPERS, the BAR BOSS, everyone, though in east European/Siberian costume—there is a PUNISHER (a beheader) and his victim.*

**MARILYN**

I have lived a life worth living. And I *will* find my twin sister... *(coughs a racking fit, blood.)* And, I *will* find my twin sister... *(coughs.)* That radiant magnificence... which *has* to exist... How can I—

*PUNISHER walks by with wheeled guillotine. The victim to be beheaded looks like Evelyn. One of his incoherent ravings about the victim to be beheaded becomes clearly audible:*

**PUNISHER**

A mere mortal, as reality shall prove!

*MARILYN does not notice the PUNISHER & victim.*

**MARILYN**

—have pictured her otherwise? *(Utmost conviction, but turn to audience with lost expression on face.)* She *must* exist! *(Beat.)* And, I am finally here, in the midst of the snowiest, most pristine mountains, to find her!

*Blackout.*

# AVE MARIA

## ACT 3: Life's End

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Scene 0: The Lost One III

EVELYN

My name is Evelyn, and I... (*She collapses.*)

Blackout.

Scene 1: The Road to Paradise

Smokescreen.

MARILYN ascends a snowy hill. She wears a heavy black cloak, the darkness of which contrasts with the pristine white of the hill. She holds a giant folio.

There's a black box, the size of a coffin standing on end, at the top of the hill.

Something strange is going on. It seems that the more she climbs, the taller the hill becomes. (Perhaps, have a set with a growing hill. The smokescreen would blur the mechanical details.)

Suddenly, she can't climb anymore. She collapses onto the snow. She does not move.

Instead, the multimedia projector projects an image of her semblance climbing out of her body, as if her soul ascending. (The projector might project this faded version of Marilyn on the smokescreen or somewhere in the set. Preferably, the projection should intersect Marilyn's real body on stage, so that it appears that her spirit is "floating out" from her body.)

Marilyn's spirit walks up the hill. The hill becomes a regular hill, and it does not continue to grow taller for Marilyn's spirit. Marilyn's spirit reaches the top of the hill. Marilyn's spirit reaches into thin air and takes out a key. She opens the box.

Evelyn appears, as Marilyn's spirit opens the box. Marilyn's spirit takes Evelyn's hand with the hand not holding her folio. She leads Evelyn out into the world.

Evelyn shivers in the cold, as if feeling the harsh bitterness of reality for the first time. Marilyn's spirit takes off her black coat and hands it to Evelyn.

But, Evelyn disappears inside the giant fur coat. (Thus, all this is shown with a multimedia projection directly onto the smokescreen or something similar to create an eerie ghostly effect.)

Marilyn's spirit makes frantic efforts to dig through the pile of cloth of the coat. When it becomes clear that Evelyn's truly gone, Marilyn lets out a scream.

Blackout. Remove smokescreen.

Scene 2: The Earthly Road

MARILYN gets up after having fallen onto the snow. There's a small puddle of blood in the snow. She is NOT holding her folio in her other hand. She continues climbing, each time looking up at the black box at the hill's apex, as if an object of prayer. She falls several times, and each time she falls, she coughs out a fit of blood. A trail of blood follows her, as she haggardly makes her way up the hill.

MARILYN

The black box atop the most pristine mount—
My twin Eve Lyn has to exist... She's here.

MARILYN opens the black box. Evelyn is not inside. There is only a mirror inside the box. (Perhaps the box might actually be a solar-power panel or some sort of refracting telescope in real life.)

Blackout.

Scene 3: Reflection of the World

The mirror reflects the true image of the world: the snowy mountain is not as pristine white as Marilyn's delusional sight has made it to be; instead, it is filled with debris, garbage, and it shimmers with an unkempt gray-greenish shade. The sky is an ugly grey.

MARILYN takes a few staggering steps down the hill, quickly reaching the bottom. She faints.

Grey snow falls on MARILYN. It covers her.

Lights fade out.

Scene 4: They take her

The stage is split into two halves. One half is the mountain, and the other half is that of a charity hospital room. EMS INTERN 1 and 2 lift MARILYN off the snow and put her in a gurney. They carry her across the stage, going seamlessly from Siberian mountain top to that of a hospital room.

MARILYN climbs off the gurney. She steps into the hospital bed, her deathbed, on her own. As she sinks into the bed, the spotlight on the bed darkens.

As the sky across the mountain half darkens, the set begins rotating a quarter turn in the audience's full view. The Siberian mountain disappears by way of some stagecraft magic, and the stage is now completely that of a charity hospital room. Seamless scene change:

Scene 5: The Ghosts of the Charity Hospital Room

MARILYN's bed is further upstage than that of her hospital roommate's. They are separated by a dingy hospital curtain. MARILYN's bed is still in shadows.

