

the morituri

a play by oliver nowak

**For...your blood.
For...your heat.
For...your Heart.
For...your meat.**

**“Love doesn’t kill you.
You only wish it did...”**

-

* an analogue for this play exists...

Characters

Henry

Joan

Robert

Man

masked-figure in WHITE (WHITE)

masked-figure in RED (RED)

masked figure in BLACK (BLACK)

Setting

Death Valley

Time Period

This happens throughout time...

Stage Set-up

Three areas are visible on stage.

The office: containing a desk w/ swivel-chair, a chair for clients, a fax machine, a speaker phone, files.

The desert: a wide open space in the Valley.

The trailer: a couch, two armchairs, ashtrays everywhere (full), a coffee-table in front of the couch, a window upstage. A mini-fridge underneath the window. The window looks out into the desert. On the mini-fridge, Henry has made a small bar for himself.

Masked Colors

Three actors are wearing flowing robes and gloves. They are masked. The fabric color corresponds to which character they are. No flesh should ever be exposed. They are fully covered.

Act One: Sunrise
part one: Lies

Scene 1

(HENRY sits in his arm-chair and drinks. JOAN stands by the window, looking out and smokes. THEY don't look at each other, keeping themselves pre-occupied with their respective habits. ROBERT sits in his office, silhouetted. HE smokes while looking at seismographs. THREE COLORS are silhouetted in the desert. RED lies in the arms of WHITE. BLACK towers over them, pointing it's left hand, folded into a gun, at them. WHITE is looking up at BLACK. The rumbling sound of jets breaking the sound-barrier nearby, in Panamint, breaks the silence. THE COLORS exit. HENRY, JOAN, and ROBERT notice the rumbling and then return to their original composure. After a few moments, JOAN speaks.)

JOAN

The sun'll rise soon.

(Pause.)

HENRY

Want one?

JOAN

No.

HENRY

What time is it?

JOAN

I dunno. *(Pause.)* Threw out all the clocks when you were passed out.

HENRY

I figger...with those three bottles gone...shit...we been waitin...ohh...a hunderd an three hours.

JOAN

I'd rather they just said you're fucked an get it over with. I don't wanna wait anymore. I wanna do somethin--

HENRY

People gotta make sure. Damn sure. Those kinda tests are serious. That's why--honey you listenin?

(JOAN responds non-verbally.)

HENRY

That's why there's a waitin period. Gives us a chance to see how precious life is.

JOAN

Or how worthless....

HENRY

I like sittin. The waitin don't bother me any.

JOAN

Never did Henry.

HENRY

That's true. Shit.

JOAN

All you did was wait. Or run.

HENRY

Run? Run? I don't remember anytime I ran.

JOAN

No?

HENRY

No.

JOAN

No?! *(Pause.)* You don't have a spine Henry! You didn't have it when you needed it most. Why? Cuz you're nothin but a drunk! An you don't have the guts to be anythin else but a bastard. *(Pause.)* You're soft, an now it's catchin up to ya.

(HENRY drinks.)

HENRY

I get tired easy. Always have.

(Pause.)

JOAN

I hate you.

HENRY

Don't say it unless you mean it, Joanie. It's cruel.

(Pause.)

Henry...?
JOAN

I don't wanna hear it.
HENRY

Henry.
JOAN

I don't wanna hear it! Okay?! *(Pause.)* Now you're just tryin to prove a point!
HENRY

A point?!
JOAN

Joanie--
HENRY

We're sittin here--waitin here--an you think--
JOAN

Can we just drop it?
HENRY

No no no no. You think I just wanna prove a point?! I don't give a fuck about provin no goddamned points! I don't need to prove *shit* to you!
JOAN

All I'm sayin--
HENRY

An you're a fuck for even insinuatn that!
JOAN

(Pause.)

I know you love me. I just wish you'd say it sometimes.
HENRY

My actions say it. JOAN

Well it would help-- HENRY

Do you love your screwdrivers? JOAN

Now what kinda question-- HENRY

Do you love your screwdrivers?! JOAN

See now, that's diff-- HENRY

How can you put me with that? *That.* JOAN

I never said-- HENRY

Henry just shut it and drink you're fucking drink! Okay? Just fucking drink it. JOAN

(Pause. HENRY drinks a few moments later.)

I am not a bastard. HENRY

Jesus Christ!! JOAN

(JOAN stands up.)

Where ya goin? HENRY

I dunno... JOAN

So then stay here. Sit with me.

HENRY

(Pause.) You askin me to stay?

JOAN

I'm sayin you might as well.

HENRY

Why?

JOAN

What else ya gonna do?

HENRY

I dunno you're pissin me off.

JOAN

We're just talkin.

HENRY

Henry: if you're gonna drink, drink! If you're gonna talk, talk! But ya can't do both! You don't have it in ya to do both!

JOAN

Ya wanna sip?

HENRY

No!

JOAN

(HENRY drinks quietly. JOAN walks to the window and looks out. Pause.)

The desert looks beautiful this mornin.

JOAN

What kinda orange juice is this?

HENRY

Barren. But alive. In it's own way. Even in the Valley's salt flats.

JOAN

HENRY

Joanie what kinda orange juice did you get?

JOAN

(Pause.) The expensive shit Henry.

HENRY

Tastin funny...

JOAN

It was in the trunk too long proolly.

HENRY

Why is it tastin funny?

JOAN

(Pause.) I hadda make a stop in Bad Water.

HENRY

Bad Water?

JOAN

Yeah Henry.

HENRY

Out in the middle a the fuckin Valley? With my orange juice?!

JOAN

I needed to bury somethin.

HENRY

(Pause.) Well, now my drink's all fucked up.

JOAN

It was fine before.

HENRY

Fine? Fine?! You call this shit fine?! Here. Taste it.

JOAN

I'm not thirsty.

HENRY

Taste the fuckin drink Joanie!! Taste it! Just so you know!

JOAN

(Quietly.) I'll just have some water. Is that alright?

HENRY

Water.

JOAN

Yeah.

HENRY

Bet that's bad too.

JOAN

Would it matter?

(HENRY drinks.)

JOAN

Didn't fuckin think so. *(She gets water out of the fridge. Pours some into a glass.)* So just keep your fuckin drink away from me.

HENRY

Hey I'm sorry...

JOAN

Will you just drink?! *(Pause.)* Drink goddamnit! It's hard enough without you drinkin!

HENRY

I just...

JOAN

What Henry?! What?!

HENRY

...just wanted to talk.

JOAN

You had time to talk for fifteen fucking years! An now you wanna talk? *(Pause.)* You lost your skill a talkin.

(JOAN crosses to her chair and sits down.)

HENRY

I was a good talker.

JOAN

Once. That's why I married you.

HENRY

I got sick a talkin. Maybe it was the vodka...there were other things, too. You would never say what was in your heart. Three little words. *(Pause.)* Not even on my weddin day.

JOAN

I explained it already Henry.

(Silence.)

HENRY

So what're we gonna do?

JOAN

Wait.

HENRY

What time is it?

JOAN

The sun's risin. That's all I know.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 2

(Same place. Later. Early morning. ROBERT stares at the phone in his hand. Maps are strewn over his desk. HE hangs up. HENRY lays on the couch. A drink is not far away, but it doesn't have any orange juice in it. JOAN looks out the window with her hand on the telephone. SHE has just hung up. Silence.)

HENRY

Well?

JOAN

Well, what?

HENRY

Was that him?

(Pause.)

It was Robert. JOAN

An what he haveta say? HENRY

You need to go in an talk to him. JOAN

(HENRY reaches for his drink and sips.)

He made an appointment for later today. JOAN

(Pause.)

So I have it. It's official. HENRY

He didn't-- JOAN

Doesn't matter if he *said* it! HENRY

Henry I told you-- JOAN

So why the fuck do I need to go see him? HENRY

I dunno. JOAN

(HENRY drinks the rest of his drink down.)

It was your choice Henry. You wanted it. JOAN

(Pause.) I wouldn't be able to live without you. HENRY

I know. JOAN

HENRY
(To himself.) Fuck.

JOAN
It's at 10:30.

HENRY
Wha?

JOAN
The appointment? With Robert?

HENRY
Did he say how long it'd take?

JOAN
I dunno sweetheart. I dunno.

(END SCENE..)

