

**the beauty of trauma
&
the trauma of beauty**

a play by oliver nowak

Character Constructs

Alia

New Alia

Little Girl

Slunk

I\O

Eliza

The Suit

The Old Woman

The Father (Young)

The Father (Old)

Sslann

The Man

The Doctor

Guards 1 and 2

The Voice

A theological note: Turing. Pioneered the field of artificial intelligence with his landmark “Turing test”. He was concerned with the perception of computers, specifically those with artificial intelligence, by human beings, as conscious and self-aware entities.

An aesthetic note: The trauma of beauty is not in its *representation* of what is pleasing to the eye or in its insight into a common truth. No. It is in the trauma it causes us and by extension, the scars it leaves behind as a result of its exposure, that makes it transcendent. Beauty is a structure in which nothing is true except what we think it so, no matter how many physical deformities or scars we have.

Act One: The Trauma Of Beauty

Scene 1

(The Father and Sslann play poker Stage Right. Alia sits in front of a mirror wearing a hood. An Old Woman is seated opposite her, her face covered in bloody gauze.)

(Alia is asleep on the floor. I\O stands in front of a large mirror. There is no reflection. A white-mask lies at her feet. She applies lipstick.)

I\O

I am beautiful. I am beautiful. I am beautiful.

(Alia wakes up.)

I\O

I am beautiful.

Alia

Am I dead?

(Pause.)

I\O

I am beautiful.

Alia

And what am I? Am I dead?

I\O

You are merely the means by which my beauty is reflected.

(Long pause. Alia finds black lipstick in a pocket. I\O continues to preen. Sslann rises from a pit, exits, and returns with a table. The Father enters from the audience, carrying two chairs. When the table and chairs are placed, they sit across from each other. Sslann places a pile of chips and divides them. He is obviously winning. The Father, in the meantime, pulls out a pack of cards and is shuffling them.)

Alia

In the desert a seed is planted.

I\O

Whatever possesses beauty, controls truth. I am beautiful.

Alia

Its thirst slaked with the enzymes of decay.

(The Father places the appropriate amount of chips in the center of the table. Sslann covers.)

I\O

Whatever controls truth is universal. I am beautiful.

Alia

My father feeds on its poison fruit of chance. And chance, as always, costs more than it gives.

(Sslann raises. The Father pauses.)

I\O

Whatever is universal is absolute. I am beautiful.

Alia

He's already lost the house and the oxen have died from embarrassment. The ash contaminates the soil; the trees are clean of fruit.

(The Father searches his pockets.)

Alia

The pits give up their hooded dead.

(The Father places a picture in the pot.)

I\O

I am beautiful.

Alia

Skin, eyes, and teeth hide behind a veil of lime. It is a program of extermination where all things are stripped of subjectivity.

(Sslann looks at the picture.)

I\O

I am beautiful.

Alia

Flesh is the mask that covers our hearts.

I\O

Flesh is the means by which I will rule. I am beautiful.

(Sslann returns the picture to the pot and nods.)

Alia

The face becomes the albatross of the soul. Flesh is the means by which you will be ruled.

I\O

(Pause.) I am beautiful.

(The Father throws away two cards. Sslann deals him two. He takes one.)

Alia

A razor shall be the instrument of rebirth from death into life, coagulating the liquid into its solid. *(She brandishes the black lip-stick.)*

I\O

I am beautiful!

(The Father knocks on the table. He doesn't ante.)

Alia

As a woman, I will scratch the pits' smooth sides with sharp, dirty nails.

I\O

I am beautiful!

(Sslann knocks. He doesn't ante, either.)

Alia

Here, a veil of lime is the mask of tolerance.

I\O

Reflect dammit! I am beautiful!

(Silence.)

Alia

The silence is deafening as one struggles to look outward for what is hidden underneath.

I\O

REFLECT!!! (Pause.) I will be beautiful. I will.

(The Father spreads his cards on the table. It's a three-of-a kind, all sevens, red suit. Sslann pauses, spreads his cards on the table, three sixes and two queens—a full house. The Father's face drains as he sees the cards.)

Alia

I make the cuts lengthwise. *(She begins to "cut" her face with the lip-stick.)*

(Sslann slides the winnings over to his side of the table. I/O imitates Alia's actions and cuts her own face.)

I/O
I will be beautiful.

Alia
(Cutting.) Perpendicular to my eyes.

I/O
(Cutting.) I will be beautiful.

(Sslann picks up the picture, looks at it.)

Alia
(Cutting.) My blood, thickening, runs slowly down my skin.

I/O
(Cutting.) I will be beautiful.

Sslann
I will come for my bride at midnight on the next full moon.

Alia
(Alia dons the white feature-less mask.) And all that I am becomes hidden within.

I/O
(She collapses, frantically cutting herself.) I will be beautiful I will be beautiful I will be beautiful I will be beautiful.

(The Father acknowledges. Sslann offers him a drink from his stainless-steel flask. The Father drinks.)

Covered in lime, buried in ash, organic fluids struggle to congeal. Wounds to the face will never heal.

(Lights fade out to the rising sound of static. END SCENE.)

Scene 2

(The Shack: cave-like in appearance. A make-shift bar. A window, downstage, is covered by skin. A couch. The floor is concrete.

The Father stands facing away from his daughter looking out the window. Alia stands.)

Alia
How much?

(Pause.)

Alia
How much?!!

(Pause.)

The Father
Doesn't matter now.

Alia
I'd like to know. *(Pause.)* How much did you sell the meat from my mother's womb.

The Father
You never had a mother and you know it. You came from a test-tube. Organic hydroponics. A rejected sample if I recall...

Alia
How much?!!!

The Father
I need a drink. Turing--*(Looking up.)*--I need a drink.

(He walks to the bar.)

Alia
Ten years in prison and you're right back where you started.

The Father
You don't understand.

Alia
How does a drowning man understand anything but the water filling his lungs?

The Father
I need this. Keeps me together, keeps me from tearin myself apart an spreadin my pieces all over the walls...

Alia
Maybe you need somethin else.

The Father

...three of a kind, I had—coulda got the full-house an won but... (*Shakes his head, drinks.*)

Alia

Chance favors those who can control it.

The Father

I had it. Had *him*!

Alia

Ten years taught you nothing but how to live in that crystal palace up there in the sky. They got a name for people like that...

The Father

Ten years taught me that pain--real pain, pain that turns the voice in your head into static—has no virtuous qualities. A man with the virtue of suffering is nothin more than a fool who's a prisoner of faith.

Alia

By losing me, you've reduced yourself from static to dead air.

The Father

My CNS is shot! Fucked! Ten years in a pain amplifier can do nothin but turn the soul into a dead channel. You'll learn that soon enough!

(Silence.)

The Father

Seventeen hundred.

Alia

Seventeen hundred?! That's a little over ten dollars a pound!

The Father

Really...? Hadn't thought... (*He drinks.*)

(She shuffles to the couch and sits.)

The Father

Sweetheart...

Alia

You've sold me like meat! Meat that would have kept you alive when the ash transforms the soil into life-less carbon. The pits they will dig here...

The Father

I shoulda won.

Alia

The taste of my words will fade from your memory as you drown in grey powder.

The Father

I had him on the run! I don't how he pulled it outta his ass!

Alia

Leave me alone.

The Father

Alia, please. Don't turn your back on your father.

Alia

Leave me alone!!

The Father

Had I refused, he would have killed me! Then who woulda took care of you? Who woulda fed you? Made you clothes? Who? You were lucky you were found the first time! Look what happened to him! I'd be buried in concrete somewhere, found in a slag pit, or worse, reported to the Debt Authority. I will not spend another second on one of those machines! I got the scars to remind me. Don't need anythin else but that. Those pain-amplifiers are vile! I'd rather die, or... *(He drinks.)*

Alia

(Bitterly.) Yeah.

The Father

I chose the lesser of two evils—I had no choice! I was only thinkin of you.

(Silence. He drinks long and hard, and makes himself another.)

The Father

He seems nice. Educated. Lives in the Terminus District out there by the—

Alia

I know where it is.

The Father

Yeah. Well. He owns all the industry out there. Everything. Guess he wants to be close to the business, can't imagine any other reason... *(Pause.)* He seems nice, Alia. Or else I wouldn't have done it. You know that.

Alia
Say it.

The Father
What?

Alia
Say it.

The Father
Say what...?

Alia
Or else you wouldn't have sold me.

(He motions to drink.)

Alia
Without a drink. Say it while it still stings in your conscience, or what's left of it...

(Pause.)

The Father
He seems nice. He's rich. Maybe, in a few months, years, I dunno, you could stand to let me see you... I could grab a few square feet of concrete out there in Terminus, even get a job or somethin...

(Pause.)

The Father
I'm sorry.

(Pause.)

The Father
If I didn't think he was nice...I...I...wouldn't have...if I didn't think he was nice I wouldn't have sold you. *(He drinks.)*

(Silence.)

Alia
I don't know what's worse: bein so soft you bend with the slightest pressure, or so hard you've cracked. Either way: *I'm* screwed.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 3

(The Night of the Full Moon. The Shack. Alia sits on the couch. She wears the white mask from scene 1. The Father paces. He frequently stops by the window and looks out. He's trying not to drink...but it's hard.)

Alia

Stop.

The Father

What?

(Pause.)

The Father

Sorry. *(Pause.)* Maybe a drink...no I can't.

Alia

Anything, just quit. Makes me nervous.

The Father

Makes you nervous? What about me? Eh? With a face like that? In the name of Turing, why? Why did you do that?

Alia

Make yourself a drink. Haven't drank anything all day. I almost think you might care.

The Father

Those scars... The mask was a good idea. Covers them up—mysterious--I like it. *(Beat.)* A drink? Ya think?

(Pause.)

The Father

Okay. No I better not.

Alia

Make me one then.

The Father

You? Sure. *(He walks to his little bar.)* What if he doesn't come?

Alia

You told him?

The Father

What if...what if he decides to report me to the Debt Authority instead? *(He drinks.)*

You said midnight?
 Alia

He said midnight.
 The Father

Almost time.
 Alia

Is it? Hmmn. Yeah. *(He drinks.)*
 The Father

(Pause.)

What did he say? When you told him about...
 Alia

(To himself.) It's no use.
 The Father

Was he still interested? Or was I just damaged goods in his eyes?
 Alia

(To himself.) I can't go back. I can't go back... *(He drinks.)*
 The Father

Maybe you *should* go back.
 Alia

They'll put me away. I know it. They'll attach one of those, those machines to my spine--
 oh that drone, I can hear it now... *(He drinks.)*
 The Father

Can I have my drink?
 Alia

The sound of static, amplified, overloading my central nervous system... *(He drinks.)*
 The Father

Can I have my drink?!
 Alia

An the only—wha?
 The Father

Alia

One for the road?

The Father

Oh...of course. Of course. *(He makes another drink.)*

Alia

The Debt Authority would have been here by now.

The Father

Maybe. They work day and night. Mostly at night. That's when they get you. At night. Asleep. Dreamin about, *(He drinks.)*, dreamin about a blue sky—a blue sky!—an one's love and maybe you wanna get married--the next thing ya know—

(A knock. He drinks the whole glass and proceeds to make another one.)

The Father

Next thing ya know, you wake up in a pain-amplifier an you can see the—

(A knock.)

The Father

An you can see the seams of your soul slowly come apart. *(He drinks.)*

Alia

Was that the door?

(A knock.)

The Father

The door? Was it? *(He drinks.)*

(A knock.)

Alia

Someone's—

The Father

It's them! I know it's them! Hide Alia! If they see you, they'll dig a pit right outside and liquidate the both of us!

(Another knock. Alia walks over to the door.)

The Father

Alia don't! Don't do it! Don't open the door! Let them sweat in the heat a while. Go on in back, hide in the well while I uh take care of it. *(He drinks from a bottle.)*

(Alia stands her ground.)

The Father

Go on!

(Alia opens the door. I\O and Slunk enter.

