

IN THE WESTERN GARDEN

by Stuart Spencer

"It is closing time in the gardens of the west, and from now on an artist will be judged only by the resonance of his solitude or the quality of his despair."

Cyril Connolly, *The Unquiet Grave*

This play should be performed according to the following casting scheme:

First Actor:	Giovanni (<i>Water and Wine</i>) Gene (<i>Levels of Perception</i>)
Second Actor:	Enrico (<i>Water and Wine</i>) Alan (<i>Levels of Perception</i>)
Third Actor:	Dennis (<i>The Rothko Room</i>) Buonarroti (<i>Water and Wine</i>)
Fourth Actor:	Giuliano (<i>Water and Wine</i>) Leonard (<i>Levels of Perception</i>)
The Actress:	Alice (<i>The Rothko Room</i>) Sally (<i>Levels of Perception</i>)

THE ROTHKO ROOM

The Tate Gallery, London. The 'Rothko room.' We see large canvasses by Rothko -- the Seagram murals.

A low bench in the middle of the room.

Alice sits on the bench. She is somewhere in her forties or fifties. It's hard to tell. Her shoes are off, sitting in front of her. She is looking at a particular painting.

Dennis enters. He is more or less Alice's age. He doesn't seem to see her. He goes to the same painting, stands very close to it and studies at it. It becomes obvious that he is blocking her view of it.

She sighs. Clears her throat.

The sound alerts Dennis, who turns around to see the problem.

DENNIS

Oh! Sorry ...

ALICE

It's all right ...

DENNIS

Didn't see you there ...

ALICE

It's quite all right ...

(He stands aside, they both look at the paintings. After a moment, he glances her way. She is looking at the painting. He looks back to it also. A pause for thought ...)

DENNIS

They're all portals.

ALICE

Excuse me?

DENNIS

Doors. Windows. Archways, stage curtains. That's what gives the room cohesion. They're each a form of entrance, a gateway into ... something.

ALICE

(Letting it register, but not entirely sure yet.)

Yes ...

DENNIS

Obvious, when you think about it.

ALICE

Obvious but ... subtle.

DENNIS

Well, you wouldn't want 'Doorway' written under every one.

ALICE

I should say.

DENNIS

Do you have a favorite?

ALICE

Uh ... well ... those two I think -- down at the end.

(He turns to look. We can see them also.)

DENNIS

(Disappointed.)

Oh.

ALICE

What.

DENNIS

Those two - they're the only ones that are ...

ALICE

Yes?

DENNIS
... not portals.

ALICE
Oh.

DENNIS
They're ground plans.

ALICE
(Looking at them.)
How can you tell?

DENNIS
Well, you see -- you're not looking *through* something. You're looking *down*. From above. Bird's eye view. Like the site of an excavation. That's the outline of the building there. See?

ALICE
(Dawning...)
Oh ... yes. All right.

DENNIS
(Leaving these behind.)
But the rest of them, these -- they're all portals to another place.

ALICE
(Taking them in.)
Yes. Well, I can certainly see that. Yes.

(He sits down next to her.)

DENNIS
(Modestly.)
Standard interpretation.

ALICE
Really.

DENNIS
Oh sure.

ALICE
I never would have thought of it --

DENNIS

I read it in a book.

ALICE

Very informative. Thank you.

DENNIS

Your first time?

ALICE

Yes. I just happened to be walking by the gallery and I thought, why not?

(She looks at the paintings again.)

But that was quite helpful. Thank you.

DENNIS

The question is, what place? Portals to where?

ALICE

(Surprised; she looks back to the paintings again.)

I don't know.

DENNIS

One doesn't know, does one.

ALICE

No ...

DENNIS

Almost as if he didn't want us to know.

ALICE

(Still looking at them.)

No ...

DENNIS

As if he wanted it a secret.

ALICE

(Confirmed now.)

Yes.

DENNIS

Not to know.

ALICE

Not literally anyway.

DENNIS

Right, exactly.

ALICE

Where do you think they go?

(He looks at her as if surprised by the question, as if seeing her now for the first time. He almost studies her.)

DENNIS

Where have you been?

ALICE

Well I ... what do you mean?

DENNIS

You happened to be walking by. Where are you going?

ALICE

Nowhere special.

DENNIS

No particular destination?

ALICE

Well ... here, I suppose. This *became* my destination. I realized it as I walked in. Doesn't that ever happen to you. You arrive, then you think - yes, this is it.

DENNIS

Interesting.

ALICE

Is it?

DENNIS

Well, you know the story of how *they* ...
(The paintings.)
... got here.

ALICE

No.

DENNIS

They were meant as a mural for some restaurant. A famous one, I forget the name, but very famous. In New York City. A commission. But he finishes them and he thinks, "I don't want my paintings looking down on some rich bastards chewing their bloody sirloins." So he returns the commission and he keeps the paintings. For ten years, they sit. Nothing. Then *this* place offers to buy them, and he says "All right, but on one condition: They get their own room, with the lighting just so -- like this, very dark, and they all stay together. *It* stays together, the mural, forever."

ALICE

And not a sirloin steak in sight.

DENNIS

So the Gallery says, all right. That's fine. We accept your condition. The paintings arrive from New York, and on that very morning they get a call overseas, from the dealer in New York. That very night, while the paintings we high up over the Atlantic, on their way here -- at that very moment, he killed himself.

(He looks at the paintings. She looks at them too, as if for the first time.)

See what I mean?

ALICE

I'm not sure.

DENNIS

It was *his* destination also.

ALICE

Like a letter from a dead man.

(He looks at her for a moment ...)

DENNIS

How could you leave like that?

ALICE

Dennis, don't.