Scene 3

(The office. ROBERT sits behind the desk. HENRY enters. ROBERT, previously speaking on the speaker-phone, turns it off and uses the handset.)

ROBERT
I will. *(Pause.)* That's him now. *(Pause.)* Thank you. Thank you very much. *(Pause.)* It's in the heart of hearts. *(HE hangs up.)*

(ROBERT stands and offers HENRY the chair.)

ROBERT
Please, Henry--is it alright if I call you Henry? I feel like I know you already.

HENRY
Yeah sure.

ROBERT
Make yourself comfortable.

(HENRY sits down. ROBERT sits down. HE pulls out a pack of Player's cigarettes.)

ROBERT

Cigarette?

HENRY

No.

ROBERT

Sorry. I hate these kinds of appointments.

HENRY

I bet.

ROBERT

Yes, well. *(HE smokes.)* Aaahhh.

HENRY

(Pause.) Good?

ROBERT

First one of the day. Tryin to quit.

HENRY

We all gotta die sometime.

ROBERT

True. Some sooner than others.

(Silence.)

ROBERT

Player's. These are my favorite. Once I drove all the way to L. A. just to get a pack. Course I bought a carton. *(Laughs, then gets serious.)* L. A. is not a kind place.

HENRY

Neither is Death Valley.
(ROBERT smiles.)

ROBERT

I won't be here too much longer.

HENRY

Movin?

ROBERT

If everything goes according to plan. But you know how things get fucked up.

Yeah. HENRY

Yes. ROBERT

(Pause.)

So what the fuck is goin on? HENRY

Hmmm. Good question. ROBERT

(HENRY pulls out a flask and takes a sip.)

Smells like Absolut. ROBERT

You can smell that from here? HENRY

I smelled it the moment you walked in. ROBERT

(Pause.) It is. HENRY

Citroen flavor? ROBERT

Of course. It's all I drink. *(Pause.)* How'd you know? HENRY

I've been around. ROBERT

Mmm. HENRY

(HENRY drinks. ROBERT smokes.)

HENRY

So again...

ROBERT

Yes, yes. You're right. Damn right! Well...*(HE searches for a file. HE finds it.)* You were successful.

HENRY

I was.

ROBERT

Yes. The tests proved positive for you. You've contracted the disease. And in all honesty I can't believe you did it. Most husbands would've let their wives die and then try to move on. But you...

HENRY

I love her.

ROBERT

I'm- I'm sorry. It's just...as a doctor...as Joan's doctor...I have to ask: is she worth it?

HENRY

How she got it is nobody's fault. The details don't really make much difference.

ROBERT

Indeed...

HENRY

I can't let her die alone.

ROBERT

No, no. I understand that. It's just...I've never handled a case quite like Joan's. The extraordinary amount of love...

HENRY

I'm her husband.

ROBERT

...yes but...forgive me, Henry, I feel that I have to be blunt about this...the sheer stupidity you show by infecting yourself with Joan's disease is--

HENRY

I took an oath doctor. Till death do us part: ain't that right? Ain't it in there?

ROBERT

Yes. Yes of course. *(Pause.)* Till death do you part...

(End Scene.)

Scene 4

(Later. ROBERT and HENRY look over some papers in the office. JOAN is in the trailer packing.)

ROBERT

These are merely formalities.

(Pause.)

ROBERT

Assisted suicide is a viable alternative, of course.

HENRY

You sayin I can't.

ROBERT

No no. It's not a question of--

HENRY

Cuz I can.

ROBERT

I believe you.

HENRY

I been ready for this day a long time.

ROBERT

I'm sure you're wife has too.

HENRY

My wife?

ROBERT

You both suffer tremendously. The psychological damage must be enormous.

HENRY

I drink.

ROBERT

But you have a history of drinking, no?

HENRY

Keeps me from givin myself to the Valley. *(Pause.)* Sometimes, when I'm sprawled out in the sand...after a heavy night...lookin at all them stars...I'll hear voices... *(Pause.)* Keeps em away.

(JOAN walks to the phone and dials.)

ROBERT

Ever get any treatment?

HENRY

I got my treatment right here. *(Indicates his flask.)*

ROBERT

(Pause.) You're a very interesting man, Henry.

(The phone rings. HENRY drinks. The phone rings again. ROBERT gets it.)

ROBERT

Hello? Dr. Morgen speaking.

JOAN

Is he there?

(JOAN walks to the window and looks out. SHE smokes.)

ROBERT

Yes. He's here.

JOAN

Good.

(Pause.)

ROBERT

Is there anything I can help you with, Mrs. Preston?

HENRY

Is that my wife?

JOAN

I was packing.

ROBERT

(To HENRY.) Yes. *(To phone.)* What? Packing?

HENRY

Tell her I'm gonna be awhile.

JOAN

I'm leavin. Leavin everything behind tonight.

ROBERT

(To HENRY.) Henry hold on. *(To phone.)* You're doin what?

JOAN

I packed all my stuff.

ROBERT

Joan...?

(Pause.)

JOAN

Yes Robert.

ROBERT

You don't need to pack. Where you're--

HENRY

She's packin?!

ROBERT

(To HENRY.) Yes--

JOAN

I-I packed a few things I thought maybe--

ROBERT

Joan, where you're going you won't need anything.

HENRY

What's she doin over there?

(*Pause.*) I'm scared Robert. JOAN

We all are. ROBERT

It has to be quick. JOAN

It will. ROBERT

Quick and painless. JOAN

Doc, is she okay? Does she want me to come home? HENRY

Are you going to be okay? ROBERT

No...yes...I...I dunno... JOAN

It'll be fine. ROBERT

...tell Henry...tell him... JOAN

Can I talk to her? HENRY

...fuck it... JOAN

(*To HENRY.*) Hold on. ROBERT

This'll work right...? JOAN

(*Pause.*)

Of course it will. ROBERT

(Pause.)

See ya later. JOAN

Yeah. *(Pause.)* Bye. ROBERT

(JOAN hangs up, sits on the couch and cries.)

ROBERT
She didn't want to talk to you. *(Pause.)* It's to be expected.

HENRY
Yeah?

ROBERT
She's committing suicide, Henry. It's a hard thing to accept.

(Pause.)

ROBERT
I wouldn't worry about it.

HENRY
Maybe I should pack.

ROBERT
Do you feel the need?

HENRY
No.

ROBERT
It's normal. Really. She may even go so far as to put it in the trunk of her car.

HENRY
Really?

ROBERT
It makes it easier to deal with.

(Pause.)

HENRY

So what else I gotta sign?

(ROBERT takes papers from a file.)

ROBERT

A few things. A last will and testament...

(HE gives him the form.)

HENRY

Never seen this before.

ROBERT

Your wife had them drawn up.

HENRY

(Pause.) Where?

ROBERT

At the, uh...she talked to a lawyer--

HENRY

No, I meant, where do I sign?

ROBERT

Oh! Yes. *(Points to it.)* Here.

(HENRY signs the form. HE drinks. ROBERT takes the form.)

ROBERT

Okay... *(Looks in file again. HE lights a cigarette if he doesn't have one.)* This.

HENRY

What's this?

ROBERT

This verifies that I've counseled you about the disease and you're aware of available treatment.

HENRY

Hmmm. Okay. Where?

(ROBERT points. HENRY signs. THEY stare at each other. Long pause.)

ROBERT

That's it.

HENRY

That's it?

ROBERT

I'll come by tomorrow...to, uh, identify...

HENRY

Yeah...

(Pause. BLACK enters the office and stands behind ROBERT with its hands on his shoulders.)

ROBERT

If there are any problems--

HENRY

There won't be. I've got the spine, doctor.

ROBERT

Of course you do.

(HENRY stands. ROBERT remains sitting. HENRY looks at the two of them, and then leaves. END SCENE.)

Scene 5

(HENRY walks in the desert with his thumb outstretched as he tries to hitch a ride. HE carries a small paper bag with a bottle in it. HE sings something bluesy. HE looks up at the sun. HE looks around. HE'S a solitary figure in the middle of the desert. HE squats down and grabs a handful of sand. HE slowly lets it escape through a crack in his clasped left hand. HE drinks constantly. HE sits. HE looks for a cigarette in his pockets, doesn't find one though. After awhile, RED flows from UP STAGE.)

HENRY

What's your name?

(Pause.)