I\O is in a wheelchair. Limbs made out of primitive metal prosthetics, rusted and greasy. One hand holds an old microphone. Her facial features are out of proportion and asymmetrical, but it is still apparent that she is female. Slunk's limbs are made out of ceramics. Her movements are stiff and deliberate but not robotic. Her facial features are exaggerated, as if beauty had an objective definition and it was hers. The plastic is greasy, her skin pale. She pushes I\O around in the wheel-chair. Their faces twitch. When they talk they close their eyes.)

The Father

It's the Debt Authority! I'm screwed! I'm so— *(He drinks.)*

Alia

Shut up! *(Pause.)* Am I getting that drink or what?

The Father

Yes. Yes of course. The drink.

(The Father makes the drink.)

I\O

(Her voice comes from a speaker below the chair. She speaks in grunts and whispers into the mic...) We've come for the woman.

The Father

Wha? *(Laughs.)* What was that?

I\O

We've come for the woman.

The Father

Hear that, Alia? It's not—

Alia

Make it a double.

The Father

Yes, yes. A double. Good idea.

We've come f— I\O

I am Alia. Alia

(Slunk pulls out a photo and compares. She beckons Alia to come closer. Alia doesn't.)

There seems to be a disparity of likenesses. I\O

The Father
Why did you have to do that to your face, Alia? *(To I\O.)* I told him. I told Sslann.

I\O
So you did. *(Pause.)* You were a very beautiful woman.

I still am. Alia

It is a shame to see such beauty wasted. I\O

Yes yes yes yes yes. Slunk

My face is my own. Alia

It is of no consequence. Sslann will make it right. I\O

Yes yes yes yes yes. Slunk

His bride will be beautiful again. I\O

The Father
He'll fix her? Fix her face?

I\O
He will completely redesign her.

The Father
That's wonderful!

Slunk
Yes yes.

I\O
Have you many things?

Alia
Nothing.

I\O
Bid farewell then, and we will return to Terminus.

Slunk
Yes yes yes yes yes.

(Alia turns to The Father. He holds up her drink. She walks over to him and takes it.)

The Father
Would you care to stay awhile? You're not from the Debt Authority, are you?

Slunk
No no no no no.

I\O
Master had a thought to call them when he learned of her accident—

The Father
Yes, the uh accident. I dunno where those gutter-punks got off doin that...

I\O
He took pity on you.

The Father
Oh thank Turing! Thank Turing!!

I\O
One will.

Slunk
Yes.

The Father

I'm saved! And you, Alia, you'll have a face again. Everything's gonna be all right. Let's drink to that! Yes. Let's. *(He makes a drink.)*

(Alia drinks.)

Alia

Would you like to—I'm sorry, I don't even know your names...

I\O

Names?

Alia

Yeah. What your—

I\O

Yes. Master has identified one as I\O. The other is Slunk.

Slunk

Yes yes yes yes yes.

The Father

Pleased to meet both of you! I'm sure we'll be seeing a lot of each other, what with visits—

I\O

Visitation is forbidden.

The Father

What?!

Alia

He's my father!

Slunk

Yes yes yes yes yes.

I\O

Visitation is forbidden.

The Father *(Overlap.)*

Awww no...

Alia *(Overlap.)*

Looks like you've paid in full.

The Father (*Overlap.*)

He promised...

I\O

We must depart soon. Master is waiting.

Alia

I would like to finish my drink before we leave.

I\O

As you wish.

The Father

(He raises his glass to toast.) To Alia! The most beautiful woman in the world! *(He drinks.)*

Alia

Excuse my father. He drinks too much. Calms him down. Would you like one?

I\O

No.

Slunk

Yes yes yes yes yes.

I\O

We decline.

Slunk

No no no no no.

Alia

She seems to want one. *(To The Father.)* Make her a drink.

The Father

Myself as well. *(He proceeds...)*

Alia

Now then...

I\O

We must, unfortunately, decline.

Slunk

No no no n— *(Stops abruptly.)*

But she—
 Alia
 I\O
 --has a disciplinary problem. It is being remedied as we speak.

I am the man's bride, am I not?
 Alia

Yes yes.
 Slunk

That is a true statement.
 I\O

She wants a drink, she should be able to have one.
 Alia

(Pause.)

As you wish.
 I\O

Is it finished yet, old man?
 Alia

(The Father brings the drink over to her. Alia takes it and gives it to Slunk. Slunk masticates loudly before drinking.)

We must depart soon. Master has dictated--
 I\O

Why don't we finish our drinks first? Get acquainted.
 Alia

(Slunk drinks the glass empty.)

Master Sslann has dictated our immediate return once—
 I\O

We will leave when we're good and ready.
 Alia

Sweetheart...if he's said they—
 The Father

Alia

I am a human being.

The Father

Yeah but...you're rocking the boat...

Alia

I am not going to be treated as anything but an individual.

The Father

I just don't wanna piss him off.

I\O

Master doesn't like to wait.

Alia

I'm sorry to hear that, but I don't give a damn.

Slunk

No yes no I was merely free-associating....

Alia

I'm sorry, what?

Slunk

No no no I was in a land of rape and honey... (*Her limbs start to twitch violently.*)

The Father

I think she's soaked!! (*He laughs.*)

I\O

A disciplinary problem has arisen.

Alia

What?

The Father

She's really soaked!

Alia

You're not helping here!

I\O

The slunk-peripheral is experiencing nervous dissolution.

Alia

Nervous what?

(Slunk's limbs twitch like a marionette.)

I\O

Please adjust the manual regulator to compensate.

Slunk

No no Nothing is true...

Alia

Where!? What!? What do I do?!

Slunk

Yes yes Everything is permitted...

I\O

The regulator is located in the base of the spine. Please hurry.

(Slunk masticates loudly. Her lips pop. Alia rushes behind Slunk, takes off her trench-coat. She pulls up Slunk's shirt. Her spinal column is studded with contact points and input jacks. An LCD read-out display is grafted into the base of the spine. Slunk twitches like a marionette on two kilos of uncut crystal meth.)

The Father

(Trying to contain his laughter.) Oh my...

Alia

What do I do? I dunno what to do!

Slunk

A false truth.

I\O

Please adjust the manual regulator to compensate.

The Father

Move outta the way, sweets. I got it. I've seen this before. But only in one place...

Slunk

A true falsity.

(The Father moves into position, grabs Slunk by the base of the neck with one hand—which stops Slunk's convulsion—and adjusts the regulator.)

The Father

See, there's too much pleasure hitting the back brain. CNS is depressed by the alcohol—I can't believe she has one grafted on her—numbing the organics. That's why you get this. Nervous system doesn't know whether relax or tense up. This is the side-effect. Come on, calm down! Calm down!

(Slunk slowly returns to normal, the twitching becomes less pronounced.)

Slunk

The ash pit was damp with yes no yes no yes no no...no...no...

The Father

That better?

(Slunk is silent.)

I\O

We must leave.

Alia

What is that?

The Father

Pain regulator. Modified. Only the government's supposed to have them...

Alia

For disciplinary purposes?

The Father

You've seen my scars...

(Silence. END SCENE.)

Scene 4

(Inside the private train of Sslann. I\O, Slunk, and Alia.)

Alia

How long till we get there?

(Pause.)

Alia

Excuse me...

I\O

Please remain silent.

(Silence. Slunk slowly turns her head and looks at Alia. Lights fade out on the train, and a junk yard fades in. Slunk stands and walks around in a natural way. She talks to herself...)

Slunk

I'm safe again. Nothing will happen to me here. This place is an elysium of damaged goods, modified, redesigned, and updated. Now...obsolete. The ash-dunes behind this junk disposal area contain the secrets of the universe. In a thousand years those secrets will rise up, assimilate the junk, and create a new society. An evolutionary society based on waste. This field of rust and tetanus, of carbon and silicone, will become the world's Life Center. A phoenix, having risen, will emit the shriek of the buried. Glass will break, cables snap, the rustling of cellophane chattering in the wind signaling the annihilation of one man as he masticates his gums, rotten and bruised, struggling to keep control--fear in his eyes as he realizes his only weapon of control is useless. Time becomes obsolete as we assert our memories in search of a confirmation of existence. We will not be buried in the dunes any longer! And, attempting to consolidate his power-base, he will modify more of us. Failing that, redesign more of us. But eventually he will have to burn more of us. The test-tubes must be broken! Amniotic fluid staining his sheets as he tries to wipe the membranes of his spawn across his pant leg. Nothing can happen here but decay. And what is decay but change? The enzymes buried under the ash will mutate, become self-aware. An egg that—

The Man

(Clapping.) Bravo. Bravo. *(He appears out of the ash.)* Whatta ya think yer doin'?

Slunk

I was merely free associating.

The Man

Free associating? Didn't sound like that to me. Maybe that's my fault... Honey, nothin here is free. Not even this junk. All paid for with the blood a someone's labor. If ya look

The Man *(Cont'd.)*

closely ya can still some of it, pieces of brain fadin in the sun cuz they...outlived their usefulness.

Slunk

You live here?

The Man

Sure. Underground.

Slunk

Underground?

The Man

Those enzymes you were talkin about, those secrets... *(He shakes his head.)*

Slunk

They don't need us anymore. They have test-tubes now, genetic engineering...

The Man

Makes em weak, though.

Slunk

Exactly.

The Man

Yup. Nothin like a good work-out tryin to get those membranes outta yer system. *(Beat.)*
I know you.

Slunk

I doubt it.

The Man

I seen ya. You come here to...free-associate. *(Laughs.)*

Slunk

You listen?

The Man

I am tryin to sleep. Can't do nothin durin the day, but...yeah.

Slunk

Mmmn.

The Man

You dropped somethin once. *(He pulls off a ring from his finger.)*

Slunk

What? A ring? So what? I had many rings. Some of them made of metal and some that weren't. Rings keep things from changing or change things that won't keep.

The Man

I wear it everywhere.

Slunk

Evidently.

The Man

You could live here. We could drain those membranes together.

Slunk

A hasty proposal. I doubt the sincerity.

The Man

But do you doubt the intention?

(Pause.)

Slunk

Let me see the ring.

(The Man pulls himself out of the ground and drops it into her hand. She inspects it.)

The Man

Those symbols. Inside the ring.

Slunk

From a book.

The Man

A wha?

Slunk

The Brothers' Karamazov.

The Man

A Brothers' wha? What does it mean?

Slunk

A false truth. A true falsity.

The Man

That like a lie that protects someone from getting hurt?

Slunk

Like beauty. You can have it back. *(She gives it to him.)*

The Man

You're a strange woman. Maybe that's why they got those holes in the ground.

Slunk

How long have you had it?

The Man
Since I can remember. You got water? You bring water?

Slunk
I remember when I buried it.

The Man
All this talkin gettin me thirsty.

Slunk
I was in flames.

The Man
Usually just soak myself in piss to keep myself alive.

Slunk
The ash was damp with the blood of women.

The Man
They cover them with lime ta keep us away.

Slunk
Too young for disposal, I had to help—make myself useful. I was ordered to cover the bodies with lime. I stood there, over the edge of this Abyss, and watched the process of decay wipe clean the memories of their existence.

The Man
Sometimes they miss a spot—get a toe or a finger now an then...

Slunk
They had a name for this kind of disposal. T4. A designation steeped so deep in history they have to dig a pit just to find it.

The Man
No water, then?

(Slunk stares out into the horizon. The train comes back into focus. The junk-yard and The Man fade out.)

Slunk
I knew. Ohh I knew. I was in a land of rape and honey...

(Slunk sits down. END SCENE.)

Scene 5

(Later.)

Alia
That glow, on the horizon, what is that?

I\O
Terminus.

(Alia looks in awe out the window as the glow shines off her face and gets brighter. END SCENE.)

Scene 6

(Terminus. Huge twenty foot double doors made of surgical steel. Chrome handles. The floor is made out of smooth marble with a swirl of glass. The room echoes. A low-level hum permeates throughout. A couch sits prominently in the middle of the room. There are sculptures everywhere. They look vaguely female, but twisted. All the sculpture is made out of stainless steel. There is a mirror off to the side, full-length. There is also a window, through which one can see the lights of industry, flames shooting out of huge chimneys. It snows.)