Spotlight on MARILYN's roommate's partition. A LITTLE GIRL lies immensely still:

LITTLE GIRL

Mommy? I don't want to die.

The LITTLE GIRL lies all alone in a dark hospital perforation. Her MOTHER comes into view of the audience. MOTHER is silent.

The LITTLE GIRL is too sick to move, but she does not want to lie still:

LITTLE GIRL

There's so much I want to do! I want to go running in the spring rain. I want to go flying on top of a carousel horse in the park, I want to—

MOTHER

Mary, remember what we said about make-belief?

LITTLE GIRL

(Glumly.) Yes.

MOTHER

You must die because you can't live in your dream world.

The LITTLE GIRL whimpers.

MOTHER

It's just real life. Don't be scared. *(She pats the girl cheerily, then exits.)*

The LITTLE GIRL whimpers alone in the dark.

Light darkens on her perforation. Lights brighten on MARILYN's perforation.

Scene 6: Her Deathbed

Fake-ish "Get Well Soon" cards from anonymous nurses scatter across piles of Kleenex spotted with blood on top of a flimsy hospital table.

The OLD LADY, in disguise as a custodian, comes into the room to clean the table. She picks up the balls of blood-covered Kleenex, throws them all into the garbage. She arranges the cards, folding and compacting them, like a bad housekeeper, into a stack.

After clearing the mess, the OLD LADY finds a stack of paper with illegible handwriting. It is evidently MARILYN's work—everything she's torn up and destroyed, let fall into a deep dark gorge in the middle of a Siberian overpass, the surreal album that existed in the pre-climax, where M takes E out of her box, in the world that might-have-been. (Perhaps a multimedia projection can be used to show a close-up of this, with the OLD LADY's gnarled wrinkled hands on top of a pile of paper with handwritten poetry columns.)

Not knowing what to do with the album, the OLD LADY drops it into a Kleenex-filled wire-hatched trash can. The OLD LADY takes the bag out from the trash, ties it up. Takes it with her, as she leaves the room. The lights begin to darken.

MARILYN coughs in a horrid fit, all alone in a darkening partition. The lights do not totally fade out, but freeze for a moment on the coughing MARILYN. A river of blood flows down the hospital bed towards the now-empty wire-hatched trash can.

Then: the lights fade completely out.

Scene 7: Mass Cemetery

The nurses gather around in a field marked for a mass funeral. This particular funeral quickly ends, and they walk three steps to the next grave. This particular quickly ends, and they walk three steps, yet again, to the next.

They stop at MARILYN's open grave. She has a wooden "gravestone," like everyone else. The nurses give their usual fake and hackneyed epithets:

NURSE 1

She was such a sweet girl. So innocent...

NURSE 2

I have only good memories of her.
I've known her for only a day, but she
Is one of god's creatures, and I bless her.

MARILYN walks in from SL. She is dressed all in white, and her rosy complexion has become the grayish drab of everyone else's. She holds a torn piece of paper. Those gathered look at her without surprise. They each hand her a wilted rose. She holds the bouquet of thorns in one hand, while holding the piece of torn paper in the other. She reads her own elegy:

MARILYN

Death by a darkness contracted in tragic innocence... a fall eternal.

As MARILYN finishes, MAN writes the date of her death on her wooden gravestone. (The date is the date of this production.) MARILYN lowers herself into her open grave.

They bury her and leave.

Lights focus on her gravestone.