HENRY

Okay. Lemme try this again. *(Beat.)* Hi, what's your name?

(Pause.)

HENRY

You're supposed to say "Secret, what's yours?"

(RED makes a pistol out of its left hand, pulls it out of an imaginary holster and points it at him. HENRY stares.)

HENRY

Are you an angel?

(RED fires. HENRY pretends to be shot in the heart.)

HENRY

Ya got me.

(RED blows the smoke from its index finger and reholsters.)

HENRY

Now tell me you love me.

(RED exits, slowly, flowingly, the same way it came.)

HENRY

Tell me you love me! Say it!! You're gonna leave me without sayin it?! Don't you leave me. Don't you fucking leave me! Don't...you...leave...me...!

(HENRY cries. HE grabs a hold of his bottle and notices his left hand is a bit bloody. HE drinks anyway. Looks around. Tries to find a cigarette again, but can't so he drinks again. END SCENE.)

Scene 6

(HENRY enters the trailer. The suitcase is still where JOAN had left it. HE finds a half-smoked cigarette in the first ashtray he finds. HE makes a drink. HE sits down, with the glass in one hand, the cigarette in the other. HE is about to light it when the phone rings. HE answers it reluctantly.)

HENRY

Hello?

ROBERT

(Voice over.) So you're home then, I take it?

HENRY

Yeah.

ROBERT

I called earlier and you weren't.

HENRY

I walked. Couldn't hitch a ride.

ROBERT

Mmmm. *(Pause.)* I just wanted to make sure you got home okay. You seemed a little despondent when you left.

HENRY

Despondent?

ROBERT

I was concerned.

HENRY

That's...*(Drinks.)*...really nice of you, doctor.

ROBERT

I was just sitting in my office-no, that's okay honey *(Laughs.)*- sorry...my fiance' wants me to hang up.

HENRY

It's okay. Is that all?

ROBERT

Uh...yes. I guess I just wanted to make sure you were home.

HENRY

With a drink in my hand!

ROBERT

Good, good.

(Pause.)

ROBERT

Yes, okay. Well. I, uh, we'll be in touch.

(Pause.)

Bye. ROBERT

Yeah. HENRY

(HENRY hangs up. END SCENE.)

Scene 7

(HENRY sleeps on the couch with his eyes closed. HIS hand is still on his drink. A car pulls up and stops. Someone gets out. JOAN enters. SHE carries groceries. SHE enters the trailer with emotional difficulty. HENRY wakes up. SHE walks to the fridge area and sets the bag down.)

What's your name? HENRY

Don't. JOAN

Okay. Lemme try this again. *(Beat.)* Hi, what's your name? HENRY

Henry...don't. JOAN

(Pause.)

Got any cigarettes? HENRY

I got a few. JOAN

I'll have one. *(HE drinks.)* HENRY

(JOAN pulls out the pack, Marlboro Reds, and gives it to him. HE takes one and gives it back.)

You makin dinner? HENRY

Our last supper together. JOAN

(Quietly.) The last supper. HENRY

Makin your favorite. JOAN

I'd rather you made yours. HENRY

Not my turn. JOAN

Get anything special ta drink? HENRY

(Pause.)

Gettin two bottles of champagne later. JOAN

I love you. HENRY

I know you do, sweetheart. JOAN

But can't you say it? HENRY

No. JOAN

Why not? Why the fuck not? HENRY

(Pause.)

What?! I just wanna hear you say it! HENRY

(Pause.)

HENRY

Come on, say it. *(Pause.)* Say it! *(Pause.)* Say the fuckin words Joan!

JOAN

(Calmly.) Today is difficult enough--

HENRY

Why can't you just fuckin say the goddamn words!

JOAN

I'm not gonna say it.

HENRY

Why not!!

(Pause.)

JOAN

My actions tell you. Actions speak louder--

HENRY

--than words! I know! I don't fuckin care!

JOAN

Tough shit Henry.

HENRY *(Overlap.)*

Tough shit?! I'm dyin an all--

JOAN *(Overlap.)*

Jesus, you bring this on yourself!

HENRY *(Overlap.)*

--an all you can say is 'tough shit'?!!

JOAN *(Overlap.)*

I'm not lettin you categorize me with your fuckin alcohol!

HENRY *(Overlap.)*

Oh Jesus Christ!

JOAN (*Overlap.*)

No, fuck you! I'm not gonna!

HENRY (*Overlap.*)

It's not the same thing!

JOAN (*Overlap.*)

It's just a fuckin word Henry! It doesn't mean a goddamned thing!

HENRY

(*Pause.*) It's not just a word! It's more than that!

JOAN

Yeah yeah. You keep sayin it, but I ain't seein it.

(*Silence.*)

HENRY

I like ta drink. So did you. Once. (*Pause.*) I don't tell ya ta quit smokin, do I? *Do I?! (Pause.)* Cuz I respect that. (*Pause.*) Maybe I don't like you smokin. Maybe I don't like the way it obscures your eyes. I don't see the angel in em anymore, Joanie. The smoke...hides you. Or you hide in the smoke, I dunno...

(*Pause.*)

JOAN

I am not an angel.

(*HENRY drinks.*)

JOAN

See, Henry, you just don't have it in ya anymore. You're soft. You pour yourself into the couch an that's it. That's fuckin it for the rest of the night! (*Pause.*) Ya think ya got a spine cuz ya infected yourself? That this'll be the stand that ya shoulda took years ago? Well, Henry, it's too fuckin late! Your fucked up romantic notions--whatever's left of it anyway--is gonna get you killed. An when you feel that cold barrel pressed against your skin, an ya gotta pull the trigger, you're stomach feelin like it's burnin a hole straight through your shirt, you're gonna be sorry. Sorry that you shoulda went sober. Sorry that we hadn't fucked in years an now you can't have any. Sorry that I had ta get some somewhere else an you got what I got because of it. How's it gonna feel ta be sorry Henry? Sorry's not gonna get you a spine. That comes from within. An you're soft to the core. Soaked.

(Pause.)

HENRY

I love you...that's all I know.

(HENRY storms out of the trailer. HE collapses. RED enters the desert.)

HENRY

I remember this spot.

JOAN

It's natural...

HENRY

This is where I first met you. *(Laughs.)* Tryin to hitch a ride...

JOAN

...separatin...

HENRY

Later, we made love on this salt.

JOAN

...dismemberment...

HENRY

It's the soil in which my love grew for you.

JOAN

...I'm afraid of it hurtin...

HENRY

An I just wanted to tell you, like I told you then...

JOAN

...I'll be free...weightless...

HENRY

I'd be dead if it wasn't for you.

JOAN

...I'll be able to forget my life...

HENRY

You gave me a reason to live.

...content in the silence...

JOAN

You listened to my talkin.

HENRY

...far away from this...

JOAN

It was like heaven.

HENRY

...hell...

JOAN

(Pause. BLACK enters the desert. RED exits quickly.)

Where's my angel now?

HENRY

He calls me.

JOAN

I can't hear my angel anymore...

HENRY

At first it was infrequent. Accidental. First from his office, then...at home.

JOAN

This desert...

HENRY

The frequency increased.

JOAN

...sing me a song, sweet, sweet desert...

HENRY

Until I was waitin for the calls.

JOAN

(Drinks the rest of his drink.) I've been waitin for you.

HENRY

I listen to him... JOAN

Tonight...I'm comin for you. HENRY

...as he tells me he loves me. JOAN

Gonna give back what you gave me... HENRY

He knew I felt the same way. JOAN

...with interest. HENRY

(END SCENE.)

Scene 8

(HENRY lies prostrated in the sand. HIS glass is knocked over. JOAN stands in the front door, looking at him.)

Henry? *(Pause.)* Henry? JOAN

(SHE exits the trailer. HENRY starts crying. JOAN crosses to him and stops.)

(Pause.) Ya think I'll hear it. JOAN

Huh? Wha? HENRY

(HENRY looks up at her.)

The shot. Ya think I'll hear it? JOAN

(Pause.)

HENRY

I'll hear it. You prolly won't.

JOAN

(Pause.) Whatta ya cryin for?

(SHE kneels beside him.)

HENRY

I feel like I've been unfaithful.

(SHE reaches out and rubs his back)

JOAN

Unfaithful ta whom?

HENRY

The desert. The Valley. *(Pause.)* Ever since we got married.