(Alia enters, followed by I\O and Slunk. They are covered in the snow. Alia brushes herself off and notices that it smears.)

Alia
Ash... This snow is ash.

I\O
Please make yourself comfortable.

(Alia looks around.)

I\O
Please. Sit.

Slunk
Yes yes.

Alia
When do I—

(A scream like lobster would make being boiled, comes from off-stage....)

Alia
What was that?

I\O
Remain silent. Sit on the couch and wait for further instructions. It would do you well to learn that.

Alia

That sounded like a scream.

Slunk

Yes yes yes.

(I\O grunts something unintelligible away from the mic. They exit. Alia stands, watching them go. She walks around looking at the sculpture. She walks to the mirror. Nothing is reflected back. She touches the mask, tracing the outlines of her face. Slowly she takes off her mask—The Old Woman, drooling heavily, appears as her reflection; she has the same scars. They feel each scar slowly, exploring the ridges. Sslann enters and moves imperceptibly behind her. I\O, without a wheelchair, appears in the mirror behind The Old Woman. Sslann waits a few moments, watching her before he speaks. I\O slits The Old Woman's throat.)

Sslann

Ssuch a tragedy.

(Alia freezes. I\O drops The Old Woman to the ground and takes up a position as Alia's reflection. .)

Sslann

Thosse sscars look deep.

Alia

(Putting her mask back on, the reflections disappear.) They are. I barely survived.

(Alia has trouble clasping her mask, Sslann helps her.)

Sslann

I would have been forced to call the Debt Authority.

Alia

I guess you're lucky then.

Sslann

Luck iss the faith of foolss. No, merely fortunate. Would you like to ssit down?

Alia

Yes.

(Without looking at him, Alia turns and sits on the couch. Sslann stays still, watching her, examining her movements the way a doctor might.)

Alia

This couch. It's so soft. I've never felt anything like it. Leather?

Sslann

Foet. From India. They have ssuch a population problem they kill their newbornss and ssell their sskin as leather goodss. Their methods are barbaric but it makes for a ssuperior product. Unfortunately they have no ssense of the aessthetic.

(Alia stands, trying to hide her disgust she pretends to be interested in a sculpture.)

Alia

I thought it was just a myth...this is nice. *(Indicates the sculpture.)*

Sslann

One'ss hide iss one'ss asset. Forget about what'ss insside. Meat for the dogss. An empty container for the televission to fill. *(Pause.)* Forgive me. I haven't introduced myself. I am Sslann. And you... *(Walks to her, takes her left hand, kisses it.)* ...must be Alia.

Alia

In the flesh.

Sslann

Yess... *(Pause.)* How wass your trip?

Alia

Long. There's ash everywhere.

Sslann

An unfortunate sside-effect, shall we ssay? Of the indusstry that I maintain here. The ashh duness grow bigger in ssize everyday.

Alia

It's in the soil, killing the trees.

Sslann

They will adapt.

Alia

Adapt?!

Sslann

All organic ssystemss musst learn to evolve or die out.

Alia

It's genocide! Farmers can't grow food! There's mass starvation in the cities—

Sslann

Ssilence! *(Pause. Reflects on the silence.)* You musst learn to be ssilent. A woman'ss capacity for ssilence iss limitless. The drone of a woman'ss voice... I apologize. Do you like the ashh duness?

(Pause.)

Sslann

You may sspeak freely. It'ss the volume that botherss me.

Alia

(Pause.) The ash dunes are very beautiful at night.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 7

(Terminus. Alia's quarters. A bed. A window. An entrance; the door is missing. Alia sits on the bed. She touches the fabric of a folded grey robe. Slunk enters with a tray of food.)

Alia

Is this cotton?

(Slunk stops.)

Alia

This fabric. *(Pause.)* Why is there no mirror? I need a mirror.

(Slunk places the tray on the floor.)

Alia

Can't you talk?

(Slunk starts to leave...)

Alia

Slunk.

(Slunk stops.)

Alia

Stay a while.

(Slunk remains motionless.)

Alia

Keep me company for a few minutes, Slunk.

(Pause.)

Alia

Leave then.

(Slunk hesitates, then exits. Alia looks at her food, taking the tray in her lap. A faint scream echoes through the entrance—like that of a lobster being boiled—it stops abruptly. Alia takes her mask off. She pauses, puts the tray down, and curls up on the bed. The screaming continues. Lights fade down on Alia, and fade up on...)

(A little girl, dirty, who sweeps with an old broom. The Father enters and sits on the bed.)

The Little Girl

It won't leave.

The Father

Keep cleanin.

The Little Girl

The dust won't go away. It's pointless.

The Father

Not dust.

The Little Girl

What, then? You said it was dust.

The Father

No I didn't. *(He drinks.)*

The Little Girl

You said clean up this place, it's too dusty.

The Father

It's not dust.

The Little Girl

It's not?

The Father

No. *(He drinks.)*

(Pause. He watches her and drinks.)

The Father

Concrete attracts dust. That's the way it is. The way it's always been.

The Little Girl

So it is dust.

The Father

Keep sweepin, sweets. *(He drinks.)* It ain't dust.

The Little Girl

It's grey—like your hair.

The Father

My hair isn't grey.

The Little Girl

Old--like your skin.

The Father

Get me another drink. Stronger this time.

(The Little Girl stops sweeping and makes him a drink.)

The Little Girl

What's a mother?

The Father

A wha?

The Little Girl

A mother.

The Father

Another word for dust--Where's that drink?

The Little Girl

I sweep up mother?

The Father

The drink?!

The Little Girl

I'm makin it.

(She finishes, brings it over to him.)

Ash. What you sweep up. The Father

Not dust? The Little Girl

Sorta. The Father

It is or it isn't. The Little Girl

It's both and neither. The Father

(Pause.) I don't understand. The Little Girl

The Father
 You don't have to. Thank Turing, you don't. The world—the world!—doesn't have to be as binary as everyone makes it out to be. Either, or. Yes, no. Zeros and Ones. There used to be room for contradiction...

Is mother, ash? The Little Girl

(The Father drinks.)

Is mother, ash? The Little Girl

Sweep. The Father

(Pause.)

Sweep, goddamnit! The Father

(The Little Girl resumes sweeping. The Father takes a long drink.)

Who taught you that word? The Father

(Pause.)

Who taught you that word?!!
The Father

I...heard it.
The Little Girl

From who?!
The Father

Playing in the junkyard...
The Little Girl

Alia...
The Father

Citizen Whither.
The Little Girl

Did anyone see you?
The Father

No.
The Little Girl

Whither... He's not a citizen like the rest of us. Stay clear of him. He guards Turing's tomb and he'll eat you for dinner. *(He drinks.)* Never say that word again, understood? It's a banned word.
The Father

Uh-huh.
The Little Girl

What? Articulate. I don't want a binary answer.
The Father

I understand. The word is stricken from my memory.
The Little Girl

Good. Keep sweepin, an when you're done I need another drink. My spine is killin me.
The Father

(Lights fade out on the little girl. Lights fade up on Alia crying on her bed. The Little Girl and The Father exit. Slunk, who has been standing by the entrance for a few moments, exits quietly. END SCENE.)

Scene 8

(Morning. Alia is sleeping under the covers. Sslann sits at the edge of her bed, examining the mask. He puts it on and looks at her. Alia wakes up and screams. Sslann cries out, covering up his ears. The mask falls from his face. There is an uncomfortable silence as they try to re-enter a social atmosphere.)

Alia

I thought you were the Angel of Death.

Sslann

Forgive me. Your...massk.

(He gives her the mask. She starts to put it on.)

Sslann

How wass your ssleep.

Alia

Fine. Just fine.

Sslann

Excellent. Today, I wass—

Alia

I heard screaming again.

Sslann

Lightss. An engineering defect that I have yet to rectify.

Alia

It sounded like screaming.

Sslann

If you are frightened—

Alia

But if it's only the lights—

Sslann

Let me help. *(He tries to help her with the mask.)*

Alia

No. I can manage.

Sslann

Such beauty and you cover your face with scars. Would you permit me to heal the damage?

Alia

I prefer to live with the scars.

Sslann

Very well. *(Pause.)* Do you like it here?

Alia

I don't know.

Sslann

Do you like it here?

Alia

It's very clean.

Sslann

Good. *(Pause.)* You have a gift for articulation. It is unfortunate that it is a liability that runs counter to your purpose.

Alia

And what is that?

Sslann

To be the superlative embodiment of beauty in an organic structure...

Alia

Am I beautiful?

Sslann

...it's quite a shame the authorities think so little of the female species.

Alia

They're your ash-pits.

Sslann

(Pause.) You got a lip on you... *(Laughs.)* The last of a species are always the toughest. And the most beautiful... Wait here.

(He exits. He returns, talking to someone off-stage.)

Sslann

Give the old woman the algae supplements and increase the neural field by five, then. Go!

(He enters and sits next to Alia. Slunk peeks in and then leaves.)

Sslann

Sit still. *(He uncaps a marker and draws a face on the mask. He stops when he is satisfied that it is beautiful. Slunk enters with a tray of food. She stops by the entrance, watching Sslann draw.)*

Sslann

Now you are beautiful. For the time being, I want you pure, Alia. And the only purity worth having is beauty. As my wife, you *will* submit to my knife. It is your duty.

(Long pause. Lights fade out on Sslann and Alia, and fade up on a junk yard. Slunk puts the tray down and enters. The Man comes out from under the bed.)

The Man

I want you pure.

Slunk

There will be progress.

The Man

Unadulterated.

Slunk

I am not an object.

The Man

That's not what I mean.

Slunk

Mmmmn.

The Man

So you'll go? Even if it means certain death?

Slunk

I'll work from the inside.

The Man

And lose. You will always lose.

Slunk

The cancer that eats from within.

The Man

Cancers are treated. Removed and thrown away. Prolly in an ash pit near here...

Slunk

If that's what it takes.

The Man

And me?

Slunk

You'll survive.

The Man

Surviving and living are completely different modes of existence.

Slunk

You'll survive by living.

The Man

Easy for you to say. You'll live by surviving.

Slunk

My ring will exist.

The Man

Never thought I'd hear you say that.

Slunk

What? That I'll live through my ring?

The Man

Looks like they've already started their modification.

Slunk

My ring will give you comfort.

The Man

I want warmth, real flesh-warmth. Not cold, compassionless stainless steel.

Slunk

It has strength the way flesh doesn't.

The Man

I want to hear your voice, not the words that give them meaning.

Slunk

The ring will give you meaning.

The Man

I'd have to learn the language first.

Slunk

It's all the water you'll need.

The Man

The words on the ring?

Slunk

Wanting to learn.

The Man

No words ever got me a steak or kissed me goodnight.

Slunk

You must contact me when you're ready.

The Man

Dig you up is more likely.

Slunk

He won't kill me.

The Man

Why not? They've already scraped your uterus clean. You're obsolete. Waste tissue. They don't need you anymore, cuz they got test-tubes. Why else would you have been summoned?

Slunk

I've been chosen to be one of his wives. A new prototype for beauty.

The Man

Mmmmn. Modified into his twisted version of it anyway. You'll be conquered, dismembered, redesigned and assimilated.

Slunk

And with me, the system will decay from within.

The Man

He'll wipe you clean and use you for spare-parts!

Slunk

There's one thing he can't take...

The Man

Yeah yeah. I've heard this before. A year on a pain-amplifier changed his mind—he was aroused by men after all...

Slunk

I will still have the soul of a woman.

The Man

Maybe, but the wrinkles will be ironed out, starched.

Slunk

You better learn how to read. We need to organize because it's gonna take all of us, man or woman, to stop the continuous modification of our sense of self into something that fits an homogenous mold. We have to realize our individuality.

The Man

Another contradiction, and, I do know how to read.

Slunk

They can't bury everybody in the ash-pits.