DENNIS

No? Why shouldn't I?

ALICE

This was going so well.

DENNIS

It's ridiculous – all this *formality*.

ALICE

I thought that's what you wanted –

DENNIS

Why did you leave?

ALICE

I didn't leave.

DENNIS

Oh really?

ALICE

Well I'm here, aren't I? I'm here now.

(He looks at her angrily. Then he looks to the painting on the fourth wall for a long moment, silent. She looks at it too. A pause.)

ALICE

If you look long enough, they start to shimmer.

DENNIS

Yes?

ALICE

Vibrate, almost. This one in particular.

(She nods to the fourth wall. He looks at her skeptically.)

Go ahead, look.

(He looks. A long pause.)

Do you see?

DENNIS

... no.

(Her eyes don't leave the canvas.)

ALICE

Go stand right up next to it.

DENNIS

What do you mean?

ALICE

Eighteen inches is the perfect distance.

(He looks at her skeptically.)

That's what *he* says.

(A nod to the painting, indicating she means Rothko.)

DENNIS

How do you know?

ALICE

It's in the flyer.

(She indicates the museum brochure.)

Go ahead. Go right up to it.

(He stands and walks far downstage, facing the audience. He is inches from the painting.)

ALICE

Give it a moment.

(He continues to look. Another long pause.)

Yes?

DENNIS

(After a moment, still looking. There's a glimmer, but he's still not sure.)

Mmmm.

ALICE

Yes?

DENNIS

(Suddenly, like a revelation.)

Yes.

ALICE

As if there's something behind ... something *else*.

DENNIS

(Still looking, caught up in the experience.)

When did you notice this?

ALICE

I just -- I don't know. I found myself watching it and it started to shimmer --

DENNIS

Yes.

ALICE

Tremble almost. And there's nothing but the painting.

DENNIS

... nothing, no ...

ALICE

... shimmering, vibrating ...

DENNIS

... glowing.

ALICE

Beautiful, but ...

(Slight pause.)

DENNIS

(Still looking.)

But what?

ALICE

But ... not beautiful.

DENNIS

Yes. Beautiful. And ... *not* beautiful. That's exactly it.

(He steps away from the painting, turning to look at her, though he stays where he is.)

ALICE

I must be going.

(She starts to put on her shoes.)

DENNIS

You can't go *now*.

ALICE

That's all I wanted to do. I wanted you to see that.

DENNIS

Wanted me to see what?

ALICE

(Not really paying attention; struggling to
get her shoe on.)

That it shimmers. That there's something *there*.

DENNIS

Yes and what else?

ALICE

What do you mean, what else? What else is there?

DENNIS

But why does it shimmer?

ALICE

I can't explain that.

DENNIS

Then why are you telling me?

ALICE

I'm not telling you. I asked you to look, and you did.
You looked, you *saw*.

DENNIS

There's got to be more to it than that. You must know
why.

ALICE

It shimmers because that's what it does.

DENNIS

And why should it do that?

ALICE

I told you, I can't explain.

DENNIS

Because something is on the other side? Because we can
see through to the other side?

ALICE

Yes, I've told you.

DENNIS

Then what is it? What's on the other side?

ALICE

If I could tell you, I would. But there's nothing I could say that would explain. If I could, there wouldn't be any reason for the painting.

(Her shoe is on. She starts to go.)

DENNIS

This is worse than the fact that you left in the first place. Do you know that?

Or is it that you just don't you care.

(This cuts. She turns impatiently. She looks at the fourth wall painting, then to Dennis.)

ALICE

All right, what do you see?

DENNIS

I just told you.

ALICE

Behind that. The reason for all that shimmering.

DENNIS

(Slight pause. Considering.)

I don't want to say.

ALICE

Why not?

DENNIS

I don't want to think it.

ALICE

Why not?

DENNIS

Because it's ... it's not .. it's like you said: it's something ... not beautiful.

ALICE

And?

(He looks again.)

DENNIS
It's like the flickering of a candle.

ALICE
So?

DENNIS
Like a flame.

ALICE
And?

DENNIS
And it scares me.

ALICE
It can be frightening, yes.

DENNIS
(Sarcastically.)
Well that's very comforting. Thanks a lot.

(He turns away. She takes a moment to re-consider.)

ALICE
Sunlight.

DENNIS
(Confused.)
... what? I'm sorry, but I don't ...

ALICE
That's the closest way to say it. Sunlight. It's a flame, after all, isn't it. A terrible, blinding burning. But at the same time, quite beautiful. The most beautiful thing there is.

DENNIS
(Realization.)
It's true.

ALICE
Isn't it.

DENNIS
You're right.

ALICE
So in a sense ...

DENNIS
Yes.

(Beat. She goes back to the other subject)

ALICE
It had nothing to do with you.

DENNIS
No, I know that.

ALICE
Do you? Really?

DENNIS
Well, it sometimes *feels* as though ... maybe ... I
wasn't -- oh this is stupid ...

ALICE
What?

DENNIS
... worthy.

ALICE
Well that's all it was. A feeling.

If you think about it, if you really try to *understand*
-- you'll know it was just ... I had to go. There
wasn't any choice. Yours, mine, anyone's. It was time
for me to go. Everyone has their time. I've had mine,
you'll have yours.

DENNIS
I've been so *angry* ...

ALICE
Of course. Who wouldn't be?

DENNIS
Really? You think?

ALICE

(Laughing.)

Oh *please*. Furious!

DENNIS

I kept -- I just assumed I was somehow ... I don't know. A crank of some kind.

ALICE

You're not a crank.

Well, you are -- talking to yourself in galleries after all.

DENNIS

Don't say that.

ALICE

What?