JOAN

It's just a place...like L. A....

HENRY

Everything I know is in this Valley. In the rocks. The salt.

JOAN

It's suckin the life outta ya Henry.

(Pause.)

JOAN

It hates you.

HENRY

It wouldn't let me in. I tried ta explore it...

JOAN

The desert's not meant to be explored and conquered. Only respected.

HENRY

I did respect it!

JOAN

But then you hadda to know it. An by knowin it, you thought you could control it. Own it.

HENRY

I just wanna know which way the wind blows.

JOAN

It's unpredictable. An you don't like that. Never did.

HENRY

I wanted it to know I was there.

JOAN

You left your mark. More'n once. *(Pause.)* Those are things the desert can never get rid of, can never forget.

HENRY

There's one thing I can do. One thing that'll let it grow...

JOAN

What's that, Henry?

HENRY

My blood.

(JOAN hugs HENRY, pulls him up.)

JOAN

Let's get back inside. I'm dyin a thirst.

(THEY enter the trailer. The drinking-glass is still outside. JOAN gets a glass of water and sits down. HENRY stands.)

HENRY

You unnerstand me.

JOAN

I know you.

HENRY

Yeah. You know me...

JOAN

I know you like your steak medium-rare.

HENRY

I like the blood.

JOAN

An tender. Bruised-like.

(Pause.)

HENRY

(Laughs uncomfortably.) Joanie, whatta you sayin'?

JOAN

Nothin.

HENRY

You were sayin it out there too.

(JOAN pulls out a cigarette. HENRY paces.)

HENRY

Ya got somethin ya wanna say ta me? Cuz we got time.

JOAN

Henry. We were married at midnight and we're gonna die at midnight.

HENRY

I just want everything to be clear.

JOAN

Everythin is.

HENRY

What?

JOAN

Clear. Clear as water.

(Pause.)

JOAN

Can ya stop?

HENRY

What? Stop what?

Hoverin. JOAN

I'm hoverin? HENRY

Why don't ya sit down? JOAN

Cuz this waitin's gettin ta me. HENRY

That's life kickin ya in the ass. Hurts, don't it? JOAN

What? HENRY

Gettin your ass kicked. JOAN

Is that what this is about?! HENRY

You tell me. JOAN

What the fuck do ya want me ta do?! HENRY

Nothin. Don't do anythin. JOAN

So then what the hell you bringin that shit up for?! HENRY

(Pause.) I like seein you squirm. JOAN

(HENRY snorts in disbelief.)

HENRY
We had our problems. Hell yeah. Every marriage does. It's the nature of the beast. But that's all background scenery now.

Background scenery? JOAN

Yeah. HENRY

That *shit* wasn't background scenery to me! JOAN

I made mistakes! HENRY

Seein if my head could bounce was a mistake?!! JOAN

We all make mistakes! HENRY

I can't see out of one eye Henry!! Because of your *mistake!* JOAN

(*Pause.*) That-that...that wasn't me. I told you that. It wasn't me! HENRY

Who was it then?! Ain't nothin alive around here for miles but us Henry!! JOAN

I tole you what happened! HENRY

(*Sarcastically.*) Ohhh, the desert! It was the desert's fault! JOAN

I had no control ov-- HENRY

You had no control, that's right! Cuz why? Cuz the desert was makin ya?! JOAN

It was, goddamnit!! It wouldn't stop! Every day! Every night! It'd tell me ta do this or do that, or why dontcha listen ta me, or how come ya never explore my valley's anymore? Accusin me a HENRY

likin another desert. *(Laughs.)* I remember that! *(Beat.)* I couldn't take it anymore. Couldn't fuckin take it. I just...imploded.

JOAN

Exploded! You exploded all over this trailer Mr. Preston! *(Pause.)* I dunno what I hate more about you: bein hard as a Valley rock an explodin under the heat a the desert, or bein so soft you melt!

(Silence.)

JOAN

Soon there won't be any more *mistakes*.

HENRY

...you...you want some lunch...?

JOAN

Why?

HENRY

Cuz, I dunno--

JOAN

I'm not hungry for what you're offerin.

HENRY

Sure?

JOAN

I wanna sit here and smoke my last cigarette before I pick up the...the...

HENRY

You don't have anymore?

JOAN

Sorry.

HENRY

I need a cigarette.

JOAN

Plenty a ashtrays.

(HENRY looks around. HE looks in the first ashtray he finds.)

HENRY
You're goin back into town?

JOAN
I gotta get the shit, don't I?

(HENRY pulls out a cigarette-butt. HE looks at it. It's a Player's cigarette-butt.)

HENRY
You ever smoke Player's?

JOAN
An I gotta get some more cigarettes, maybe somethin to eat...

(HENRY puts the butt in his pocket. HE returns to looking.)

HENRY
I'm not findin anythin.

JOAN
Maybe visit Bad Water one more time...

HENRY
Ya listenin?

JOAN
What?

HENRY
Can I get a drag off yours?

JOAN
I know there's one in there.

HENRY
Just to tide me over.

(Pause. JOAN reluctantly gives him her cig. HENRY takes a drag.)

HENRY
Mmmm. Good. *(Pause.)* That's what I love about you.

JOAN

What?

HENRY

I know you.

(HENRY gives it back. HE looks in a different ashtray.)

JOAN

You stayin, right?

HENRY

I'm thinkin about comin with.

JOAN

Henry, I'm not gonna be that long.

HENRY

I know...but I wanna get outta the trailer.

(Pause.)

JOAN

I'd rather you didn't.

HENRY

Why not?

(Pause.)

JOAN

I need to be alone.

(Pause.)

JOAN

Please?

HENRY

Are ya gonna get somethin to eat? Ya need to eat.

JOAN

Yeah. Okay?

HENRY

(Pause.) Buy me a pack?

JOAN

You want me to *buy* you a pack?

HENRY

I got some money. I'm not findin shit in these ashtrays.

(HENRY fishes in his pocket for money.)

JOAN

I don't think I've ever seen you buy a pack.

HENRY

We all gotta die sometime.

(HENRY gives her the money.)

JOAN

What kinda cigarettes you want?

HENRY

(Pause.) Camels. The hard pack.

(JOAN gets ready to leave, puts out her cigarette.)

HENRY

You didn't put the suitcase in the car.

JOAN

I got over it. Figured I didn't need it after all.

HENRY

(Pause.) Yeah.

JOAN

Bye.

(JOAN leaves after a moment. HENRY doesn't watch her leave. As JOAN exits and drives away, HENRY pulls out the cigarette-butt he found and looks at it.)

HENRY

Yeah.

(END SCENE. END ACT ONE: PART ONE.)

part two: Secret

Scene 1

*(ROBERT sits in his office. Only HIS silhouette is visible. HENRY is in exactly the position he was at the beginning of **Scene 2, part one**. JOAN sits in her chair, staring off into the distance. ROBERT puts the maps he was looking at onto the desk. HE picks up the phone and dials. The phone rings in the trailer. JOAN picks it up furtively.)*

Yeah.

JOAN

The paperwork's in.

ROBERT

(Pause.) He's sleeping on the couch.

JOAN

Nobody'll know the difference. As far as the little people are concerned, the papers say he's positive.

ROBERT

Is it authentic?

JOAN

Nobody'll know.

ROBERT

(Pause.)

Good.

JOAN

Honey, I've been waiting for th--

ROBERT

What time does he need to come in?

JOAN

When?

ROBERT

Yeah.

JOAN

Ten-thirty. ROBERT

Everything'll be taken care of? JOAN

He just needs to sign the papers. ROBERT

What if he can't? Or worse: won't. JOAN

ROBERT
(Pause.) I'll do it. (Pause.) If I have to. It would be messier...

(Pause.)

You okay? ROBERT

Uh-huh. JOAN

He hasn't--? ROBERT

I'm fine. It's okay. JOAN

You deserve better, you know that? ROBERT

Sure. JOAN

It'll be better. L. A. will better. ROBERT

(Pause.)

Today is our anniversary. JOAN

ROBERT

(Pause.) I'm not too keen on anniversaries...

JOAN

I don't think he remembers.

ROBERT

One eye is enough.

JOAN

Yeah, well...

(Pause.)

ROBERT

Lunch today?

JOAN

I'll...try. I dunno if I should...