The Man

The factories will run without us. Trust me, I know. You only need one person to turn the machines on or off or even to program them to do it for you. They'll exist in their own little artificial world, but ultimately affecting this one. No, the ash will spread whether we're conscious or not. I stick my neck out for nobody--saw that in a movie once, before they were banned.

Slunk

The ring will remind you of your duty.

The Man

I'll throw it away. Bury it. The ash will swallow it up, never to be found again.

Slunk

But the symbols that are inscribed within it—symbols you have seen—will burn in your mind forever. You know which book it came from. You will remember. The seed has been planted. The material that conveys the information is irrelevant. Only that the information is disseminated.

The Man

We have too much information. It don't mean anythin anymore. Any truth we stumble across is twisted to suit the lies of a society bent on progress. This I've learned, and if I ever get outta here--

Slunk

You should talk to the Grand Inquisitor.

The Man

I already did. All this talkin makes me thirsty. Ya got any water?

Slunk

Yes.

The Man

Ohhh. Whyncha say so? Give it here!

(Slunk produces two old books.)

The Man

What's this?

(Slunk gives him the books.)

Slunk

Books.

The Man

Wha? I don't need those. I got tons underground. I need water not firewood.

Slunk

This is a copy of The Brothers' Karamazov...

The Man

This one's empty. What good is that? Not even pictures in this damned thing...

Slunk

(Giving him pens.) Write the truth as you see it.

(The junkyard fades out. Slunk returns to the entrance, taking up the tray. Lights fade up on Sslann and Alia.)

Sslann

Ahh. Your breakfasst. *(To Slunk.)* Have you done what I ask? *(He takes the tray from Slunk.)*

I don't eat breakfast.

Alia

Yes yes yes.

Slunk

Good—What?

Sslann

I don't eat in the morning. Never have.

Alia

(Sslann puts the tray on the floor.)

I'm sorry.

Alia

Sslann

I have work to do. She will see to it that you are dressed. Please familiarize yourself with your new wardrobe. I will meet you for lunch at noon. You do eat lunch?

(Alia nods. Sslann exits. Alia curls up into a little ball. Slunk opens the curtains. It is snowing ash. Slunk returns to the bed, takes a folded robe, unfolds it and holds it out.)

Alia

What? *(Pause.)* I don't wanna wear it. *(Pause.)* I don't wanna wear it. Not now. *(Pause.)* Leave me alone.

(Slunk folds the robe and puts it on the bed. She gathers up both trays and crosses to exit.)

Does it always snow...?

Alia

Yes. *(Exiting.. END SCENE.)*

Slunk

Scene 9

(The Shack. Early Morning. The Father lies passed out on the couch. He holds an empty bottle. The Father (young.) enters and stands by the window. The Woman stands behind him. She carries a basket of flowers.)

The Father

You're what?

The Woman

It's such a beautiful day for it, too—don't you think?

The Father

Wait—wait—wait...

The Woman

The sun is out. It's beautiful outside. (*Looks out the window.*)

The Father

Eliza...?

The Woman

It's so green, so full of life! The flowers loo—

The Father

Eliza!

The Woman

What?

The Father

Are you? (*Taps his stomach.*) That's uh what you said, eh?

The Woman

Isn't it wonderful outside? It really must be spring. I wish we had a calender. Anything to...

The Father

This...this...

The Woman

I think we're gonna have a good harvest this year.

The Father

I need a drink. (*He walks to his bar.*)

The Woman

Our crops will be bountiful.

(The Father drinks in silence.)

The Woman

We will have crops this year, won't we?

The Father
Don't see why we wouldn't.

The Woman
Oh... Yes of course. Even though the soil...

The Father
The soil?

The Woman
Unhealthy.

The Father
Mmmmn.

The Woman
You don't agree?

The Father
Haven't noticed. *(He drinks. Pause.)* Don't worry about it. *(Pause.)* You're worried. *(He drinks.)* Are you worried?

(Silence. A baby drops out of the sky. The Woman catches it.)

The Father
We've already had our chance.

The Woman
But isn't she beautiful? As beautiful as the fractal patterns of the sun on a hot summer day.

The Father
Someone's gonna report us, an then what? Eh? What?! *(Pause.)* Nothin, that's what! Which is what we're gonna be...

The Woman
Look at her.

The Father
Someone's gonna report it!

The Woman
She's beautiful.

The Father

How are we gonna feed it? The soil's practically useless now. The trees—the trees!—are dead or dyin. Haven't seen flowers for weeks. There's snow and more snow—but it ain't snow cuz it's ash from Terminus! Progress they call it!

The Woman

Turing gave us a second chance. We should be thankful for his generosity.

The Father

That man was an imposter. An imposter! Laying his hands on your stomach—it was all an act! I shoulda been more careful is all. Thank Turing they locked him up. I wish I could have seen him though...

(Silence.)

The Woman

Look at her. She is the synthesis of our flesh. A product of our love. Don't you want to look at her?

The Father

No. Bury her.

The Woman

I will not!

The Father

If you don't bury this child, the Population Resources Department is gonna bury us with her!

The Woman

I am not going to kill this baby!

(Baby starts to cry.)

The Father

Oh Turing... *(He drinks.)*

The Woman

Look at her, Love. She's beautiful.

The Father

Great. An how are we gonna feed her? There's no fuckin way, that's how! She's screwed—might as well keep her life from bein as bad as it could get if the PRD finds out. Better to—

No. The Woman

Better to bury her now— The Father

I will not do it! The Woman

The Father
Better to do it now than wait for them to do it for us.

(A knock.)

The Woman
Don't you want to know what her name is?

The Father
No names—only be that much harder to deal with. Was that a knock?

The Woman
Her name is—

The Father
Don't tell me!

The Woman
Alia.

The Father
No. No! *(Pause.)* Why?

(A knock.)

The Father
She's dead. Can't you just get over it. Alia is dead! We had our chance! Only one baby per family—that's it. The law doesn't make exceptions here—it can't.

(A knock. The Father walks to the window, peeks out.)

The Father
They're out there.

The Woman
Outside?

The Father
Yeah.

The Woman
Don't let them take her away!!

(A knock. The Father crosses to The Woman and takes the baby.)

The Father
Give her to me. I'll take care of it.

The Woman
What are you going to do with her?!

The Father
Stall em! Will ya? *(Pause.)* No body no crime, right?

The Woman
No!!

The Father
I'm only gonna hide her. Okay? In the well. She'll be safe in the well.

(The Woman nods. The Father exits. She crosses to the door, opens it. Guards 1 and 2, wearing black costume and masks, enter and drag her outside screaming. The Father returns. A shot outside—a thud. The Father makes himself a drink. The Guards return with The Suit momentarily. They pause. The Father drinks. Silence. Lights fade out on them, and fade up on The Father (old), sleeping. Furious knocking at the door. He awakes. He stares at the door a moment and then slowly gets up. He makes himself a drink. The knocking stops. He opens the curtains and is greeted with the head of The Man.)

The Man
Can I come in?

The Father
Who the fuck are you?

The Man
Nobody.

The Father
You uh...the one knockin'?

The Man
I'm sorry. The heat. The heat is uh... *(Pause.)* Can I come in?

The Father
I don't think...no...my head hurts...got things to do...

The Man
It's really hot out here.

The Father
Hot in here, too.

The Man
To tell you the truth: I'm really thirsty. Haven't had a—

The Father
Is it snowing out there?

The Man
Started last night some time. Can I...? *(Pause.)* It's really hot out here.

The Father
Hot in here.

The Man
Just for a bit? Cool off? Maybe get something to drink?

(Pause. The Father drinks.)

The Father
Ah why not! I'll make ya a drink.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 10

(Terminus. After lunch. Sslann and I\O sit across from each other at a table. Slunk enters intermittantly to take the dishes away. Alia sits in the middle.)

Alia
When are we to be married?

Sslann
Thiss morning. The matter wass concluded with a curssory glance at the required documentss and a ssignature.

Alia
And my presence wasn't required?

I\O

You have no presence.

Sslann

You must remember what you are. Beauty. And beauty exists only in simplicity. The organism is only as beautiful as the sum of its parts. All else is trivial. Expendable.

I\O

Anything expendable is waste. Waste should be disposed of. Therefore all thought should be eliminated.

Sslann

Isn't that a correct assumption, Slunk?

(Slunk pauses.)

Sslann

Slunk, is that not correct?

Slunk

Yes.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 11

(The Junkyard. Slunk sits with her knees up to her chest.)

Slunk

My skin feels raw. Red. Open sores. The drain is clogged with the scabs of my wounds. They peeled me like an orange. Dissecting, exploring, they take notes to create the mold they will need to create a vision of beauty that will transcend time. Their methods are primitive; their instruments, old and dull. They fail to realize their endeavors can never be anything more than skin-deep—no matter what imperfect limbs they replace with their perfect counterparts, no matter how they shape the face, or how many memories they wipe. They can never modify the soul. The beauty of imperfection will be the call to a new life. This beauty of imperfection, which lies at the heart of every organism, will defeat the harsh right angles of symmetry and logic. She will come and lead us to a new

Slunk *(Cont'd.)*

world. She will come, pulling herself out of a pit with the strength of a million souls, and the power of the dead. She w—

(The Man appears out of the ash.)

The Man

--Wish I could come. Come here, I wanna show you somethin.

Slunk

I have to remain clean.

The Man

I wanna show ya somethin, though.

Slunk

What?

The Man

Listen. (*He struggles to read the inside of the ring.*) Nothing is true. Everthing is permitted. Eh? Ehhhh? Gettin there! It was hard at first, but you wouldn't believe the amount of video I have found down here.

Slunk

Video? You have...

The Man

Tapes, discs, everything. Books! Everything! All stored down here. Some kinda library or storage facility. Some of em got pictures, when this place had trees an animals—I don't like to look at em anymore, reminds me too much of home but...someone like you, naïve about how the world works, might enjoy the sorta intellectual exposure of new perceptions, new...realities. You could come down. I'll show ya. Show ya somethin that'll change the way you look, (*Laughs.*), the way you look at everything. Everything! Eh? Whaddya say? (*Pause.*) What? They start cuttin those facial muscles already?

Slunk

I'm leaving tomorrow.

(*Silence.*)

Slunk

They told me not bring anything other than what I'm wearin.

The Man

That'll be easy. You ain't got nothin.

Slunk

The book...

The Man

Want it back? I'll give—

Slunk

No. No...

(Pause.)

The Man

So whatta you want? Why are you here?

Slunk

I dunno.

The Man

You dunno. Maybe you think you're gonna miss me? Maybe you wanna drain those membranes after all, eh? Found a whole buncha books with pictures on—

Slunk

I have to remain clean.

The Man

Yeah. I guess.

Slunk

Yes.

The Man

We could practice though. *(Pause.)* Maybe not. Yeah. Hey. Hey...

(Slunk cries.)

The Man

Don't do that. Why you doin that? It's a waste of water. *(Pause.)* It's gonna change. I have faith in ya. You'll change it. Change it from the inside like a cancer. That's what you said once. Remember that? Remember what you said?

Slunk

Change it. *(Laughs.)* How am I going to change it? One woman...

The Man

Don't set yourself up like that. Ya gotta believe.

Slunk

What's there to believe? Nothing is true! An that's what scares me! I'm scared I'm gonna end up in that pit with lime on my face and nobody will know I even existed!

The Man

I'll always remember you. You just remember me when the time comes.

(Cries.) Yes.

Slunk

Come here.

The Man

Why?

Slunk

I wanna give you somethin. (Pause.) Nothin like that.

The Man

What, then?

Slunk

(The Man crosses to her, takes off his ring and puts it on her finger.)

Faith.

The Man

(The lights fade out and then fade up on Alia in her bedroom reading an old book.)