DENNIS

"... talking to myself ..." You're here. I know you are.

ALICE

Yes, but imagine what someone would see, if they walked in right now.

(Slight pause.)

DENNIS

You know, I wonder.

ALICE

Wonder what?

DENNIS

If I knew that you would be here. Not *knew*, but somehow *felt* ...

ALICE

You were ready to see me. That's all.

DENNIS

Ready?

ALICE

You were ready.

DENNIS

But why now? I've missed you so long.

ALICE

Today you were ready. I don't know why. One never knows why. Even *he* doesn't know why.

(A nod to the painting again, indicating Rothko.)

DENNIS

Do you really have to go?

ALICE

I really think I ought to, now.

DENNIS

Hold my hand, would you?

(She takes his hand. He presses it with his other hand.)

You really have to leave?

ALICE

I think so.

(He gets it.)

DENNIS

Thank you for ...

ALICE

... making this my destination?

DENNIS

Yes ... that's it, isn't it. You were ... bidden. And you came.

(She smiles indulgently.)

ALICE

If you'd like another minute, you could walk out with me.

DENNIS

No.

ALICE

Then you're staying.

DENNIS

I can't walk out with you. I'd only have to say good bye to you someplace else. Better it were here.

ALICE

That's very smart. You were always such a smart boy. I worried about my other children when I had to leave. But I never worried about you. You were so young, the youngest. But even then I knew how smart you were. And I knew you'd be fine.

DENNIS

Good bye.

(He presses her hand one more time, then turns to study another painting.)

ALICE

I think you're wrong about that one, though. I think it's also a door. I think they're all doors.

(She stays for just a moment, then realizes it's time for her to go – the signal has already been given. She turns silently and exits.)

He watches her go. Then he sits and studies the painting as the lights fade.

End of play.)

WATER AND WINE

The dark interior of a vaulted chamber. It is used as the storage room for a vineyard, so there is a large wooden vats and an array of bottles - some of them full and corked, others empty.

There are two exits, both heavy wooden doors. The first goes to the outside. The second, upstage, leads to a "cellar" which is burrowed into the side of the hill, so you don't have to descend steps to get into it. The cellar door is locked.

It is late afternoon on a winter's day. Outside it is cold and rainy. The light is beginning to fail. A single candle is on the table. It brings a warm glow to the otherwise dank room. But we can hear the wind and the rain whipping against the side of this stone structure, buried half beneath the ground.

The year is 1506. We are on a farm outside Florence.

The door bangs open and a man enters. He is in his sixties, but the farmer's life has made him look much older. He has a beard, and is weathered and grey.

Behind him will follow Enrico, in his early twenties. He's very handsome and energetic, and very earnest.

GIOVANNI

Christ! What a day!

(He sees the door is still open.)

Close the door for God's sake!

(Enrico reaches back and closes the heavy wooden door.)

ENRICO

The rain is good for the grapes, though.

GIOVANNI

It's bad for the old men.

ENRICO

In the summer, you'll be happy we had so much rain. You'll be dancing around the wine press singing songs to the Madonna.

GIOVANNI

If I live that long.

ENRICO

You say that every year.

GIOVANNI

Every year I could die. And I have never danced around any wine presses. Light a candle.

ENRICO

It's lit. Liccia must have come down.

GIOVANNI

That's it? That's the only candle we have?

ENRICO

They're expensive, papa.

GIOVANNI

Well, we've got money now, don't we.

ENRICO

Do we?

GIOVANNI

Well, as soon they get here and take a look at it. I think they'll pay plenty, don't you?

ENRICO

I don't know. I hope so.

GIOVANNI

Ah well, there you go. Hope. You add faith and charity, and you've got yourself a Beatitude.

ENRICO

Faith, hope, and charity are not Beatitudes.

GIOVANNI

No? What are they?

ENRICO

They're just three good things to have. The greatest of them is charity.

GIOVANNI

Oh forgive me, I'm just an ignorant old man.

ENRICO

Just because I go to church and you don't ...

GIOVANNI

The last time I went to church that crazy Savanarola got up in the pulpit and scared me half to death.

ENRICO

They say he's not so frightening since they burned him at the stake.

GIOVANNI

And a good thing too.

ENRICO

Savanarola had some good things to say.

GIOVANNI

Why don't you march down into town and say that to the nearest Medici who happens to be walking by? I understand they've got a few stakes left and kindling is cheap.

ENRICO

That's exactly my point. The Family would do just that.

GIOVANNI

So would Savanarola.

(Enrico dismisses him with a wave.)

ENRICO

Oh - you're an old man.

GIOVANNI

You only noticed just now? Where are the candles?

(Giovanni is looking for them in a low cabinet against a wall.)

ENRICO

One is plenty.

GIOVANNI

We're going to have money soon. You wait and see. We'll have candles, some new clothes, maybe a helper for that lovely sister of your's so she doesn't complain all the time about the work she has to do.

ENRICO

Papa ...

GIOVANNI

I'm sorry.

ENRICO

We agreed.

GIOVANNI

Yes, yes. I'm sorry.

ENRICO

Liccia works very hard.

GIOVANNI

God knows she works harder than your mother ever did. Now there was a lazy one.

ENRICO

Papa, that's not nice!

GIOVANNI

It's true!

ENRICO

Yes, but you don't say that about the dead.

GIOVANNI

You say what's true about the dead and let the dead take care of themselves. Anyway, they're dead. What do they care?

ENRICO

You're a wicked old man.

GIOVANNI

Yes and you are young and stupid. So when they get here, you let me do the talking. I plan to get our money's worth out of this little artifact we've discovered.

(He has found three candles. He sits at the table, and sets about putting them in holders and lighting them.)