ROBERT

Try hard. Okay?

JOAN

(Pause.) I think he's awake.

ROBERT

I'll be done around noon.

JOAN

I have to go.

ROBERT

Sure.

JOAN

I'll tell him what he needs to know.

ROBERT

I'll call you 1--

JOAN

Don't call here anymore.

ROBERT
What?

JOAN
Better that way. Safer.

ROBERT
Saf--?

(JOAN hangs up. END SCENE.)

Scene 2

(HENRY and JOAN sit in opposite chairs. HE drinks. SHE smokes.)

HENRY
How'm I gona know when to go? No fuckin clocks...

JOAN
You'll know.

HENRY
But when?

JOAN
You'll feel somethin in your stomach.

HENRY
Hmmm.

(Pause.)

JOAN
How are you gettin there?

HENRY
With you.

JOAN
I'm not leavin just yet.

HENRY
Hitchin, then.

(Pause.)

I'm glad I did this Joan.

HENRY

We'll see.

JOAN

No really--

HENRY

Henry I don't wanna hear it.

JOAN

(Laughs in disbelief. Pause.) You don't wanna hear--?

HENRY

No.

JOAN

I'm tryin--

HENRY

I don't care!

JOAN

(Silence.)

JOAN

I don't wanna hear about your sacrifices.

HENRY

Not a sacrifice...

JOAN

What, then? Tryin to be a saint all of a sudden?

HENRY

(Pause.) I'm tryin to show you how much--

JOAN

Oh please Henry! You keep talkin but I--

HENRY

--ain't sein it?! Eh?! What the fuck do ya think I'm doin?

JOAN

I'm sure you got your reasons. *(Pause.)* An I'm *damn* sure some of em don't have to do with me.

HENRY

I'm committing suicide for you! Don't you fucking see that?!

JOAN

I don't see too well these days...

HENRY

Ohhhhh Jesus Christ!

JOAN

You're tryin to pay for your 'sins', Henry.

HENRY

My sins?!

JOAN

You got a guilty conscience.

HENRY

I fucked up, yes...

JOAN

An it's eatin you away inside.

HENRY

Does that matter now? Is that even relevant?!

JOAN

With the way you drink--

HENRY

What does my drinkin have to do w--

JOAN

It's got everything to do with it Henry!!

HENRY

You were right there with me!! For years!! For years, Joan!!

(Pause.)

JOAN

That was a long time ago.

HENRY

Last year's a long time ago?! *(Pause.)* You quit a day after our anniversary!

JOAN

I'm clean now.

HENRY

You haven't been clean that long!

JOAN

Long enough to see.

HENRY

What?! See what?!

(Silence.)

HENRY

Joan. Joanie. Honey. Sweetheart. Darlin. I'm dyin for you. I'm givin myself to the furnace in which our love burns. And I'm scared. I just wanna know if you feel the same way...so that we can die in a moment of love, not hate or...indifference.

(Pause.)

JOAN

My stomach hurts.

HENRY

Yeah? *(Pause.)* Okay. Okay...

(HENRY gets ready to go, leaving his drink. HE pours some vodka into a flask and exits. JOAN stares continuously at HENRY's drink throughout. When he's gone SHE hesitatingly takes the drink, finishes it, slams it down, and walks to the bar to make another. END SCENE.)

Scene 3

(ROBERT talks to a man on a speaker-phone in his office.)

ROBERT

Shell. Shell... Really Shell. I'm only gonna say this once. Once. You listenin? *(Pause.)* It's a done deal. In a week I'll have it. And then you'll have it. And then we're gonna make it. Tons of it. You hearin me? Tons. It's a done deal, Shell. Really. I'm just waitin for the paperwork to come through. With things workin out the way they ought to...two weeks tops.

Man

Two? You said one.

ROBERT

Shell. You're not listenin. Okay. Two weeks. It's gonna take that long for the heat to cool down.

MAN

Uh-huh...

ROBERT

I only want thirty points off the top.

MAN

Your offer was thirty off the bottom last week...

ROBERT

No no no no. The top. The fuckin top! I'm practically givin this to you. It's a major fucking vein!

MAN

Thirty points off the top.

ROBERT

Off the top, yeah. An a good deal on a house in the hills. I know you guys got your fingers all over that shit.

MAN

First it was thirty off the bottom, then it was off the top, and now you wanna house, too?

ROBERT

Jesus Christ, man! It's there !

(Pause.)

ROBERT

You wanna see the seismographs?

(Pause.)

ROBERT

I'll show you the seismographs. I'll fax the fuckers straight to ya.

(ROBERT faxes the papers.)

ROBERT

It's a done deal. Thirty percent an the house. That's it.

MAN

Mmmm. Looks dirty. These graphs registered?

ROBERT

You think they'd be livin in a trailer if they were? They're fuckin white-trash! Little people. Fuck em. Fuck em all.

MAN

You got an angle, then?

ROBERT

Am I stupid? No. I'm a fuckin doctor. I own this town. Nobody takes a shit without me knowin it. Nobody writes out a will without me seein it. I'm fuckin god around here. But it's too small Shell. I got bigger fish to fry. There's more money out there, an I'm gonna take some of it. Course by givin you guys the prime leads, I stay safe an you keep your jobs. In the hills, man, that's where it's at. That's where the leads are: the suckers. Too many little rich people worryin about if an when they're gonna die... I can tell em they got cancer, prescribe some bullshit sugar-cubes, an then a few months down the road, tell em they went into remission. An who are they gonna thank? Not god. Not they're fuckin priest or rabbi. But me. *Me*, Shell. Cuz I pull the strings that can keep em alive with hope or kill em with despair. So, I'm tellin *you*, Shell. I got an angle.

MAN

Could get messy. Specially with women...

ROBERT

I'm takin care of it.

(Pause.)

MAN

Thirty points and a shack in the hills.

ROBERT

I think it's fair. *(Pause.)* It doesn't have to be a big house. *(Pause.)* Come on. It's good. Damn good.

MAN

Too good. Lotta risks.

ROBERT

This'll give your wetbacks a chance to work. Think of how small your overhead's gonna be.

MAN

I'll think about it.

ROBERT

You'll think about it.

MAN

Yeah.

ROBERT

Alright...

MAN

Can I give you some advice?

ROBERT

Yeah sure, what?

MAN

Always cover your ass.

(A knock. HENRY enters. ROBERT takes the speaker-phone off and uses the hand-set.)

ROBERT

I will.

MAN

Always.

ROBERT

That's him now.

MAN

Call me in a week. I'll see about some shack I can put you in down there in the hills...

ROBERT

Thank you. Thank you very much.

MAN

Remember what I said.

ROBERT

It's in the heart of hearts.

(ROBERT hangs up, stands and offers HENRY the chair.)

Please, Henry--is it alright if I call you Henry? I feel like I know you already.

HENRY

Yeah sure.

ROBERT

Make yourself comfortable.

(HENRY sits down. ROBERT sits down. HE pulls out a pack of Player's cigarettes.)

ROBERT

Cigarette?

HENRY

No.

ROBERT

Sorry. I hate these kinds of appointments.

HENRY

I bet.

ROBERT

Yes, well. *(HE smokes.)* Aaahhh.

HENRY

(Pause.) Good?

ROBERT

First one of the day. Tryin to quit.

HENRY

We all gotta die sometime.

ROBERT

True. Some sooner than others.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 4

(HENRY tries to hitch a ride in the desert. JOAN sits on the couch with the suitcase next to her. WHITE hovers over her. During the following exchange, Scene 5, Part 1 happens in silence unless noted.)

JOAN

I'm thirsty. Not *thirsty*. No, I don't want your vodka. I've had enough of that shit. I'm parched. It must be a hunderd degrees in here. *(Pause.)* I'd rather have some water. I don't care if it's supp--I know all that. Yes. *(Indicates her suitcase.)* It's full. My clothes. Only for a while. I need to. I...I...wanna see the ocean. I've never--of course I do. Only for a few d-- No. There's nobody. Really. Don't you shout at me! I need to go! Need to be near the ocean where there's--*(WHITE slaps her.)*...life. *(Pause.)* I'm going. *(SHE stands up.)* I don't fuckin care! *(SHE turns and grabs her suitcase. WHITE slaps her again. SHE stops.)* Maybe I'll never come back...*(WHITE punches her, SHE reels.)*...after seein it. *(WHITE throws her down and starts bashing her head into the floor.)*

HENRY

Tell me you love me! Say it !! You're gonna leave me without sayin it?! Don't you leave me. Don't you fuckin leave me! Don't...you...leave...me...!