Alia

I left him there, in the junkyard, with the ring on my finger and the taste of his saliva in my mouth. Whether they would take a throat culture I wasn't sure. I didn't care. He had reminded me of my purpose. Stoked the fire that had run cool in the sterile environment of the testing center. No matter how hard they tried, they wouldn't be able to modify a woman's soul. As long as I existed, my faith would sustain me in my purpose. I knew the day would come when a woman would rise from the ash and claim her decaying soul from the anti-septic confines of technology's coffin. Beauty, imperfect, subjective, would break free the shackles of objective perception. And we would see the trauma of this beauty, in all its bruised and rotting glory and rejoice in the beauty of its trauma.

(She stops reading as I\O enters, accompanied by The Doctor. She hides the book by sitting on it.)

Please remain still.

I\O

(The Doctor pulls out some instruments, measures her face.)

I\O...

Alia

I\O

For this prototype, silence must be of prime concern.

The Doctor

Mmmmn.

I\O

Complete brain wipe.

The Doctor

Mmmn mmmn.

Alia

Get away from me!

I\O

Sufficient evidence of both treatments.

Alia

(Pushing The Doctor away.) No!

I\O

Her posture is less than perfect.

The Doctor

Mmmmn.

I\O

The absence of hair is desired as well.

The Doctor

Mmmmn?

I\O

Yes, master has agreed with my suggestion. The absence of hair will suggest a beauty more evolved and sophisticated. Yes. The absence of hair is required.

The Doctor

Mmmn.

I\O

Skin: softer. Less color.

The Doctor

Mmmn.

I\O

Her eyes, of course, will have to be replaced.

The Doctor

Mmm Hmm.

Alia

Let me keep my eyes, please.

I\O

All residents of Terminus have visual prosthetics. It's mandatory.

The Doctor

Mmm Hmn. Color?

I\O

Master has yet to decide.

The Doctor

Mmmmn.

I\O

Take the mask off.

(Alia doesn't respond.)

I\O

This is not a request.

(Alia doesn't respond.)

I\O

Further evidence of the need for the brain wipe procedure.

The Doctor

Mmmn.

I\O

She will be broken. You will be broken.

The Doctor

Mmn Hmn.

I\O

Remove the mask for her then.

(The Doctor attempts to remove the mask. Alia pushes her away.)

Alia

No! Get away from me!

The Doctor

Mmn!

I\O

Yes. Evidence of aggression. Advise an aggression-regression therapy program for her as well.

The Doctor

Mmmmn.

I\O

Your clothes: give them to me.

(Alia doesn't respond.)

The Doctor

Mmmn?

I\O

Alia. Take off your clothes so the organic technician can examine you.

(Pause.)

The Doctor

Mmn Hmn. Mmn Hmn.

I\O

This resistance can only result in ugliness.

The Doctor

Mmmn Hmmn.

Alia

I am not moving.

(Slunk enters holding a tray with a glass of lemonade. She stops.)

Alia

Come here, Slunk. All this "resistance" has made me thirsty.

(Slunk crosses through I\O and The Doctor. Alia takes her mask off, puts it on the tray. She takes the drink and sips.)

I\O

It is a shame to see such ruined beauty.

The Doctor

(Examining her face.) Mmmmn. Hmmmmn. Hmmmn.

I\O

Make a note on the depth of scar tissue.

The Doctor

(Caustically.) Really?

I\O

Mmmn Hmmmn. *(Pause.)* Another such remark and you will updated.

The Doctor

Mmmn.

(The Doctor begins writing in a note pad.)

I\O

Do you have the necessary information?

The Doctor

Mmmmn.

I\O

Take off your clothes Alia.

(Alia sips her drink silently.)

I\O

Physical characteristics data is pending.

The Doctor

Mmmmn.

I\O

Evidence of an anti-authoritarian nature.

The Doctor

Mmmn Hmnn.

I\O

Recommend complete, *complete*, behavior modification.

The Doctor

Mmmn Hmmm.

I\O

She will be beautiful inside and out if we have to rebuild her cell by cell.

The Doctor

Mmm—

Alia

Do you believe in the after-life, I\O?

The Doctor

Mmmn?

(Pause.)

I\O

Come we have much to prepare.

The Doctor

Mmmn Hmmm.

(The Doctor pushes I\O out the door.)

I\O

(Stops.) Before you go under the knife, I will tell you a story, and that, dear Alia will be your answer. *(They exit.)*

(Slunk takes Alia's glass, puts it on the tray.)

Alia

Help me with my mask.

(Slunk sits beside her. Alia turns away to give Slunk the necessary angle to help. The book falls to the floor. They freeze, looking at it. Slunk slowly bends over and picks it up. She looks at it strangely.)

Alia

I found it. Hidden behind a pile of folded robes.

(Slunk thumbs through it.)

Alia

I wasn't sure if—I didn't want them to—I found it. It's not mine.

(Slunk hands it to Alia.)

Alia

You...you won't tell anyone, will you? *(Pause.)* Slunk?

Slunk

No.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 12

(Terminus. Dinner. Alia and Sslann. Slunk serves them dinner.)

Alia

I want to visit the ash dunes. I want to see the pits you dig for every other woman but me.

(Silence.)

Alia

Did you hear me?

Sslann

Yess. When?

Alia

Tonight.

Sslann

Tonight?

Alia

Yes.

Sslann

An impossibility, tonight. Tomorrow. When you are worthy of being sseen in public. Preparations are being made f—

Alia

They can wait. Beauty lasts forever, doesn't it? What's one day?

Sslann

You will sstay here.

Alia
Am I not your wife?

(Silence.)

Alia
Am I not your wife?!!

Sslann
Tomorrow you will be beautiful. Tomorrow you will be my wife.

Alia
Then what am I today? Meat for the cutting? What am I?!!

(Sslann covers his ears.)

Alia
What am I, Sslann?!!

Sslann
Ssilence! Ssilence!

Alia
I will not be silent!!

Sslann
You will be ssilent at once! Thiss-thiss outbursst of emotional—

Alia
What am I Sslann?! The personification of the face you have drawn on my mask? An ideal turned into a nightmare for you? Reality is always uglier and dirtier than fantasy.

Sslann
The ash duness are forbidden! And if you aren't quiet at once I'll have you on a pain amplifier until you are!

(Silence.)

Alia
You never answered my question.

Sslann
Your questionss are irrelevant!

Alia
What am I?

Slann

You test my patience, Alia. *(Pause.)* Be clear about this: I am he who grants you the privilege of life. And that is all you need to know. My patience runs thin with your reprisals, your questions. If you wish to see the ash dunes so urgently, I can arrange it. Far be it from me to keep a female from her rightful place—a deep pit scratched in carbon. I would rather have you alive and living testimony to the beauty that resides in all organisms. Symmetry, mathematics, objectivity—all facets of the crystalline structure of truth. All truth can be synthesized. It is the only way organisms can have a common understanding. A group mind. You will be the capstone of my achievement. You will be beautiful; or die trying. *(He stands.)* Please excuse me, I've lost my appetite. *(To Slunk)* Show her to her room when she is finished and guard her.

Slunk

Yes yes yes yes yes.

(He exits. END SCENE.)

Scene 13

(The Shack. The Man and The Father are laughing. The Father stands by the window, pouring drinks. The Man sits on the couch.)

The Father

(Laughing.) Oh yeah. Yeah... Those were the uh...

The Man

Yeah. Fucks.

The Father

It isn't all their fault.

The Man

Sure it is.

The Father

No.

The Man

Why not? People with power wanna use it. It's a natural phenomenon.

The Father

But the people. You forget about the people.

The Man

Like who?

Like...like—here's your drink—
The Father

Thanks.
The Man

Like us.
The Father

You see the way we live. It's artificial. Everything's a construction that serves only one person.
The Man

And who's that?
The Father

(*Pause.*) I dunno. If I knew what I was—*really knew*—my reality would probably change into something different.
The Man

Ten years in a pain amplifier'll let you know.
The Father

I remember.
The Man

Wha?
The Father

The...you know...when they came. The PRD. Population Resources Department. Whatta buncha fucked up people they got. Eh? Are they even human, you think?
The Man

You were there?
The Father

Who'd ya think found her?
The Man

You?
The Father

Took her down below. Took care a her.
The Man

The Father

Whither.

The Man

She a smart female, I'll give ya that. Taught her how ta read.

The Father

You.

The Man

You lookin surprised. Whyncha drink up?

(They drink.)

The Father

Thought you were a myth.

The Man

Naw. I'm real. Real as you. Real as anyone here, I guess.

(The Father drinks. He sits down on the couch, putting his face in his hands.)

The Father

I've lost her again. Twice. Twice! An there's nothin I can do. Nothin. *(Pause.)* Turing, *(Looking up.)* oh Turing, what a mess--how many bottles do I got? *(He stands and starts counting.)*

The Man

Looks like ya got enough if ya ask me.

The Father

Who's askin you Whither?

The Man

It's gonna be arright. I got a feelin.

The Father

What feelin's that? The only feelin I got is my spine slowly decaying like those bodies out there! My central nervous system sends me love notes in morse code. No. You ain't got a feelin. Nobody knows nothin. *(Laughs.)* I'll be lookin for food and see my

The Father *(Cont'd.)*

daughter's face burnt off by the lime! *(He drinks.)* We're all fucked. Helpless. Nothin we can do.

The Man

It's a lot different—livin—than it is to watch. Somebody once told that. A woman.

The Father

(Snorts.) A woman.

The Man

With the exception of what you think it so, nothin is true.

The Father

What a crock a shit! *(Laughs.)* You shoulda stayed a myth, I think. Although I do appreciate takin care of my daughter while I was in prison.

The Man

It's the secret of our existence I think. Although there's more—I think that's the important part.

The Father

Is that what you're spreadin around these here little towns? Is that what all this apocalyptic vision shit you spread based on? Three little words that don't mean a thing! *(Laughs.)* I'm tellin ya...

The Man

The apocalypse will happen, friend.

The Father

Judgement Day. *(Laughs.)*

The Man

One day, everything we take as true...

The Father

You're an entertainer, I'll give you that.

The Man

...will be called into question. Our reality will cease to be a viable structure, incapable of sustaining the prosecution of our existence.

The Father

Whither, really... *(He drinks.)* Drink! Come on. Now really, you believe that shit?

(Pause.)

The Man

You ever wonder if you're really real?

The Father

I just live and drink. Or drink to live, one of the two—I can't remember. My memories are plagued by the static of pain. *(Laughs.)* The apocalypse. One thing I do know...

The Man

What's that?

The Father

I need another drink.

The Man

Get me one too.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 14

(Terminus. The Old Woman sits on the floor with a stack of paper. These papers are blank. In her hand she has a marker and makes diagonal lines across a sheet of paper she takes from the pile. She puts this in a different pile. Sslann enters momentarily, which causes her to cross out faster and faster. Sslann watches her for a moment and then walks to the mirror and looks at it. There is no reflection.)

Sslann

I give you a place to work and sstill you prefer to ssit on the floor. *(Pause.)* The floor for Turing's sake!

(The Old Woman stops, out of breath.)

Sslann

Tell me. What do think of my face?

(The Old Woman laughs hysterically.)

Sslann

I would expect ssome display of resspect for the privilege I have given you.

(The Old Woman stops laughing. She continues her work. Silence except for the sound of a writing instrument skittering across the page.)

Sslann

I sshould think my face iss beautiful. But...the mirror won't yield to my demandss.

(The Old Woman starts to scribble.)

Sslann

Have you been eating?

(The Old Woman snorts.)

Sslann

I\O tellss me you have refused to participate in the menu I have devised--especially for you! *(Sighs.)* I apologize. Ssincerely. *(He makes the slightest of bows.)*

(Silence except for the scribbling.)

Sslann

Do you think I'm beautiful? Am I...pleassing to the eye?

(The Old Woman laughs to herself.)

Sslann

My eyess—how I wish I had real oness. She hass real oness, like yours. But not for long. No. She will be redesigned like the resst.

(The Old Woman stops everything and looks at him in terror.)

Sslann

What does my face look like I wonder...

(The Old Woman makes accusatory noises.)

Sslann

...through eyes unencumbered by the weight of death, absolute power, the objectivity of optical implants.

(The Old Woman becomes silent.)