A requiem of silence, with only a lonesome wind howling, blowing leaves on the fresh mound. The leaves pile up, and there is no trace of her left at all.

~~~ *FIN* ~~~

A Brief Critical Analysis of *Ave Maria*  
THE METHOD TO MY MADNESS  
YOSUN CHANG

The opening scene titled “Exordium” reveals the storyline. Marilyn “wakes up” (to her talent) from an uncaring world. She lives in the unrealistic dream of poetry as salvation. The delusion lasts until she finds herself coming full circle—back to where she starts: a cynical prostitute of her own talent who refuses to believe in her “divine fate,” that words alone could fight against the mass-manufactured natural violence and stagnant depression of the real world.

The first act introduces the unique “experience-style” of the play. Not only does it contain the most poignant scenes of a poetry driven play,<sup>1</sup> it also induces in the reader a sense of feeling trapped. That though Marilyn’s made a decision by her being bound to this world, certainty is rarely hers. Through repetition, the reader relives Marilyn’s semi-certain decision to find her “long lost twin,” several times in the context of the events of her real life. Unfortunately, when certainty becomes finally her’s by way of divine epiphany, the reader finds that no matter what, Marilyn’s fate is sealed, for her HIV test turns positive, and “By this time a decade from now, / [she] will be dead. Yes, as simple as that. / Perhaps sooner, but not later.”

Act 2 creates false hope while building poetic significance by way of “implicit subplots”<sup>2</sup> of various seemingly disjoint but actually quite similar characters. Individual background stories add depth to character personalities. Ultimately, through the proverbial vicarious MOTHER living through her son’s (CHILD) pre-planned financial success, the audience receives verification—via words—of an intellectual commodity they might have already formulated: Marilyn is a prostitute more than by profession, but also in the realm of talent sacrifice. In Marilyn’s dreamlike reality, MAN finds himself trapped in fate. He holds the cure to “the disease that kills the world’s people from within,” but because of his

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<sup>1</sup> (Excerpt from a much longer critical analysis) Crucial to a poetry-driven play are the words and the symbolic meaning of each story aspect. The words drive the play on—the character’s reasoning, his or her motivations and conclusions, are expressed by way of poetry. The degree of difference in a character’s conviction over a personal decision is magnified when the decision is made in context of poetry, than in prose. This is an experimental form of writing that attempts to convey, more completely, the character’s emotional turmoil through words—and poetry always wins against mere prose in this respect. (Why did Joyce and Faulkner have to use “stream of consciousness,” a poetic form of prose, to create their opuses?)

<sup>2</sup> (Excerpt from a much longer critical analysis) The “personalities” of characters are not always evident. Instead, each character is given a thorough background, introduced seamlessly along with the storyline, viz., Marilyn’s self-discovery. This replaces the need for explicit individual character personalities. Why and how, you ask? Think about what you automatically assume when a character talks and acts a certain way—yes, you immediately draw out a mental outline of the character’s actions. You then attempt to formulate a background. If a character talks in slang, uses words like “deal and shoot,” you assume the character’s from the underclass. In my play, I make this background explicit, to give the troupe the freedom of creativity to conjure their own personalities. Just enough of the character’s background is revealed, so there is still room for speculation. But, the background revealed offers food for thought. Essentially, what I’m doing is instigating “implicit subplots,” by way of introducing character backgrounds, whilst simultaneously providing character personalities.

inherently miserly nature, he has no choice but to destroy it.<sup>3</sup> Marilyn then lands in film noir Paris, where she finds the ARTIST the mother's son has become. In a symbolic sweep of destructive rain, Marilyn experiences her first suicide—that of the ARTIST walking into the waters, too reminiscent of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

Later, Marilyn discovers the motivation of the strippers. That though they live living-deaths, they are power hungry and voracious for the spirit of men who come to them—it is a form of revenge they wreck for having been cornered down there in Hades. It is also a vile secondary form of living that is parasitically dependent on MAN, who represents both their exploiter and prey. But, Marilyn finds herself not amongst them—although she shares in their mistake, for having lived a living death, a life not worth living. Marilyn escapes her fellow strippers and their complex degradation, as well as Boss Charon,<sup>4</sup> by fleeing on a modern day raft—a large ship of convicts bound for Europe.

There, in the Siberian mountains of Act 3, Marilyn finds the world to be crueler than in her foreshadowing dream. In the final scenes, where she overhears the MOTHER's conversation with the LITTLE GIRL, and the OLD LADY's subsequent disposal of her work, Marilyn finally comes full circle to the character she starts out as: a disbeliever. She lowers herself into her own grave without knowing the full depths of why she has to die other than the fact that she does not belong in this world and thus must leave it.

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<sup>3</sup> A cut line has MAN attempting to negotiate with WOMAN a non-violent end to AeonGenesis:

**MAN**

But, what if we resell their cure. Steal it. Remake it in our own image—the *KrapSoftCure*—supply it to the world at a rate much faster than AeonGen can ever go at. Eliminate them by way of their own creation.