ENRICO

Little artifact!

GIOVANNI

Yes, exactly.

ENRICO

Oh papa! It's sculpture!

GIOVANNI

I'm not impressed by words, I'm sorry.

ENRICO

Maybe because you don't understand it.

GIOVANNI

Oh! God save us! And you do, I suppose.

ENRICO

No, but I admit it. I'm humble in my ignorance.

GIOVANNI

It's a very pretty piece of stone, I'll give you that. But all this hub-bub about art? That's for the Medici and the Pope and all those city folks who love to stroll around town gasping at all their lovely belongings. Me, I go into the vinyard every day and do my job. And do you know what? When they sit down to their table in the afternoon, they enjoy a very fine wine because of my work. Wine that in my ignorant opinion is every bit a thing of beauty as any of their fancy art.

ENRICO

Our work.

GIOVANNI

You're right -- because the one thing you do know how to do is when to pick the grape.

ENRICO

Thank you.

GIOVANNI

No small talent, that. Not just anyone can time it the way you can. We make good wine because of that.

ENRICO

Thank you Papa.

GIOVANNI

A serious, businesslike exchange of cash is all I'm looking for. No elegant talk for me, if you please.

ENRICO

You're a terrible philistine.

GIOVANNI

I don't even know what that is, so it can't possibly bother me that I am one.

ENRICO

It's in the Bible.

GIOVANNI

This explains why I don't know.

ENRICO

Anyway, we'll both going do the talking.

GIOVANNI

I don't think we're having this discussion.

ENRICO

Both of us, Papa.

GIOVANNI

You don't know the first thing about business.

ENRICO

And you don't know anything about art.

GIOVANNI

I don't need to know anything.

ENRICO

For this, it wouldn't hurt.

GIOVANNI

I'm the head of this family and I do the business.

ENRICO

You could give something away and not even know it.

GIOVANNI

We've got one item on the block: a statue. We're trying to get two thousand for it, tops. We'll settle for one. I know the difference between 1,000 and 2,000. That much business sense I know I have.

ENRICO

Papa, please. Just don't close any deals without checking with me first.

GIOVANNI

I'll see how it goes.

(He goes to the upstage door and tests it.
It's locked.)

ENRICO

Papa ...

GIOVANNI

I said I'll see. Now leave it. When does he get here?

ENRICO

I don't know. And it's they.

GIOVANNI

They?

(Enrico sits at the table.)

ENRICO

There are two of them. Buonarotti and a friend of his.

GIOVANNI

Another artist?

ENRICO

I don't know.

GIOVANNI

Maybe a businessman.

ENRICO

Maybe.

GIOVANNI

Maybe someone from the government.

ENRICO

Maybe, I don't know.

GIOVANNI

Maybe a Medici.

ENRICO

I doubt it.

GIOVANNI

Why?

ENRICO

They don't even know what we have yet. They may not be interested.

GIOVANNI

Not interested?! Are you serious?

ENRICO

They haven't seen it yet, papa.

GIOVANNI

Yes, but you described it to them in your letter, didn't you? You made that little drawing of it.

ENRICO

I'm sure my drawing looked very simple to the likes of Buonarroti.

GIOVANNI

I thought it looked very nice.

ENRICO

You're my father.

GIOVANNI

Yes, but I don't like you enough to compliment you if you don't deserve it. That was a good drawing.

ENRICO

Thank you.

(Giovanni goes to him.)

GIOVANNI

I always thought you had talent.

ENRICO

Thank you.

GIOVANNI

Who knows? With a little instruction, maybe you could be a real artist.

ENRICO

It takes more than a little instruction, Papa. It takes a long time and hard work.

GIOVANNI

Well, you were always lazy.

ENRICO

I am not lazy!

GIOVANNI

Okay, all right.

ENRICO

You know that you need me here, Papa, and that's the end of it.

GIOVANNI

I was only saying ...

ENRICO

We've been through this a hundred times.

GIOVANNI

If you'd let me get a word in ...

ENRICO

Let's just drop it!

(Enrico gets up and crosses away from Giovanni, though he soon realizes he has nowhere to go and ends up floating on the other side of the room.)

GIOVANNI

I never heard of anyone finding a piece like this, have you?

ENRICO

Well, no. But we don't get much news up on this mountainside, papa.

GIOVANNI

They're always digging up a piece of this, a chunk of that. But a whole statue? In virtually the same condition as the day it was finished? Now that's a rare thing indeed.

ENRICO

You may be right. I hope you are.

GIOVANNI

You and that hope again.

ENRICO

I'm only saying that I don't know.

GIOVANNI

And not just any old statue, but a great one. I mean, that is one very impressive piece of marble, don't you think? So dramatic. The way they're all tangled up in the snakes like that, struggling to get free. It's pathetic, really, if you think about it. Really, very touching.

ENRICO

You sound like you almost like it.

GIOVANNI

(indignantly)

I do.

ENRICO

I thought you couldn't care less about all that fancy art nonsense.

GIOVANNI

I don't care about all the nonsense. But I like the statue. It's ... I don't know. It's good. It's nothing to get excited about it, but it's good. I never said it wasn't good.

ENRICO

You said you weren't impressed by it.

GIOVANNI

I never said such a thing.

ENRICO

You did. You just said it a few minutes ago.

GIOVANNI

You don't listen. I said I wasn't impressed by all the nonsense that goes with it. Of course I'm impressed by the statue. Who wouldn't be? You'd have to be blind. Or stupid. What do you take me for anyway? A philistine?

(Enrico goes to the table with the wine bottles on it.)

ENRICO

I'm going to have a little. How about you?