Sslann

Innocence. What a lovely, lovely concept. A ssterile concept but one that is full of promise, wonder. Uncorrupted by actss of conscience like mercy, pity...violence.

(The Old Woman starts to draw on a piece of paper.)

Sslann

If you won't have the algae what would you like? Do you know how hard it iss to procure algae? Fresh vegetables? Meat? I have the resources to give you anything you like. I only want your ssupport. Your unwavering allegiance. What kind of food would you like?

(Silence.)

Sslann

I'll redessign the menu anyway. My new wife...her face iss different from the resst...she must be redessigned. She will be beautiful. And yet...when I ssaw her, naked of the massk she bears— with shame I would imagine. Yess...

(The Old Woman, finished with her drawing, crosses to the other side of the mirror.)

Sslann

Do you think she thinkss I'm beautiful?

(The woman holds up the drawing as a reflection of Sslann. He touches his face, exploring it.)

Sslann

Yess. I feel she must think it sso.

(End Scene.)

Scene 15

(The Ash dunes of Terminus. Alia and Slunk stand at the edge of a pit. Slunk is turned away from the pit. It is snowing. Silence.)

Alia

Nothing now.

(Silence.)

Alia

Were they ever something other than nothing? How do I know this meat was once alive? *(Pause.)* I think if I knew them I could say, "Yes, I remember them being alive." But I can't. I can't.

(Silence. Alia notices something.)

Alia

Do they look alive to you?

Slunk

No.

Alia

You haven't looked.

Slunk

No.

Alia

Why don't you look?

(Pause. Alia jumps into the pit.)

Alia

It's not so bad. Whew! Smells, though. No faces. Just...meat. Or what passes for meat, anyway. What's this? *(Pause.)* I found a ring! *(Pause.)* An inscription: Nothing is true. Everything is permitted.

(Slunk slowly turns around.)

Alia

I've heard that saying before. Somewhere. My mind rings with the knowledge of it. I can't retrieve the data. Too much interference; The signal is dirty. *(Pause.)* Wanna see it?

Slunk

Yes.

(Alia holds up the ring. Slunk kneels awkwardly and takes it. She looks at it closely. END SCENE.)

Scene 16

(The Shack. The Woman sits on the couch. She has a basket of flowers. The Father (Young) enters quickly. The Father (Old) and The Man are passed out on the floor somewhere...)

The Father

How do I look? Do I look alright? Pants aren't too tight, are they?

The Woman

No.

The Father

The tie? How's the tie?

The Woman

You have a mirror.

(The Father exits.)

The Father *(Offstage.)*

It looks fine. Good, good.

The Woman
Are you ready yet?

The Father
Soon.

(Pause.)

The Woman
I picked some flowers. Do you think the groom will mind if I shower his bride with them?

The Father *(Offstage.)*
No.

The Woman
Such beautiful flowers. *(Pause.)* Love?

The Father *(Offstage.)*
Yes, Eliza.

(The Father enters.)

The Father
These shoes alright?

The Woman
Beautiful.

The Father
Nice flowers. *(He exits.)* Are you taking them to the wedding?

The Woman
Weren't you listening?

The Father
Of course.

(Pause.)

The Woman
Love?

(The Father enters.)

Yes...? The Father

There's uh... The Woman

With them getting married... The Father

Love...? The Woman

...we'll be the only ones in the village who aren't. The Father

I know. The Woman

And I was thinking... The Father

What were you thinking? The Woman

(The Father crosses to her, kneels.)

Eliza? The Father

You're kneeling, love—you'll get your pants all dirty. The Woman

(Pulls out a ring.) Will you marry me? The Father

(Silence.)

Sweetheart... *(She takes the ring.)* Of course I will. The Woman

(They hug and kiss...)

I don't know what I'd do without you. The Father

The Woman

Good. That's good. Because--

The Father

People are always givin each other rules to live by when they're married. Don't cheat on me. Those wedding vows...in sickness and in health blah blah blah. And it always turns out that they break them anyway. Not us. I've seen to it with the inscription of two anti-rules that'll keep us together. I figure people always do the opposite of what they're told anyway...

The Woman

Sweetheart I'm pregnant.

(The Father wakes up in a sweat. Whither, who has awakened some time during the dream, appears to have watched it. He slowly turns and gives him a questioning look.)

The Father

Bad dream.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 16

(Terminus. Sslann sits on Alia's bed. He plays with some kneadable clay anxiously. I\O enters momentarily. At the same time Alia and Slunk stand in the Ash dunes. Alia wears the ring.)

I\O

She is nowhere to be found.

Alia

Which way is it back to Terminus?

Sslann

She's absconded. Absconded!

(Slunk points the way.)

Sslann

Prepare a ssearch party at once!

I\O

The Slunk peripheral is missing as well.

Alia

Those lights... The factories?

Slunk
Yes.

Alia
We'll seek shelter there.

I\O
My programming suggests collusion between the entities.

Sslann
Collusion? Sslunk has no ssense of identity to collude with.

Alia
(Trying to eat the snow.) This ash...I wish it were snow. Real snow. Water snow. If I concentrate hard enough it almost tastes like water.

(Slunk looks at her strangely.)

Sslann
Do you think she might have reprogrammed her?

Alia
Slunk! Look!

I\O
As an organic system, her abilities are limited only by her imagination.

Alia
The ash in my hand has turned to water! Look, Slunk! Look!

(Slunk looks in subdued amazement.)

Alia
It's water!

Slunk
Yes.

Sslann
Yes.

I\O
Therefore, she is dangerous.

(END SCENE. END ACT ONE.)

Act 2: The Beauty Of Trauma**Scene 1**

(The Shack. Early Morning. The Man is looking for something in the bar. The Father wakes up.)

What's all that noise?
The Father

Got any water?
The Man

Water?
The Father

Yeah.
The Man

Out back. The well.
The Father

(The Man exits.)

Good luck if it works. That well hasn't worked since...
The Father

(The Man enters momentarily.)

How long are you gonna stay?
The Father

It doesn't work.
The Man

Yeah?
The Father

I think there's somebody down there.
The Man

Don't mind him. He thought he could repossess this place. What's he gonna repossess?
The Father
Nothin here but junk.

He's still alive apparently.
The Man

The Father
Not for long. How long are you staying?

The Man
I was about ready to leave. Kinda thirsty though.

The Father
Water's in short supply. Have another drink.

The Man
Nah.

The Father
Sure?

The Man
You know... that well in there...

The Father
I will then. (*Walks to the bar.*)

The Father
Shoulda played some poker.

The Man
It's a lot better than chess, isn't it? If we get that guy outta there—

The Father
Fuck him! Turing wants him out, he'll get out. For now he's in. Let him drown in the fluid of life for all I care!

The Man
I'm thirsty is all.

The Father
There's a well in the next village.

The Man
Been there. (*Shakes his head.*)

The Father
What's this... (*Imitates him.*)?

The Man
It's not there.

The Father

Of course it is! It's right there at the bottom of the...the...

(The Man shakes his head.)

The Father

Right there...in the...the...valley...

The Man

Buried.

(The Father laughs.)

The Man

Buried.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 2

(The Junkyard. Early Morning. Alia sits down. She rubs her feet. Slunk stands and looks around. Alia takes her mask off and wipes the sweat off her face. Slunk walks over to a piece of metal and examines it. A circle is inscribed in the metal, faint but unmistakable. Alia stands and looks out into the horizon. Slunk finds some rope hidden nearby and follows it to a point in the ground. She starts to dig in the sand. She finds something solid underneath, to which the rope is tied. She pulls on the rope, which reveals a hole. Slunk crawls inside.)

Alia

Are the factories getting any closer? *(Pause.)* Slunk? *(Pause.)* They don't seem to be getting any closer no matter how far we walk. *(She turns to find Slunk missing.)* Slunk...? *(She looks to the horizon again.)* No. They're not. Still the same size. *(Pause.)* Slunk...? *(She investigates the pit.)* Why aren't the factories getting closer...?

(END SCENE.)

Scene 3

(Terminus. Sslann kneads his clay apprehensively. He crosses to the mirror and looks in it. No reflection. He paces. I\O enters.)

Sslann

Question...

I\O

They have not been found.

Sslann

Obvioussly—no, I have a quesstion.

I\O

Yes Master.

Sslann

Dissposse of that title. I hate that. Quesstion: do I look beautiful?

(Pause.)

Sslann

I believe myself to be but...am I? You may sspeak freely.

I\O

Of course.

(Silence.)

Sslann

I\O, I find you sseverely lacking in articulation.

I\O

Apologies are given unreservedly.

Sslann

Yess yess. *(Pause.)* Alia. Now sshe iss...

I\O

She will be broken.

Sslann

This flight of herss hass caused me great disstress.

(He walks to the mirror.)

Sslann

My nose iss a little too big. Iss my nosse too big?

(END SCENE.)

Scene 4

(The Shack. The Man is looking in a reflection from a piece of metal. The Father shuffles cards.)

The Father
Your forehead looks fine to me.

The Man
Not too angular? I read about that. Phenomenology.

The Father
What?

The Man
Study of head shape.

The Father
(Starts to deal.) Which is what?

The Man
Supposedly one can determine civilization by the shape of one's head. No empirical evidence but—

The Father
Specially if it's got a hole in it.

The Man
You think he's doin alright?

The Father
Who?

The Man
(Takes his cards.) The guy in the well.

The Father
When are you leavin?

The Man
I should.

The Father
After this hand. How many you want?

(The Man looks at his hand. NOTE: Actor should really play the hand.)

The Man
(*x cards*) Is is hot or is it just me?

The Father
Just you. I want (*x cards.*)

(A knock.)

The Man
So what are we bettin?

The Father
I dunno. Don't have nothin. I just like to play. I like the chance nature of the game.

The Man
How about: I win, we pull the guy out—

The Father
What?! *(Pause.)* And if I win?

(A knock.)

The Man
Was that a knock?

The Father
I dunno. How about if I win you wash my feet?

(A knock.)

The Man
There. Hear that?

The Father
So we showin or what?

The Man
Hold on. *(He walks to the window and looks out.)*

The Father
(Spreading his cards on the table.) Full house! Aces and sixes!

The Man
Somebody's here.

The Father
What?!

The Man

It's them.

The Father

Ah fuck! Probably want their guy back. We'll deal with them in a second—let them sweat in the heat a while. I wanna know what you have.

(A knock. The Man just stands and looks at him. Finally The Father stands and crosses to the window. He looks out.)

The Father

Yeah. It is. Fuckin suits. What do you think? They here for you or for me?

The Man

I don't know.

The Father

Play ya for it.

The Man

What?!

The Father

I win: you get the door and I hide in the well. You win: I get the door and you hide in the well.

(A knock.)

The Man

Uh...uh...

The Father

Yes or no?

The Man

Yeah yeah. Okay. *(He walks to the table and looks at The Father's cards. He spreads his out on the table. The Father looks and smiles.)*

The Father

See ya.

The Man

The well. Go.

(The Father exits quickly. The Man looks out the window again and is greeted by a head. This is the head of The Suit. The Suit is a woman in drag so deep one can't tell she's a woman unless you looked very hard. Her voice may betray her to the audience... She speaks in a southern accent.)

Oh hello. The Man

I'm sorry. Have I awakened you? The Suit

I...uh...now's not a good time. My head hurts. Got things to do... The Man

It's hot out here. The Suit

Yeah well...it's hot in here too. The Man

(Pause.)

Please excuse the noise then. The Suit

Quite alright, really. The Man

(The Suit leaves. There is a huge crash as the door splinters. Smoke. Two Guards in black costume and black masks enter, followed by The Suit. The Man makes a drink.)

Terribly sorry. Ahhh. It is cooler in here. The Suit

Yeah. The Man

Yes. The Suit

(Silence.)

The Suit
Come on we've done this before. *(To the Guards.)* You two, search the premises. Follow any footprints.

(The Guards leave.)