(HENRY cries. WHITE stops and stands up. JOAN cries. WHITE notices his left hand is bloody at the same time that HENRY looks at his hand. WHITE goes to the bar and makes a drink. RED enters the trailer, kneels down, grabs the cigarette pack from JOAN and sits on the couch and smokes. WHITE crosses to the couch, sits next to RED and drinks. JOAN runs out of the trailer.END SCENE.)

Scene 5

(JOAN sits in ROBERT's office. ROBERT enters in a labcoat and stethoscope. HENRY enters the trailer and Scene 6, part 1 begins, sometime during this scene.)

ROBERT

Joan! I didn't expect--

JOAN

I needed to get outta the trailer. Gettin a few things for tonight.

(ROBERT walks to the fax-machine, takes the papers that were in it and puts them in his drawer, locking it.)

ROBERT

Oh...

And I missed you. JOAN

(ROBERT consoles her.)

I want him dead, Robert. Dead. JOAN

I know...I know. ROBERT

I can't live with it anymore. JOAN

You'll get yours. Don't worry... ROBERT

I can't even look at him without...remembering. JOAN

The pain will dissipate. ROBERT

I need something... JOAN

...that'll let you forget...? ROBERT

...something strong. JOAN

What did you have in mind? ROBERT

Let's go to Bad Water...we'll eat lunch there. JOAN

Do a little desert exploration...? ROBERT

Yeah. JOAN

ROBERT

Somewhere the locals wouldn't see you.

JOAN

Somewhere Henry hasn't been.

ROBERT

Hmmmm.

JOAN

What?

ROBERT

I have a patient.

JOAN

How long's it gonna take?

ROBERT

Not sure. Could take a while.

JOAN

I could go shopping...

ROBERT

Why don't you do that.

JOAN

Get a map of L. A....

ROBERT

You won't need it.

JOAN

Have one?

ROBERT

I know where to go.

JOAN

But the quickest way to the ocean?

(ROBERT sighs.)

Well...I guess you have to go.

JOAN

Yeah. He's waiting.

ROBERT

(ROBERT is about to exit when...)

When did Henry leave?

JOAN

Why?

ROBERT

Didn't see him drivin in.

JOAN

He left a while ago.

ROBERT

Can you call?

JOAN

What? Me?

ROBERT

Call him? Please?

JOAN

I really--

ROBERT

Please?

JOAN

(Pause.) Okay. *(HE goes to the phone.)* Why can't you call?

ROBERT

Would you call Hell if you could help it?

JOAN

(Pause.)

JOAN

Just see if he's there.

(ROBERT dials. The phone rings in the trailer. HENRY picks it up.)

HENRY

Hello?

ROBERT

So you're home then, I take it?

HENRY

Yeah.

ROBERT

I called earlier and you weren't.

HENRY

I walked. Couldn't hitch a ride.

ROBERT

Mmmm. *(Pause.)* I just wanted to make sure you got home okay. You seemed a little despondent when you left.

HENRY

Despondent?

ROBERT

I was concerned.

HENRY

That's s...*(Drinks.)*...really nice of you, doctor.

ROBERT

I was just sitting in my office- *(JOAN hugs him.)* no, that's okay honey *(Laughs.)*- sorry...my fiance' wants me to hang up.

HENRY

It's okay. Is that all?

ROBERT

Uh...yes. I guess I just wanted to make sure you were home.

HENRY

With a drink in my hand!

ROBERT

Good, good.

(Pause.)

ROBERT

Yes, okay. Well. I, uh, we'll be in touch.

(Pause.)

ROBERT

Bye.

HENRY

Yeah.

(HENRY hangs up. HE lights his cigarette. ROBERT hangs up.)

ROBERT

He's there. Everything's fine.

JOAN

Drinkin'?

(ROBERT nods. JOAN smiles.)

ROBERT

I love you Joan.

JOAN

(Pause.) I know.

ROBERT

I want you to know that.

(Pause.)

ROBERT

Fear is always greatest before a separation. *(Pause.)* Before dismemberment. It helps us survive.

JOAN

Yeah...I should stop worrying about it.

(ROBERT kisses her and escorts her out the door.)

ROBERT

We all have to leave sometime. *(Pause.)* Some sooner than others...

(THEY exit. END SCENE. END ACT ONE: PART TWO.)

Act Two: Sunset
part three: Truth

(ROBERT sits in his chair, smoking. HENRY stands by the window looking out while pouring himself some water. JOAN sits in a chair, smoking and drinking straight vodka. THE THREE COLORS are in the desert. RED and WHITE are being married by BLACK. THEY mime a wedding. The sky rumbles. After a few moments of silence, HENRY speaks.)

HENRY

The sun'll set soon.

(Pause.)

HENRY

We don't have to do this.

JOAN

(Pause.) I don't wanna live like this anymore.

(Pause.)

HENRY

Want another drink?

(THE COLORS leave in procession.)

JOAN

Wha?

HENRY

Nervous?

JOAN

Thinkin of better times.

HENRY

Mmmm.

(Pause.)

JOAN

Yes.

HENRY

What?

JOAN

I'll get it.

(JOAN stands and walks to the fridge.)

HENRY

Drinkin a lot this afternoon.

JOAN

So what.

HENRY

So nothin.

JOAN

Mind your own fuckin business Henry. *(Pause.)* Why don't you go sit down?

HENRY

Sit down?

JOAN

I get edgy when you're close to me.

(HENRY goes and sits on the couch. HE smokes. Pause.)

HENRY

Whatta you thinkin about?

JOAN

Nothin.

HENRY

Nothin? Not even--

JOAN

There are times, Henry, when I'd wish you'd shut the hell up!

(Silence.)

JOAN

You think this is easy for me?! Separatin ain't easy for anyone. It's like havin a limb cut off.

Even after it's gone you're gonna feel it. It itches...like it's still there, but there ain't gonna be nothin there but a memory- but you scratch anyway. You wanna scratch. Make it go away. So you scratch an scratch until your stump bleeds an it don't hurt anymore. An then you realize it ain't there. The pain was all in your mind but it ain't *there*. Maybe that's why people get prosthetics...

HENRY

Yeah...

(JOAN drinks.)

HENRY

Think it'll hurt?

JOAN

(Quickly.) No.

HENRY

So how are we gonna do it?

JOAN

We'll put the guns to our heads an pull the trigger.

HENRY

Pull the trigger.

JOAN

I got em in the car.

HENRY

(Pause.) I love you Joan.

JOAN

You love me.

(Pause.)

JOAN

That's why we're here.

HENRY

Before I pull the trigger...

JOAN

No. No no no no. No. Don't even pull that shit on me Henry. Not now. Not...now.

HENRY

(Builds.) Before I smear my brains all over the wall...

JOAN

Henry why are ya doin this?! Why now?! You're talkin but I ain't gonna listen!

HENRY

(Builds.) Before I sacrifice myself, *give* myself to the desert...

JOAN

You couldn't do it then with violence, an you can't do it now with love. Face it Henry.

HENRY

(Builds.) It would make things easier!

(Pause.)

JOAN

My actions tell you.

HENRY

I don't want actions, Joanie! I want words! I want you to say it! Say the fuckin words!

JOAN

Don't you tell me--

HENRY

No! No! We're dyin here! We're fuckin dyin an all you can do is stand there while I gotta do every-fuckin-thing! You stand there...you stand there like nothin's goin on inside! Like you're made a stone!

JOAN

(Quietly.) It's all I got.

HENRY

It's all you got?! All you fucking got?!

JOAN

You knew about this the first time you said it to me.

HENRY

Fifteen fucking years ago, I know! *I know.*

(Pause.)

JOAN

It ain't gonna work.

HENRY

I know what's goin on.

JOAN

You takin a stand like this. You're wastin your breath.

HENRY

(Laughs.) It's all I got.

JOAN

Not for long, Henry. Appreciate it while you can.