GIOVANNI

Unlike my son, I try not to drink up the profits.

ENRICO

So you won't have another after this cup.

GIOVANNI

Exactly.

(Enrico hands him a cup of wine.)

GIOVANNI

You're not such a bad son.

(There's pounding at the door.)

GIOVANNI

It's them.

ENRICO

I'll get it.

GIOVANNI

Don't forget, I do the talking.

(More pounding.)

Come in! Now be obedient for once in your life.

ENRICO

Yes, papa.

(Two men enter. The first, Buonarroto, is about thirty. He is bearded and not very attractive. He is overbearing in his manner, abrupt and arrogant. The second man, Giuliano da Sangallo, is in his forties. He is quite straight-forward, businesslike. They are both very wet and wind-blown.)

GIULIANO

God in heaven! The wind on this mountain!

GIOVANNI

Bad day out there.

GIULIANO

Terrible!

GIOVANNI

Let me take your cloaks. Enrico, some help here.

GIULIANO

Yes, yes, thank you so much.

(Meanwhile, Enrico has stepped in to take Buonarotti's cloak. Buonarotti's eyes fasten on Enrico, who manages -- barely -- to meet the gaze. Buonarotti's tone is stern and formal.)

BUONARROTI

You didn't tell us it was so far up the hill.

ENRICO

It's a steep climb, yes.

BUONARROTI

Look at this. I'm soaked through.

ENRICO

I'll get you some dry clothes if you like.

BUONARROTI

No, no, don't bother. I'm not staying that long.

GIOVANNI

We thought you might stay for dinner.

BUONARROTI

We have to get back.

GIULIANO

I don't know. Dinner doesn't sound so bad to me.

BUONARROTI

I want to be back in the city tonight.

GIULIANO

We're going to have to eat somewhere.

ENRICO

Yes - please stay. It would be such an honor for us to have you ...

BUONARROTI

I'm not staying for dinner!

GIOVANNI

If he doesn't want to stay he doesn't have to.

BUONARROTI

I just want to look at the statue. That's what I came for.

ENRICO

Of course, of course. I only meant that ...

BUONARROTI

I know what you meant.

GIOVANNI

We let our guests do what they like.

BUONARROTI

Thank you.

GIOVANNI

You don't want to eat my daughter's delicious cooking, there's nobody here going to force you. My name is DeAngelo. This is my son Enrico. He's the friendly one.

BUONARROTI

I'm Buonarroti.

(Giuliano steps forward to shake hands.)

GIULIANO

Giuliano Da Sangallo. It's a pleasure. The Family would like you to know that they are very pleased you told them first of your discovery.

ENRICO

We knew that they'd appreciate the value of a great work like this.

GIOVANNI

And have the money to pay for it.

(Giuliano is a little embarrassed by this.)

GIULIANO

Yes, yes of course.

BUONARROTI

May we see the statue?

GIOVANNI

It's right in there.

(He indicates.)

We put it in the cellar - it's got the only door we can lock.

GIULIANO

Very smart.

BUONARROTI

You didn't tell anyone else about it, did you?

GIOVANNI

We're peasants up here, you know -- not idiots.

GIULIANO

Oh he didn't mean that you ...

(Giovanni goes to get a candle and a key,
lying on the table. He unlocks the cellar
door.)

GIOVANNI

(interrupting)

We didn't tell a soul. But you can never be too
careful. I didn't want somebody stumbling in here and
catching a glimpse of it before you arrived. --Well
gentlemen? Care to have a look?

(Giuliano and Buonarotti look at each other.)

BUONARROTI

You go ahead.

GIULIANO

You're not coming?

BUONARROTI

I want to sit for a minute and clear my head. I've got
too many thoughts going around in it. I won't be able
to look at it properly.

GIULIANO

Well, if you insist.

BUONARROTI

I do.

GIOVANNI

All right, then. Come along. Take that candle with you.

(Giuliano takes a nearby candle and Giovanni
They are gone.)

ENRICO

Please, have a seat.

BUONARROTI

Thank you.

ENRICO

You're sure you don't want some dry clothes.

BUONARROTI

They'll only get wet when I go back into the rain.

ENRICO

You really can spend the night if you like.

BUONARROTI

You're very kind. No thank you.

ENRICO

Whatever you want. But I want you to know that we're not just being polite.

BUONARROTI

I understand.

ENRICO

We have a comfortable house. The beds are warm and dry and they don't have lice. My sister's cooking is really very good - everybody says so, even my father, and he isn't one to give compliments. I don't understand why you'd want to go back tonight in the rain. It'll be dark soon, too.

BUONARROTI

Maybe I like the dark.

(This stops Enrico short. He turns away vaguely until his eye falls on the wine bottles.)

ENRICO

Would you like a glass of wine?

BUONARROTI

Is it your own?

ENRICO

We grow the grapes right out on that hillside.

BUONARROTI

I'll try a cup.

(Enrico pours two cups.)

ENRICO

I think we make a good wine up here. Very light. But with a good body.

(He hands Buonarroti the cup.)

But you tell me.

(Buonarroti drinks it down.)

BUONARROTI

It's fine.

ENRICO

You barely tasted it.

BUONARROTI

I thought it was fine.

ENRICO

You couldn't possibly know, drinking it that fast.

BUONARROTI

I know everything I have to know.

ENRICO

Then you don't really care about good wine.

BUONARROTI

You're right, I don't. Now please, leave me alone for a minute.

ENRICO

To clear your mind.

BUONARROTI

Yes.

ENRICO

The way a wine drinker will clear his palate. So that you're ready to have the experience.

BUONARROTI

That's right.

ENRICO

That's the only thing that's important to you.

BUONARROTI

Yes.