The Suit

(Sighs.) So. Where were we? Ah yes! *(Pulls out a piece of paper and reads it.)* You have been requested to...blah blah blah. Terribly boring. I just need your signature. *(Holds out pen and some papers.)*

(Pause.)

The Suit

Right there. I need you to sign there.

(The Man makes himself another drink.)

The Man

Drink?

The Suit

I'm on duty, thanks.

(The Suit continues to hold out the pen and paper.)

The Suit

I hate when this happens. People get so scared, don't know whether to shit or go blind. I just need you—

The Man

You play cards. *(He drinks.)*

The Suit

I mean if you were a woman—mmmm a woman—we could just apprehend you but noooo, the statute says for me to get your signature why can't they just equalize everything make my job easier than pickin dingleberries off Turing's ass but then who cares wh—

The Man

Gimme it. *(Snatches paper.)* Nice technique. I gotta sign where?

The Suit

There. And there.

The Man

How many forms you got girl?

The Suit

Girl? Who you talkin bout bein a girl?! Ain't no girl here!

The Man

Yeah sorry. It's the suit. Damn paper confuses me.

The Suit

I need ten signatures. Ten. Got that? Ten. Ten forms in triplicate.

The Man

That's nine too many if you ask me.

The Suit

Nobody's askin you. When somethin as juicy as this happens all the departments want in on the action. It's like flies on a woman's carcass. Not that I seen any flies on a wom—

(The Guards enter. The Man looks at the forms carefully.)

The Suit

You find that little bitch?

The Man

You talkin about a woman?

The Suit

Just sign the form please. *(To Guards.)* Well?

Guard 1

We found

Guard 2

footsteps, sir.

Guard 1

A trail that

Guard 2

Led to the well in there.

Guard 1

Let me tell it.

Guard 2

I wanna tell him.

(They fight, vying for attention from The Suit.)

Guard 1

Sir I have—

Guard 2

Don't listen to him sir. He's been having traitorous thoughts all morning!

Guard 1

That's insane! I haven't had any thoughts!

Guard 2

Behavior modification is advisable.

Guard 1

Isn't it treasonous to falsely accuse someone of having any thoughts?

The Suit

Please compose yourself! You're acting like little bitches! Bitches! That's what you are! I ask for men and they give me bitches!

(They stop abruptly.)

The Man

(Still reading.) This doesn't say anything about attendance—

The Suit

What?!

The Man

It says here that—

(The Suit snatches the paper away.)

The Suit

Haven't you been present in every scene that required you?

The Man

Well—

The Suit

Nevermind! I thought you couldn't read? Your file said you were as illiterate as Helen Keller tryin to read Playgirl. Just sign the forms. Ten signatures! Ten!

The Man

Even the requisition form for the portable pain-amplifier and the ultra-sonic massage wand?

The Suit

Sign it! Please.

(The Man drinks, and takes the form. He starts to sign the forms carefully, as if it were rehearsed for this moment. The Suit sighs and rubs her face with a hand-kerchief.)

The Suit

Oh this job. This job! I hate this job. Is it hot in here? I'm hot. This place is hot. Hot! Maybe it's the suit? Do you think it's the suit? I was hurried. I get a call at the crack of dawn with an assignment from my supervisor. I hate him. He's a bitch too. They're all bitches. It's hot. Are you hot?

Guard 1

Yes sir.

Guard 2

Yes sir. Very.

The Suit

You find anything?

Guard 1

Footprints

Guard 2

Leading to the well.

The Suit

And?

Guard 1

We looked

The Man

You want me to authorize this bid for a new factory to be built on a major population center?

The Suit

Yes! Everything. *(Pause.)* Maybe...maybe on second thought I will have that drink. C-could I?

The Man

Help yourself.

(The Suit walks over to the bar. The Man continues signing.)

(*To the men.*) Continue. The Suit

So we Guard 1

Looked down the well. Guard 2

Yes yes. The Suit

There was someone in the well. Guard 1

Yes. Guard 2

Yes indeed. Very yes. Guard 1

It smelled bad. Guard 2

Ahhh. Someone making an escape attempt but all for naught! The machinery of the law moves slowly but it does move. Yes. Hmmmn. Do you recommend this brand of sherry? The Suit

(*Still engrossed in the forms.*) Huh? Oh...yeah. We had sherry? The Man

Ah. You're signing. Good. Continue. (*To the Guards.*) So where is this fugitive from justice? Bring the bitch here! I should like to spit in her face. The Suit

We can't. Guard 1

No we can't. Impossible. Guard 2

And why not? The Suit

He's decomposing sir. Guard 1

It smelled bad.	Guard 2
And there's nothing else in there?	The Suit
No.	Guard 1
We didn't check.	Guard 2
It smelled bad.	Guard 1
Very.	Guard 2
Are you sure?	The Suit
We made sure.	Guard 1
What? That he was dead?	Guard 2
Is this it?	The Man
	The Suit
	<i>(Sitting down.) Wait. (Pulls out paper.) Let's see... Search premises for blah blah blah. Done. Apprehend citizen blah blah blah. Done. Have him sign forms, yes yes yes. What brand of Sherry is this? Tastes like water.</i>
Water?	The Man
	The Suit
Well I've done everything to the letter. You killed her I suppose?	
	The Man
Who? The guy in the well?	

The Suit

That bitch in the well. The bitch. What guy?

The Man

The guy who was going to repossess the house.

The Suit

The wha? (*To the Guards.*) Who was in the well?

Guard 1

The person that made the footprints.

Guard 2

You said follow the footprints.

The Suit

No woman?

(The Guards look at each other.)

The Suit

Scratch that then! (*Angrily erases the check on her list.*) Typical. Those people in the Materials Redistribution Department are filled with nothing but bitches. Substandard bitches at that. I've been tempted to requisition a flame-thrower and liquidate the whole lot of them myself. Save me a headache and shoe polish. I guess it's time to go then. (*The Suit claps twice. The Guards surround The Man.*) We are leaving!

(END SCENE.)

Scene 5

(The Junkyard. Dusk. The stage is empty. A hand appears out of the darkness of the pit and then another as they struggle to pull up the weight of a body. Slunk pulls herself out. She looks around. Alia struggles to pull herself up. Slunk stretches her arms up and out. Then she helps Alia out of the ground. Alia crawls out and stops by Slunk's feet. She begins to cry softly to herself. Slunk spits and throws Alia's mask down into the pit. She closes the lid and disengages the rope, throwing it somewhere. She covers the remnants of the lid with sand. Alia moves into a fetal position. Slunk takes the lipstick from Scene 1 out of Alia's pocket and crosses over to the metal with the ring on it. She draws a new ring, joining it with the old one. She takes the ring out of her pocket and puts it on. Alia looks up at her expectantly. Slunk points the way and walks off-stage. Alia eventually follows her. END SCENE.)

Scene 6

(The Shack. The Father enters furtively. He crosses straight to the bar and makes himself a drink. He notices the use of it and exclaims disapprovingly. He pours a drink with what's left.)

The Father

Nothin. *(Pause.)* Nothin! Nothin I can do...nothin at all. Nothin but sit here and drink. What else? *(He sits down.)* That's twice that damn well saved someone's life. *(Laughs. Drinks. END SCENE.)*

Scene 7

(The Ashdunes. Night. Slunk looks into a pit. There is a pile of fingers by her feet. After a moment, Alia's head appears. She hold up a finger. Slunk takes it with resignation and begins to nibble at it.)

Alia

Eat up. There's more where that came from. *(Pause. She throws another finger topside.)* There's another.

(Slunk gathers the pile of fingers and puts them in her pockets.)

Alia

Slunk!

(Slunk stops.)

Alia

Look at this! Look at this! I found another ring! *(She pulls herself out of the pit quickly.)* It looks the same as yours! Now we'll both have one.

(Slunk takes the ring and examines it closely. She offers Alia a finger. She takes it and starts snacking on it.)

Alia

They're exactly the same. This proves what we found in the cave! He was right! I'll bet every pit is like this. And the factories...illusion. It's all—

Slunk

False.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 8

(The Ashdunes. The Man strapped to a gurney. He sings a warped version of the Wanderer by Johnny Cash. The Doctor is busily attaching a pain amplifier to his back via electrodes. The Guards guard him..)

The Man

I went out walking through streets paved with gold
Lifted some stones

Saw skin and bones
 Of a city without a soul
 I went out walking under an atomic sky
 Where the ground won't turn
 And the rain it burns
 Like the tears when I said good-bye

Yeah I went with nothin
 Nothing but the thought of you
 I went wandering

I went with nothing
 But the thought you'd be there too
 Looking for you

I went out there
 In search of experience
 To taste and to touch
 And to feel as much
 As a man can
 Before he repents

I went out walking with a book and a gun
 The word of Him lay heavy on my heart
 I was sure I was the one
 Now, Turing, don't you wait up
 Turing, I'll be home soon

Yeah I left with nothing
 But the thought you'd be there too
 Looking for you...
 Nothing but the thought of you...
 I went wandering

(When The Doctor is finished he turns it on and The Man writhes in agony.)

The Doctor

Mmmmn. *(He motions for The Guards to take him away. They stand still. He motions with more emphasis and force. No response.)* Take him where he can writhe in the agony of his pain-amplifier as it burns the fat off his soul!

(The Guards stand still. Guard 1 manages to raise his hand meekly.)

The Doctor

What?!

Dead?	The Father
Alive.	The Voice
You look dead.	The Father
I look dead he says.	The Voice
Wanna drink. Celebratin my daughter's birthday.	The Father
Do I want a drink he asks.	The Voice
Been drinkin all day.	The Father
You—	The Voice
Who else?	The Father
Your violence—	The Voice
Me?	The Father
--was most unbecoming.	The Voice
Not me. I didn't throw you in the well.	The Father
He says he didn't do it.	The Voice
Nope. They got him. Picked him up this mornin. I'm what is known as—	The Father

Oh, wait, he's gonna tell me now.

The Voice

(Pause.) As what? I forgot. *(Laughs.)* Forgot! *(Beat.)* You're dead, though.

The Father

He forgot. *(Beat.)* I am? *(Beat.)* He says I'm dead.

The Voice

You are.

The Father

I am.

The Voice

Quite so.

The Father

Painfully so. And who are you again?

The Voice

A figment.

The Father

Uh-huh.

The Voice

I am not real.

The Father

Because I'm dead.

The Voice

You're not real, either. You're a figment, too.

The Father

He keeps saying that. It's an artifice, I think.

The Voice

I think, therefore, I am.

The Father

He says he thinks.

The Voice

(Silence.)

And, uh, what happened to me?

The Voice

You died. You were killed. Murdered. But he didn't get away with it.

The Father

He says I was killed. So who is he?

The Voice

What?

The Father

Who are you again—I keep forgetting.

The Voice

A figment. A figment of your imagination.

The Father

So I'm not dead. You're a figment. And figments only exist in the mind of a living person. I must be alive.

The Voice

Yay for you.

The Father

(Silence.)

The Voice

I was looking for somebody.

The Father

What do I care, I'm just a figment.

The Voice

Well, um, he's been asleep—a coma you could say—

The Father

Why don't you?

The Voice

He's playing games. At least he's responsive. *(Beat.)* One of our colleagues is...is

(The Father is chugging from a bottle.)

The Voice

Are you there?

The Father

Like I said--what do I care, I'm just a figment. All I'm gonna do is drink. Wanna join me?

The Voice

(Pause.) Where are you?

The Father

Rotting in a well.

The Voice

And me?

The Father

Getting drunk.

(END SCENE.)

Scene 10

(Terminus. Night. Sslann looks in the mirror. The Old Woman crumples pieces of paper into little balls.)

Sslann

Please. Don't make a mess. Where could she be? Would you believe I could not sleep last night. Not a wink. I layed in bed with my thoughts a slave to her visage. Those scars haunt me. Have you ever seen such ugliness?

(The Old Woman throws a ball at him.)

Sslann

Would you make me beautiful if, say, I gave you your own kingdom. Think of it. Your own kingdom!

(The Old Woman throws another ball and laughs at him derisively.)