(Silence. JOAN exits the trailer and into the desert. HENRY stands and walks to the bar. HE makes a stiff vodka on the rocks. HE shuffles back to the couch. BLACK enters and crosses to JOAN. IT takes her drink and sets it on the ground. SHE cries in its arms. BLACK consoles her. RED enters ROBERT's office. IT carries a gun. Putting it on the chair, RED sits on the desk seductively. ROBERT stands and climbs on top of RED. THEY make love in a stylized, cool way.)

HENRY

The desert teaches us many things, Joanie, about love. About life. For some, love and life are the same thing. For others, it's water and life. And still for others: money *is* life. *(Pause.)* I love you, Joan. There's no denyin that. And as much as you avoid the question, as much as you refuse to say the words: I know what you're thinkin. Deep down. You're actions say it. Love is something one does, not something one says. And today, I've seen how much love I have for you. I know ohhhh *I know* that our moment of separation, my moment of death will not be one of indifference.

(WHITE enters, walking into the desert. IT carries a revolver. IT stops at the center-line. Jets scream by).

HENRY

My love for you is gonna get me killed: you're right about that. If there's one thing the desert knows, one thing it's taught me, it's this: Love doesn't kill you. You only wish it did...

(WHITE puts the gun to its head and pulls the trigger. Immediately, THE COLORS leave.)

HENRY sobs in the couch. JOAN needs to be physically pulled away and then collapses, crying. ROBERT rolls over, sits in his chair, smokes a cigarette, and stares at the pistol in his chair. Silence. HENRY looks around, hears JOAN crying and, getting his drink, walks out into the desert, stopping short of her.)

HENRY
You okay?

(JOAN looks up.)

HENRY
Those jets scared you pretty bad, eh?

JOAN
I'm alright.

(JOAN drinks.)

HENRY
It's nice out here. Almost forgot how beautiful--

JOAN
I need another drink. Can I get you one?

HENRY
(Pause.) Sure.

(HENRY finishes his and gives her the empty glass. JOAN exits.)

HENRY
We were married on this spot. Where we made love. Where we met.

(RED enters, voluptuously. IT walks around him as if checking him out.)

HENRY
I had to have you. Had to make you mine. *(Pause.)* Explore your valleys. The indigenous life. I've loved you ever since I was born. Ever since the desert-sun cast its first rays on my eyes. My love has been here eternally. You have been here as long as I have. Born of the desert, by the desert, you saved my life by existing. Before the settlers tried to conquer the salt, before the indigenous peoples lived with the salt, even before the salt was created; there was only love.

Love, you, and me.

(RED moves closer, seducing HENRY. THEY kneel.)

HENRY

I've done...things. Things I ain't too proud of. Things that've hurt me. Things that are gonna get me killed.

(THEY lay down. HENRY's on top.)

HENRY

And although I did it out of love, for love, with love...it was never about Love. Violence...

(HENRY makes out with RED in a stylized, cool way.)

HENRY

Violence...can never be Love. But Love can be violent. And it's in this violence that I surrender myself to.

(RED suddenly moves in a way that puts it on top of HENRY. HENRY is pinned. RED makes a pistol with its left hand and puts it to HENRY's forehead.)

HENRY

The desert is ruthless. The desert kills.

(JOAN walks out of the trailer carrying drinks. SHE, of course, doesn't see whose pinning HENRY. SHE crosses to him.)

HENRY

The desert...

(JOAN kneels down and hands HENRY his drink.)

HENRY

...hates.

(RED lets him up and slowly backs away, exiting the stage. HENRY drinks half the glass in one gulp. JOAN drinks.)

HENRY

You know this spot.

JOAN

Yeah.

HENRY

(Pause.) Too bad we didn't have kids.

JOAN

Thank God.

HENRY

I woulda liked a boy.

JOAN

It could never happen.

HENRY

...a boy, someone I coulda taught about the desert.

JOAN

Boys cry harder than girls. When they're young anyways...

HENRY

Think?

JOAN

Know. Girls have been takin it for too long.

HENRY

I think it might rain tonight.

JOAN

Ya think?

HENRY

I know.

(Silence.)

JOAN

I'll be right back.

HENRY

Where--?

JOAN

The car. I'm just goin to the car, honey.

HENRY

Okay.

(JOAN exits. HENRY drinks. JOAN comes back with two bottles of champagne and a paper bag filled with something heavy. The champagne is cheap with plastic corks.)

HENRY

You got the Andre'.

JOAN

Just like our weddin night.

HENRY

Are those them? *(Indicates the paperbag.)*

JOAN

No, it's tomorrow's lunch.

(Pause.)

HENRY

Can I see em?

(JOAN dumps them onto the ground. Two revolvers, exactly the same, and some bullets.)

HENRY

There they are.

JOAN

Instruments of our separation.

HENRY

From this life.

JOAN

From this pain.

HENRY

It doesn't seem real...

JOAN

Pain is real, Henry. This bullet is real.

HENRY

But my love for you isn't?

JOAN

You've said those words more times today than you have all year.

(HENRY stands and walks to the trailer.)

JOAN

Your love is gettin you killed!

(HENRY enters the trailer.)

HENRY

Love gives me a reason to live!

JOAN

(To herself.) Or a reason to die.

(JOAN proceeds to load one of the revolvers. HENRY appears in the doorway after a while. Director's Note: JOAN should only load one (1) revolver.)

HENRY

Need help?

JOAN

The other one's loaded...but this one...

(HENRY crosses to JOAN.)

HENRY

I'll do it.

JOAN

I loaded the first one fine when you were inside...

HENRY

It's okay. I'll do it.

(HENRY kneels and takes the gun and a bullet. JOAN takes the other revolver. SHE starts to cry a little.)

JOAN

I loaded it just fine. Just fine. No problems.

HENRY

How many we puttin in?

JOAN

Yours, I just couldn't do...

HENRY

Joan.

JOAN

I need another drink. God I need a drink.

(JOAN finishes her drink.)

HENRY

I'm only gonna put one in then.

(HENRY loads the revolver with one bullet.)

JOAN

My hands wouldn't...they were shaking...

HENRY

Make yourself a drink Joan. And go smoke a cigarette.

JOAN

...fingers went limp...

HENRY

Take your time. I'll be right here.

JOAN

...yeah...yeah...right here...you're not gonna leave?

HENRY

No.

JOAN

Right. I'll...

(JOAN stands, puts her revolver in her pants, and shuffles inside. HENRY hefts his pistol, looking at it. ROBERT does the same thing in his office. WHITE is present, sitting in the chair,

across from ROBERT. ROBERT occasionally drinks from a whiskey bottle. HE starts to pace his office, frequently threatening WHITE with the gun in different ways. After making a drink, JOAN checks to see if HENRY is still outside. Then SHE makes a phonecall. The phone rings in ROBERT's office. ROBERT answers. HE still threatens WHITE during the exchange.)

ROBERT
Yeah. What?

JOAN
I can't do it. I can't fuckin do it.

ROBERT
Whatta you mean 'you can't'?

JOAN
I dunno.

ROBERT
Shit. Honey. *Honey*. L. A. is only a few hours away...

JOAN
I know...

ROBERT
...you don't have to do anything but watch him die.

JOAN
I can't...do it.

ROBERT
Has he hit you?

JOAN
...no...

ROBERT
Just think of L. A. Joan. Think of the ocean. Think of how much you'd love to see the ocean.

JOAN
I'm scared.

ROBERT
We can't do anything unless you go through with this.

JOAN

Do you love me?

ROBERT

Of course I do. *(Pause.)* Just remember who gave you your vision problems. And then remember who was there for you afterwards. It was me, Joan. Me! Not--

(JOAN hangs up. HENRY has reached the door.)

HENRY

Thought you mighta passed out.

(ROBERT hangs up.)

JOAN

Had to call time and temperature. See what time it was...

HENRY

Mmmm.

JOAN

You ready?

(ROBERT puts the gun into WHITE's chest.)

ROBERT

You're dead. Both of you are dead.

(ROBERT reaches for his bottle, drinks, and leaves with it.)

HENRY

Uh-huh.

JOAN

Come in and sit down. I'll get the champagne.