ENRICO

Sometimes, I draw. Papa tells me I'm very good.

BUONARROTI

For a man who doesn't hand out many compliments, he seems to do it rather often.

ENRICO

I might have gone to Florence to study.

BUONARROTI

Why didn't you?

ENRICO

I thought I should stay on the farm. My father needed the help.

BUONARROTI

We all make choices.

ENRICO

The drawing of the statue that we sent you. Did you bring it?

BUONARROTI

Yes.

ENRICO

May I see it?

BUONARROTI

It's in the cloak. Probably soaked through.

(Enrico goes to the cloak, rummages through the pockets, and produces a rolled piece of paper. He spreads it on the table.)

ENRICO

Do you mind?

BUONARROTI
Mind?

ENRICO
Giving me a critique?

BUONARROTI
You drew this?

ENRICO
Yes.

BUONARROTI
It's not bad.

ENRICO
Do you think?

BUONARROTI
You must practice.

ENRICO
Oh yes, in my spare time. In the winter, mostly. When the weather is like this.

BUONARROTI
I meant you *ought* to practice. More.

ENRICO
Oh.

BUONARROTI
The modelling of the flesh is abrupt, here. You see? You can bring out the sense of muscle, of weight. Don't pass over it as though it isn't there. It's there. Acknowledge it.

ENRICO
I see. Anything else?

BUONARROTI
That's all.

ENRICO
That's the only criticism you have?

BUONARROTI
Yes.

ENRICO

You're very kind.

BUONARROTI

No I'm not.

ENRICO

Then you really mean it. You think I have talent.

BUONARROTI

I don't know what talent is. You can draw.

ENRICO

Enough to go to Florence? To study?

BUONARROTI

That I have no idea.

ENRICO

If you don't know, who does?

BUONARROTI

You want to make it a matter of talent. I'm only saying that I don't know if talent is so important. There's a lot that goes into being an artist besides talent. Personality. Luck. Skill ...

ENRICO

But you said I had skill.

BUONARROTI

There's skill and there's technique.

ENRICO

But that's what I would learn if I studied, wouldn't I?

BUONARROTI

I suppose so.

ENRICO

Then you do think I have something.

BUONARROTI

Yes.

(There obviously is something else on his mind. Enrico senses it.)

ENRICO

What.

BUONARROTI

Don't go to Florence. Don't study painting.

ENRICO

Why not?

BUONARROTI

It would be selfish. Your father needs you.

ENRICO

If I were a successful artist I could support my father. He'd never have to work again.

BUONARROTI

And you might fail miserably. Most artists fail miserably. Even some of the bad ones. Better to stay at home and make wine.

(Enrico lets this sink in for a moment. It's depressing, not the answer he wanted. For lack of anything to say, he offers Buonarroti more wine.)

ENRICO

Did you want some more?

BUONARROTI

I've had enough, actually.

ENRICO

You don't like it?

BUONARROTI

It's all right.

ENRICO

That's what you said about my drawing.

(Buonarroti shrugs.)

Well, maybe you just don't like good wine.

BUONARROTI

I know good wine, believe me. This isn't good. It's heavy and bitter.

ENRICO

You don't know what you're talking about.

BUONARROTI

I know how something tastes.

ENRICO

You may be a great artist, but I am a winemaker. We have the finest wine in the region on this farm. We're small, we're not famous. But the wine is good.

BUONARROTI

Have it your way. My way, it's heavy and bitter.

(A pause.)

ENRICO

Why do you have to be so unkind?

BUONARROTI

Why do you have to be so beautiful?

ENRICO

Excuse me?

BUONARROTI

You heard me.

ENRICO

I don't know what to say ...

BUONARROTI

Try answering the question.

ENRICO

I don't know what you mean ...

BUONARROTI

I asked you why are you beautiful. It's a simple enough question, isn't it? You answer mine, I'll answer yours. Why. Are. You. Beautiful.

ENRICO

First of all, I don't happen to think I'm so ...

BUONARROTI

Just answer the question.

ENRICO

I look the way I am because ... because that's who I am. Because that's how God made me. I had nothing to do with it.

BUONARROTI

Good answer.

ENRICO

Now you. You answer mine.

BUONARROTI

Isn't it obvious? The same reason. I'm not a nice person because God made me that way.

(Buonarroti takes a drink of wine.)

Oh come now, don't look so glum. Your wine is not to my taste. What could be simpler.

(Enrico gets up and puts the wine back on the low cabinet.)

ENRICO

Don't bother taking back your words.

BUONARROTI

I'm not taking them back. I'm explaining them. I told you the truth and you didn't want to hear it. That's my business, afterall -- telling the truth. You probably never thought of it, but what I do isn't about chipping away at blocks of marble and dabbing paint onto plaster. It's about telling the truth. Everything else is just technique. I've gotten very good at it, as you may have heard. And once you get good at something it's hard to break the habit. And if the truth is unkind, well, then so be it. Or Amen, as they say in church.

ENRICO

Do you go to church?

BUONARROTI

My dear, I *build* churches.

ENRICO

You're a liar.

BUONARROTI

No, I really do. I've already built a chapel for the San Lorenzo. I'm going to build a church for the Pope in Rome if they ever get the old one torn down. In the meantime I'm going to paint the ceiling of the Pope's chapel, which I admit isn't the same as actually constructing the building itself, but believe me -- after I get done with the ceiling of that chapel nobody's going to think of that building as a building. They're going to think of it as a ceiling and nothing more.

(Enrico has finally really gotten furious listening to this. He's barely containing his rage.)

ENRICO

Are you done congratulating yourself? Because what I meant was: you're a liar about being unkind. God didn't make you that way. You're unkind because you want to be. To me, in particular. I could see it the moment you walked in.