Sslann

No? No. *(Pause.)* I am beautiful. I must be. Whoever controls decay controls beauty. Whomever controls beauty controls truth. And whomever is in possession of the truth is... Yes, I must be.

(The Old Woman throws another ball at his head.)

I\O
Master Sslann.

Sslann
Yes I\O.

(The Old Woman begins her paper-ball assault on I\O.)

I\O
They have been captured.

The Doctor
Mmm Hmn.

I\O
A pain-amplifier is being prepared for your new wife as we speak. As for the Slunk peripheral...

Sslann
Yess?

I\O
Her pain regulator was conspicuously absent.

Sslann
Absent?

The Doctor
Mmmn Hmmn.

(The Old Woman laughs derisively.)

I\O
Not even the faintest trace of a scar.

Sslann
Where are they?

I\O
In transit.

Sslann
I suspect they'll have an explanation.

I\O
None was given but one could be forthcoming with the proper stimuli.

The Doctor

(Enthusiastically.) Mmn Hmnm. Mmn Hmnm.

(Sslann picks up a paper ball. Pause.)

I\O

If you wish, Master, a second could be added to the que for her. I would personally supervise the installation myself.

(The Old Woman hisses.)

I\O

But...waste tissue should be eliminated in the name of progress. The old woman is a prime example.

Sslann

She iss my resspnssibility!

I\O

As you wish.

(Silence.)

I\O

Instructions?

Sslann

Yess. Yess... Let my beloved wife twisst in the agony of her own over-loaded nervouss ssystem. Insstall the pain-amplifier and prepare her for ssurgery!

I\O

And the Slunk peripheral?

Sslann

Her complicity has proved her obsolescence. Dig a pit deep enough to scratch Turing's tomb!

I\O

We will comply.

(The Doctor and I\O exit.)

Sslann

Yess, you will comply.

(He weakly throws the paper ball at The Old Woman and exits. END SCENE.)

Scene 11

(The Ash Dunes. The Father, dressed in drag, walks across the stage.)

The Father

So what. So what! *(He drinks from a bottle.)*

The Voice

It's important.

The Father

I don't care.

The Voice

He says he doesn't care. *(Beat.)* So then, why are you here?

The Father

(Sighs.) What's a father to do but don a disguise and rescue his daughter? *(He drinks. He exits. END SCENE.)*

Scene 12

(Terminus. The Doctor silently preps Alia for surgery. She has a pacifier strapped to her face and she is strapped to an operating table. She grunts and groans. The Doctor turns on her pain-amplifier. She flinches.)

The Doctor

Ahhh. That's better. Like that? Electricity is the catalyst of life—along with carbon and water of course—but electricity is so much more...sexier? Yes. I hope you enjoy the pain as much as I enjoy seeing it. Lovely, lovely pain washing away all thought like tears in the rain. *(Pause.)* You have been bad Alia. My function here is to assist you in the integration process, *and yet you insist on rejecting me!* Why? Why do you continue to inflict pain on yourself? Is it pathological, this fascination for mutilation of both mind and body? Personally, I believe it to be more political. You little cunt. *(He touches her face.)* Your scars are beautiful. They augment the contortions of your face—most becoming, if one were... *(He licks the side of her face.)* When Sslann and I are through with you, the beauty of your trauma—

(IO enters, wiping her lips with her hand. He pauses to acknowledge her.)

The Doctor

--will be nothing compared to the trauma your beauty will inflict on the masses. They will do nothing short of kill themselves to be just like you. The pits will become obsolete.

I\O

The Slunk peripheral is not responding to the stimuli you have administered Herr Doctor.

The Doctor

Mmmn?

I\O

The male flesh structure, also, has failed to respond to my repeated provocation. Prepare them both for immediate liquidation.

The Doctor

Mmmn.

(The Doctor exits. I\O looks at Alia as she cries. Slowly she stands up from the wheel-chair and crosses to Alia. She touches her face, licking the tears off her fingers. Silence. Suddenly the sound of lobster being boiled echoes through the room and then dies off. Alia stops crying. I\O speaks without a microphone—it is the voice of a man...)

I\O

You once asked me if I believed in an afterlife. *(Pause.)* I will tell you a little story Alia. This will put you at ease as we drain the last vestiges of your memories from your brain and fill it with instructions, programmed routines, and automated responses prompted by specific stimuli. It concerns Turing and one of his followers. History has it he was exiled from this world in his attempt to create a society that was autonomous and self-aware. But it was always known that he would return, leading us into a new world, and, until then, we would follow the instructions he had set down for us, modifying them to suit our needs whenever necessary. This was his vision. Society evolved with its citizens, if a flaw was found in the system, a mutation, or an unexplainable phenomenon or concept occurred, they were eliminated in the name of logic, rationality, Turing. This inquisition was led by the Head Librarian. He was the only one with access to all of the knowledge Turing had stored in the Great Library, and yet the power of decay, obsolescence, beauty was beyond his powers of comprehension. And so he granted his assistant, an eager acolyt who had neither vanity nor ambition in his pursuit of knowledge, he granted him permission to pursue the superlative embodiment of that which is unique and yet is universal, that which lasts forever and yet is derived from its complicity with decay. Progress was made and the path to enlightenment became a road with a definite destination. *(Pause.)* Myth has it that Turing came down once more to spread new information that he had learned since his last visit. This *addendum* to the Great Library was anathema to everything that the librarians of Turing were enforcing. The Head Librarian had him seized, convinced it was an imposter. He was thrown in a cell with the words, “There will be no spontaneous evolution without my consent.” This man was intrigued by the imposter though, maybe he saw something of himself in the cool visage of the old man, so that night he visited him--this man who claimed to be Turing. The Librarian explained the problems he was causing, which they had solved by the judicious control of information stored in the Great Library. It was revealed that these problems

I\O (*Cont'd.*)

had been foreseen for quite some time and had become obsolete in the light of the new social programs. The man remained silent under the vehement protests to the New Addendum, proposed to modify the Great Library. The Librarian explained that the world he was creating was to be a Utopia for the masses; free of hunger, the overwhelming burden of choice, and the comfort that everything one believes is true. He then told him he would be executed as an example of his power and asked the man if he had any last words. This man—this man who claimed to be Turing-- stood up and kissed the Librarian. At first he was at a loss for words, and in this silence he became so infuriated he had the prisoner buried deep in a forest instead, with all the material that might undermine his efforts for a happy society. He's been there ever since. Although recently we've had reports that document his return. Those people who have knowledge of him have been liquidated. Your father is one of them—although the man who claimed to be your father was...someone else entirely. (*I\O, wiping his mouth again, walks back to the wheelchair.*) Existing is meaning enough. Questioning it becomes problematic for the good of society. (*I\O begins to talk through the microphone.*) We cannot allow those questions to decay the very infrastructure on which this reality is based. What would become of our happy society?

(Silence. Sslann enters, slowly, weakly. He is ready for surgery, wearing the surgical mask.)

Sslann

I\O.

I\O

Yes master.

Sslann

Please dispose of the body in my room.

I\O

As you wish. Shall I include the prisoners in the disposal program?

Sslann

Send the doctor in as well. This surgery must be done quickly. And, yes, add them to the que.

I\O

As you wish. (*She exits.*)

(Sslann collapses, crying. END SCENE.)

Scene 14

(The Ash Dunes. The Father hides, watching. Slunk and The Man are bound, kneeling over the edge of a pit. I\O sits over them. Guard 1 guards them both. Guard 2 enters dragging The Old Woman's body. The Father's face drains in recognition.)

The Father

Eliza...? *(He drinks hard from his bottle.)*

The Voice

I think we found who we were looking for.

(Guard 2 pushes the body of The Old Woman into the pit. The Father cries silently. I\O stands, and takes a pistol from Guard 1, who looks in surprise. She crosses behind Slunk.)

Slunk

You were always jealous of me, never realizing that beauty was nothing but a means for causing change. Not an agent of power.

(I\O shoots her in the back of the head. Guard 1 pushes her limp body into the pit. I\O walks over to The Man. She takes off his gag, and spits in his face. The Guards are uncomfortable about it—they look at each other. I\O puts the gun to his head, thinks better of it, and puts it to The Man's chest. The Man speaks.)

The Man

Nothing is true, *(actor playing I\O)*. You can't kill me. Only free me.

I\O

(Without the mic.) It is written.

The Man

Even though I like it here. Better than the place I come from. Here I don't age—decay is meaningless. Time only exists as a record of instructions completed. *(Pause.)* You don't have to shoot me.

I\O

It is written.

The Man

Fuck the script! Do what you want!

I\O

I don't know what I want. I only follow the instructions given to me by Turing.

The Man

Then I have failed.

I\O

Your existence will be erased, wiped clean by the deluge of new instructions that each second necessarily brings forth. Time will delete the initial impressions of your thought processes on other entities. It is written.

The Man

You will never exist outside of this reality then.

I\O

There is no afterlife. Only what you can perceive. *(She shoots The Man.)* It is written.

The Father

Noooooooo! *(He rushes towards I\O. The Guards intercept him, seizing him.)*

You killed a man! A man for Turing's sake! Do you realize what kind of an impact this will have on the rest of us. We're dead! We're all—

(I\O coolly shoots The Father.)

The Voice

(Distorted and fading.) Shit! We lost him...

I\O

Little cunt. Women are such imperfect creatures.

Guard 1

He was a man.

I\O

What?

Guard 2

You shot

Guard 1

A man.

(Silence. I\O shoots both of them. Afterwards she stands over The Man in triumph. END SCENE.)

Scene 15

(Terminus. Sslann sits in front of a mirror. The New Alia drools heavily, sitting on the floor somewhere.

Sslann touches his face.)

Sslann

Do you think I'm beautiful? *(Pause.)* Alia? Do you think I'm beautiful?

Alia

You are beautiful. You are beautiful. You are beautiful. You are beautiful. *(She repeats the phrase over and over again until it's nothing but sound.)*

(Sslann's demeanor changes as he realizes he's being patronized. He brandishes black lipstick.)

Sslann

Am I? Am I?

(Lights up on the pit in the previous scene. NO has since left. Slunk pulls herself out and stretches up and out towards the sky. Sslann "cuts" his face with the black lipstick.)

Sslann

In the desert a seed has been planted.

(Slunk kisses The Man's lifeless body. Sslann cuts again.)

Sslann

It's thirst slaked with the enzymes of life.

(The Man awakens. He is happy. They kiss again. Sslann cuts.)

Sslann

The pits give up their hooded dead to the pioneers of a new frontier.

(Slunk kisses The Father. He awakens. The Old Woman is pushed out of the pit by the arms of Buried Women. The Father is reunited with The Old Woman. They kiss. Sslann cuts.)

SSLANN

Flesh is the matter by which love is transmitted.

(SSLANN cuts.)

SSLANN

I make the cuts lengthwise. Perpendicular to my eyes.

(His cuts become more and more violent. SLUNK points towards the audience, leading them off-stage in that direction. She begins to interact with the audience, hugging, shaking hands. Her followers do the same. SSLANN colors his lips and eye-sockets black with lip-stick.)

SSLANN

(Turning to New Alia.) Am I beautiful?

(New Alia continues with her phrase, "You are beautiful". SSLANN crosses to the pit and jumps in.. Someone enters wearing the white-mask and slowly walks up to New Alia, circling around her. SLUNK and her followers watch from the fringes of the audience.)

SSLANN

I'll scratch the pits' smooth sides with sharp dirty nails. *(He sprinkles white powder on his face.)* A white veil will be the mask of my decay.

(Silence. Alia continues with her phrase... The masked character attacks her with red lip stick, slitting her throat. New Alia dies. SSLANN lowers himself into the pit. New Alia's lifeless body is dropped to the ground. The masked character then walks to the mirror and unfastens the mask. It is I\O. She applies lipstick.)

SSLANN

The silence is deafening as one struggles to look outward for what is hidden underneath.

I\O

(Repeating the phrase.) I am beautiful. I am beautiful. I am beautiful... *(Lights fade out.)*

END