**WOMAN**

*(Irrked sigh.)* They have the cure locked up in an imperturbable lab. Only the in-group know the way in and they cannot be bribed. We can only destroy them. Believe you me, if I can gain access to their formula, I would—but, they won't sell, and apparently, they've dedicated the bulk of their funding to keeping their secrets secret.

<sup>4</sup> In Greek Myth, Charon is the driver of the one-way raft down the River Styx in Hades.

## Stage and Cast Notes

In general: Evelyn does not necessarily have to be Marilyn's identical twin, as there are various methods to feign the effect of twin-ness. Evelyn's box will always be set at the end of the stage, and any close-ups of her expression may be pre-shot videos of Marilyn's visage. Several instances of Evelyn's reaction to the real world may be further emphasized by the use of the multimedia projection of these pre-shot videos. Moreover, to lessen the X-rated nature of this play, a semi-translucent veil can be made to cover Evelyn's box—so that her features are blurred. Evelyn thus only needs only to look approximately like Marilyn. (Also, Evelyn's eyes will be closed most of the time, as she should be unmoving—as if a statue.)

The following Scene Notes complement each Scene and should be taken into account *in addition* to the Stage Directions in the context of each scene. They are some examples of how scenes might be set up. As always, the set designs are at the discretion of the stage designer.

### Scene 1—Exordium:

Although only the items mentioned in context of the script are required for setting, extravagance is always welcome. (In fact, *please* go “all out!” See “The Divine Purpose of This Play,” especially the bit about “A Black Box Play for Art's Sake—Not for Financial Reasons!”) “Extravagance” here would involve making the room look obscenely dilapidated. Perhaps some holes in the roof, dripping drainage from above. Rats scurrying about dirt-encased holes in the walls. Cracked, blurry window. Cob-webs in corners. Wire-framed bed, mildew-stained sheets. The look of an eternal dirtiness to the room. Ah, and the pieces of torn-poetry, as well as the piece that was intact in the beginning of the play, should be written on the back of random flyers—scratch paper found on the streets, since an impoverished poet *obviously* can't afford to purchase paper!

### Scene 1 (optional appendum):

Although not explicitly needed, there might be a pre-scene before Scene 2. This pre-scene would further emphasize on Marilyn's poverty. A wall covers the stage. An open door shows the inside of her room. The door is one amongst an array of other doors, all closed. Marilyn has some raggy newspapers as a door-mat. Marilyn exists stage left (or right, depending on whichever side has more doors), down an aisle of closed tenement-room doors.

### Scene 2—Before the Bar:

The run-down alleyway and the bar might be designed as a rotating set, with one half being the alleyway and the other half being the bar. The divider is an alley-wall, and there is a doorway on one end, from the alley to the bar. On the other end, there is a metal-frame foldable staircase, leading down from Marilyn's tenement level.

### Scene 3—Strip Bar I:

This is the first scene, where I, the playwright, openly endorse the addition of advertisement in the set. The highest bidder (in the realm of known and hackneyed beer companies, examples: Heineken, Budweiser, etc.) gets to have a giant 4'x13' (or so) banner against the back wall of the set. For more details, please see my “fundraising proposal” in my attached article, “A Black Box Play for Art's Sake—Not for Financial Reasons!”

Act II & III—multimedia projection screen used with discretion, scenes set in a similar film noire atmosphere as that of Act I—you're used to my sets, by now, so I'd trust your interpretation. The stage directions in Act I may be used as reference for interpreting Act II. Evelyn's presence may be either constant or intermittently absent, as per taste, unless otherwise instructed in context.

## A Black Box Play for Art's Sake—Not for Financial Reasons!

So, I write a play that can potentially be a black box play, but seek for it to be otherwise. Some might say that I am deprecating my play, but I say I'm tending to a different sort of Art. Don't get me wrong, though. I see the beauty and art in black box plays—the sheer skilled required of the actors and actresses to get it right. I'm just...

I'm the prodigal writer with aesthetic tastes tending to the exorbitant. If the times were my way, everyone would be speaking in verse unto mind-boggling metaphors. But, that's grown out of style, and I admit myself, that even I find it difficult to read my writs with flavor too ornate. Henceforth (at least in the context of this play, *Ave Maria*), instead of excessively flowery language, I shall go with symbols, both subtle and subconscious occurrences, as well as their manifestation as extraordinary extravagance.

But how? You ask. It's quite simple. Think free TV, free radio, and the free Internet—and, perhaps, the free play? How about including non-intrusive “advertisements” in a play?

A play set in an urban world would naturally involve a variety of commercial brands. *Ave Maria* features a strip bar, among other scenes, where the highest popular beer-company bidder buys half a set wall for a fitting banner. (See *Ave Maria* Stage Notes, Scene 3.) The idea is that because certain setting and stage elements involving popular commercial brand can be substituted with other brands, there is room for media-competition. Enter the ads.

Several mechanisms can be used to heighten the bidding frenzy. In the beer-banner example, things might work like this: The highest bidder gets most, if not all of the half of the back wall reserved for the ad-banner. The next highest bidder, if \$1000 within that of the highest bidder, gets to share part of the ad-wall. If not, then the runner-up gets to have a variety of brand-named beer products displayed in the bar—be it men gurgling down X-brand beer as they watch the strippers, or whatever. The rest are listed as Patrons in the program. The incentive is, quite evidently, to be the prodigal bidder.

Other example of Non-Intrusive Advertisement placing might be scenes involving cigarettes, street-scenes involving different cars, or name-brand clothing.