BUONARROTI

You saw that.

ENRICO

Yes.

BUONARROTI

How observant you must be to see all that with one look.

ENRICO

Yes, because I can see things! I have an eye -- just like an artist.

BUONARROTI

Oh, this again.

ENRICO

What is it, jealousy? Are you so afraid that I might really be good? Is that it?

BUONARROTI

Now you flatter yourself.

ENRICO

But when you first looked at this -- the first thing you said was that I could draw! That it was good!

BUONARROTI

I said it wasn't bad.

ENRICO

That I must practice. But everyone must practice! Everyone has something to learn! Even you weren't born the way you are! And for someone who grew up on a farm, this isn't bad. Where would you be now if you had grown up on this mountain? The truth is that I could learn. Anyone could learn what they need to be an artist -- if they want to badly enough.

BUONARROTI

If that were true, then my donkey could write poetry and the pope would paint his own ceiling.

ENRICO

I am an artist! I know I am!

BUONARROTI

If you're so sure, then why do you keep asking me?

ENRICO

Because you are Buonarroti!

BUONARROTI

And what is that? What is Buonarroti? It's nothing! I am nothing! You are nothing also! We are both nothing! The work is the only thing that is something! More than that I cannot tell you!

(Pause.)

ENRICO

I think you're the cruelest man I ever met.

BUONARROTI

And *I* think that sometimes, underneath cruelty, there is something very beautiful. And sometimes, in beautiful things, there can be that which is painfully cruel.

(Pause.)

BUONARROTI (con't)

And now if I might have just a glass of water. I understand the water up here in the hills is quite good.

(A noise from within. The others are returning from the cellar.)

ENRICO

(suddenly, without warning)

Take me with you.

BUONARROTI

What?

ENRICO

I want to go to Florence. I don't care if I don't have talent. I want to study art. I want to study with you.

BUONARROTI

Pour me the water.

(Enrico hesitates.)

Pour.

(Enrico pours him a glass from a pitcher.)

Giovanni and Giuliano enter from the cellar, laughing and talking. Giovanni goes to the table and blows out the candle as he talks.)

GIOVANNI

(exuberantly)

No, no -- it was completely by accident. Enrico was digging the new well just as I had told him, which was pretty extraordinary in itself now that I think of it, when all of a sudden he's all stooped over, digging away at something in the dirt. But the minute I get there I can see from the quality of the marble itself here was something special.

BUONARROTI

(to Giuliano)

And is it? Special?

GIULIANO

It's special. Oh yes. It's very special. Just as Pliny describes it.

BUONARROTI

And the ... condition?

GIULIANO

Intact. Completely intact.

(Overcome, Buonarroti puts his face into his hands. Enrico makes a move towards him.)

ENRICO

Are you all right?

BUONARROTI

I'm fine. Don't touch me. I'm all right.

GIOVANNI

(to Enrico)

Get the man some wine.

BUONARROTI

I don't want any wine.

GIOVANNI

It's very good wine. We make it our- ...

BUONARROTI

I don't want the wine!

GIOVANNI

I thought I'd ask.

(Buonarroti gets up.)

BUONARROTI

I want to see it now. I'm ready.

GIOVANNI

Enrico, you go with him.

BUONARROTI

No, I'll go alone.

GIOVANNI

Enrico ...

(He gestures for Enrico to follow.)

ENRICO

Here, I'll show you the way.

BUONARROTI

I'd prefer to go alone.

(Enrico takes him by the arm.)

ENRICO

It's very dark in the cellar. You can hit your head ...

BUONARROTI

Get your hand off me!

GIOVANNI

Mr. Buonarroti, the statue is still mine and I want you accompanied. I'm not requesting. Understand?

(Buonarroti looks at Enrico, then back at Giovanni. Then to Enrico ...)

BUONARROTI

After you.

(Enrico lights the candle, goes to the cellar door and goes inside, followed by Buonarroti.)

GIOVANNI

Some wine?

GIULIANO

I believe I will, thank you.

(Giovanni goes to the low cabinet, brings back the wine and two cups. He will pour them out. He talks through all this.)

GIOVANNI

Quite a charmer, that Buonarroti.

GIULIANO

You must forgive him. He's very decent, really, but very ... unhappy.

GIOVANNI

Yes, must be tough. All those dinners with the Pope.

GIULIANO

He doesn't care about that sort of thing.

GIOVANNI

Then we're alike. Neither do I.

GIULIANO

(confidentially)

He enjoys men.

GIOVANNI

Yes ... ?

GIULIANO

You understand what I mean? Instead of women.

GIOVANNI

You think I never heard of such a thing? I live on a farm, not the moon.

(He assumes a mock-confidential tone.)

We even have men like that around here.

GIULIANO

Well, it's against church teaching.

GIOVANNI

Hm! The church is against church teaching.

GIULIANO

I'd watch what I say! People get burned for less than that.

GIOVANNI

Oh really, who do you think you're fooling? You didn't get where you are with the Medici by being a humble servant of God.

GIULIANO

I am as humble a servant of God as the next man!

GIOVANNI

Tell it to Savonarola.

GIULIANO

I told him -- he didn't listen!
(They laugh.)

GIULIANO (con't)

You know what I wonder? I wonder what you'll do with the money.

GIOVANNI

We haven't discussed money yet.

GIULIANO

No, but we will. If I read you correctly, you want plenty.

GIOVANNI

Something wrong with that? I'll bet the Family asks for plenty when it's making its deals.

GIULIANO

Oh, they do.

GIOVANNI

Well, then.

GIULIANO

I only wonder what you'll do with it, that's all.