(JOAN retrieves the champagne from the desert and walks into the kitchen with it. HENRY sits on the couch. HE sets his revolver on the coffee-table. WHITE enters the desert, trying to hitch a ride. RED enters the desert. RED stops. THEY communicate non-verbally. JOAN pops a cork. WHITE collapses. BLACK is revealed UPSTAGE with its left hand folded into a gun.. JOAN pops the other cork. RED collapses. BLACK circles around them. JOAN brings the bottles to the couch. SHE sits next to him, putting the champagne and her revolver on the table. BLACK enters the trailer and stands behind them. RED and WHITE struggle to crawl

nearer to each other until they are hugging. THEY die. HENRY drinks, staring off. JOAN smokes, staring off as well. HENRY turns and looks at JOAN. SHE doesn't notice. RED and WHITE leave discreetly during the following exchange. BLACK stays throughout.)

HENRY

How did it go?

(Pause.)

HENRY

Hi, what's your name?

JOAN

(Pause.) Secret, what's yours?

HENRY

Truth.

JOAN

And where does Truth call home?

HENRY

In the heart. *(Pause.)* Where does Secret call home?

JOAN

In the mind. *(Pause.)* What separates Truth from Secret?

HENRY

Lies. *(Pause.)* Where does Lies call home?

JOAN

In the mouth. *(Pause.)* How do we keep Lies from warping Truth or revealing Secret?

HENRY

We drink water.

JOAN

We drink water.

HENRY

What happens to Truth and Secret when we drink water?

JOAN

(Pause.) They fuse together to become Love.

HENRY

And what happens to Lies?

JOAN

(Pause.) Love is something one does, not something one says. Lies become non-existent.

(JOAN turns to HENRY. HE smiles at her. HER eyes are like balloons ready to burst into tears. THEY turn their attention towards the bottles. THEY reach for them. THEY look at each other.)

HENRY

To Truth.

JOAN

To Secret.

HENRY

To Love.

(THEY chug the champagne. The whole fuckin thing. HENRY finishes his first. THEY slam them down on the table. Pause.)

HENRY

Shit. I'm droppin fast.

JOAN

Yeah...

HENRY

About half-way through, the floor just gave way...

JOAN

Get your...get your gun, Henry...

(JOAN gets her revolver.)

HENRY

Okay...

(HENRY reaches for his gun with great difficulty.)

HENRY

So...how're we gonna do this...?

JOAN
Put the...these things...to our heads...

HENRY
I'm...puttin mine to my chest...

JOAN
...and...and..pull the trigger...

HENRY
Alright. *(HE puts the revolver to his chest.)* Ready.

(JOAN puts hers to her head. THEY turn to look at each other. BLACK kneels down so that his mask-head is level and between HENRY and JOAN's heads.)

JOAN
On three...?

(HENRY nods. Lights start to fade slowly.)

HENRY
...I love you...

JOAN
One...

HENRY
...I can't live without you...

JOAN
(Pause.) ...two...

HENRY
...I'm sorry...

(Lights fade out completely on stage..)

JOAN
Three...

(A gunshot. Sounds of choking, breathing, dying. SOMEBODY slumps to the floor. BLACK exits. Silence. A lit cigarette is taken from an ashtray and smoked. After a few moments

it's put out. SOMEBODY starts dragging a body out of the trailer and into the desert. A car pulls up. Headlights shine indistinctly on them. The car is shut off, but the lights stay on. SOMEONE gets out. ROBERT enters. HE carries his pistol in one hand and a bottle of whiskey in the other.)

ROBERT

Joan?! Joan?!

(Thunderclouds start rumbling in the distance and get closer as the scene progresses. The person dragging the body collapses and pulls the body closer to it, until it's in the person's arms. ROBERT walks closer, but not too close.)

ROBERT

J-Joan...?

HENRY

Joanie's dead.

ROBERT

What?! *(Points gun at HENRY.)* What?!

(ROBERT moves a little closer to get a look.)

HENRY

She's dead, Robert.

ROBERT

You...you're supposed to be dead! You!

HENRY

I shot her.

ROBERT

You shot her? *(Laughs.)* You shot her?

HENRY

You're Lies.

ROBERT

Lies? What the fuck are you talkin about? This is great! Fuckin-A!

HENRY

Don't bother callin the cops...

ROBERT

Cops?! *(Laughs.)* Why...

(HENRY tries to load his revolver.)

ROBERT

Hey? What a...whatta you think you're doin there?

HENRY

Reloadin.

ROBERT

Oh, uh-huh. *(HE points the gun right at HENRY's head.)* No I don't think so!

HENRY

(Keeps tryin to reload anyway.) I'm not doin so hot.

ROBERT

You knew?

HENRY

What?

ROBERT

About...

HENRY

When I load this fucker, I'm gonna kill you.

ROBERT

(Laughs uncomfortably.) Kill me? Kill me?!

HENRY

Yeah.

ROBERT

I'm the town doctor. I own you! I can say whatever the hell I want, Henry! I'm a respected member of this community, asshole! People come to me for everything! People need their taxes done, they come to me. People need abortions, they come to me. People need legal advice, they come to me! Me! *(Pause.)* I'm god that way, Henry. I hold everybody's lives in my hands! Without me, this shit-town would die. This little shit-town in the middle of the fuckin desert. And if sometimes I gotta lie to get what I want, then shit, I'm gonna lie! *(Pause.)* You think you're the first person I've buried here? You know how many secrets this desert has? The salt keeps em preserved. Keeps em alive, sorta. And in a thousand million years, when the desert can't hold anymore secrets, they're all gonna rise up! They're gonna rise up and take over this shit-hole! And I'll be there, waitin, cuz then it'll be my time. *(Pause.)* The desert is not a kind place, you said that yourself. And I'll do whatever it takes to keep myself in power here. I own

this shit-town. And since this shit-town's in the desert, I guess I own the desert too! You're nothin but little people. Trash waitin to be buried in the salt.

(Silence.)

HENRY

Ya warp the Truth an reveal Secrets. Ya lied to steal her away: I deserved that.

ROBERT

Damn right you did. She hadn't been happy for years. I just alleviated the pain, Henry. Told her I loved her. Seems you had forgotten what those words were.

HENRY

Thing is...Violence and Love got nothin to do with each other.

ROBERT

You talk too damn much. Shut up an take it like a man. *(Pulls hammer back.)*

HENRY

See, you ain't givin it like a man. *(Pause.)* A man, a *man* might call someone out. Or call his lawyer. Or even just ignore me. But he'd never just shoot someone down. Not a man's man. *(Pause.)* Are you a man? Or are you just another animal, a scavenger, roamin the desert...?

(Pause.)

ROBERT

(Steps back.) Arrright. Arrright. Get the fuck up then!

HENRY

I'm tryin. I've been droppin fast, though, these last few minutes.

ROBERT

I see that.

(HENRY finally loads his gun completely and gets up.)

HENRY

Let's do it then.

(ROBERT takes a huge drink and offers it to HENRY. HENRY takes it, drinks, and drops it. THEY step away from each other until they are far apart. THEY put their pistols in the front of their pants. Thunderclouds rumble. Long Pause. ROBERT draws and fires. HENRY draws and fires. THEY both go down. Both are bleeding. HENRY crawls towards JOAN'S body and stops there. ROBERT moans, trying to get up. HENRY points his revolver at ROBERT over JOAN'S

body. ROBERT finally snaps out of the pain, and crawls towards HENRY, his pistol pointed at HENRY. THEY get real close. ROBERT laughs. THEY fire. ROBERT misses. HENRY hits ROBERT in the back of the leg. HENRY crawls on top of ROBERT. ROBERT shoots again but misses wildly. HENRY pins his arms with his knees. HE puts his revolver into ROBERT's mouth forcefully. ROBERT screams and tries to struggle.)

HENRY

Love is something one does, not something one says. Lies...become non-existent.

(HE pulls the trigger. Thunderclouds rumble. It starts to rain shortly. HENRY notices RED in the desert.)

HENRY

Are you an angel?

(RED beckons him to go with it.)

HENRY

(Pause.) Yes. You are.

(HENRY puts the pistol to his chest. HE shoots himself and collapses over ROBERT and JOAN. WHITE enters shortly thereafter. IT crosses over to RED and they walk out into the desert, holding hands. BLACK enters, and walks around the bodies. RED and WHITE enter the trailer. RED crosses to the window and assumes a posture similar to JOAN'S in the beginning of the play. WHITE crosses to the arm-chair and sits down, assuming a posture similar to HENRY'S in the beginning... BLACK crosses to the office and sits down, assuming ROBERT'S posture... Lights fade out.)

END PLAY