GIOVANNI

That depends on how much it is.

GIULIANO

Let's say you get everything you want.

GIOVANNI

I'd go down into the village and hire a couple of men and get them to come up here and tend my vines for me. Then I'd sit in my house and enjoy what's left of my life. That's not so unreasonable, is it?

GIULIANO

Not if you ask me.

GIOVANNI

My son would think so.

GIULIANO

The sculpture doesn't belong to your son.

GIOVANNI

No, but he wants me to let him bargain with you. I don't think that's such a good idea, do you?

GIULIANO

I wouldn't know.

GIOVANNI

He's young and sentimental. He doesn't know about business.

GIULIANO

Well, in that case, if you ask me, you should let him join in the bargaining as much as he wants.

(They laugh.)

I love to bargain with sentimental people!

GIOVANNI

I'll bet you do. He wants to go with you.

GIULIANO

With me?

GIOVANNI

With this Buonarroti fellow, to Florence. He wants to study art.

GIULIANO

Why didn't he just say so?

GIOVANNI

He doesn't want me to know. He's guilty about leaving the old man on the mountaintop. He thinks he's fooling me. He lies about it. "No, papa. I don't want to be an artist. I don't want to be a painter." But I know. I can see it. The more he denies it, the more I know.

GIULIANO

And you won't let him go?

GIOVANNI

I need him here on the farm, don't I.

GIULIANO

Not if you have the money from the statue.

GIOVANNI

He's not very good, though. That's the real problem. He should stay for his own sake.

GIULIANO

Yes, but if the boy wants to go ...

GIOVANNI

You saw his drawing of the statue.

GIULIANO

It wasn't so bad. The boy hasn't had any training. He could be very competent if he put his mind to it.

GIOVANNI

I don't believe he's interested in "competent."

GIULIANO

Well, not everyone can be like Mr. Buonarotti here.

GIOVANNI

Tell that to Enrico. He thinks he can be.

GIULIANO

Still, he could have a career of some kind. People do. Thousands of them.

GIOVANNI

He's a dreamer. He imagines things for himself and he thinks they'll come true, but they won't. I couldn't stand him to be so disappointed.

GIULIANO

You know, honestly -- and not that this makes much difference to me, one way or the other -- but really, I suspect you're a selfish, lonely old man who is afraid he'll be left alone to die up here in the hills.

GIOVANNI

Maybe I am selfish. Then again, maybe selfish is a good thing, if it saves somebody else a lot of heartache and disappointment.

GIULIANO

But you can't keep him here where he doesn't want to be.

GIOVANNI

But it's not me keeping him, don't you see? It's God. Enrico prayed and asked for the gift and God said no. God does that on occasion. Have you noticed? It's God who's keeping him here, or Fate if you prefer. Like the snakes on those men in the statue. It's Fate that dragging him down and there's nothing to do about it.

(A slight pause.)

GIULIANO

I have a confession.

GIOVANNI

What's that?

GIULIANO

This wine has given me quite an appetite.

(Giovanni laughs.)

GIOVANNI

Come upstairs, then. We'll have dinner while we wait.

(Giovanni goes to the outside door. Giuliano starts to follow.)

GIULIANO

They won't wonder where we went?

GIOVANNI

Where is there to go? Enrico will know we're upstairs. Come on, don't worry about them. You'll like Liccia. She's very pretty, and not married yet. Tell me, Mr. Da Sangallo, are you married yourself? Because Liccia is very hard working. All day scrubbing and cooking and ...

(They are gone.)

The door to the cellar slams open. Buonarroti stands for a moment, dazed and unsure where to move. Finally he walks into the room. Enrico appears at the door behind him. He blows out the candle. He talks nervously.)

ENRICO

I knew you'd feel this way about it. I did too, the moment I saw it, I knew. Papa doesn't appreciate these things, but I -- I know something great when I see it. That's what I want to do. I want to be an artist like that also!

BUONARROTI

For God's sake, just shut up, would you?!

(Pause.)

You don't understand, do you.

When God made the world, he *created* something. In the truest sense, the real sense of the word: to bring into being. There was nothing, now there is something. That's what God did. We forget that -- there was nothing. *Nothing*. And now ... the world. The stars, the sun ...

(He runs his fingers along the table top and looks at his fingertips.)

... dust, air, stones. You. I.

When an artist paints, or a sculptor hammers the stone -- that's not creation. We're just rearranging things. It looks new, it seems as if we've created something, but no -- never. It's not possible. Only God can create things and he's long since finished.

But ... sometimes, once in a lifetime, once in a thousand years, there is a work of man that *seems* to be new. That seems to be actually created. The material seems not to have been there before, and now it is.

(He gestures behind him, to the inner door.)

That ... that creation in your cellar is one of these.

Laocoon¹, he's the man, the father, a Trojan priest. He reaches up to escape the serpent's grasp and ...

¹Lay-AHK-oh-on.

BUONAROTTI (con't)

(Unconsciously, he begins to imitate the figures in the statue.)

... his head rears back just at the moment of knowledge, the moment of despair, knowing that the reach is futile. He knows in this instant that he will die in the serpent's terrible grip. And his sons will die too. That all is lost. Yet the moment is about the *struggle*, the agonizing struggle that must go on! Now, and forever. *Now, this precise moment! And forever!*

If ever man came close to God, it was in that piece of stone in your cellar. In that marble, man has created something which comes breathlessly close, heartstoppingly close to anything in God's own creation.

And you casually stroll out the door and say you'd like to do that too. Well, you can't! It doesn't happen that way! Nobody can! Even *I* can't!

ENRICO

I'm sorry, I ... that's not what I meant. I only meant I was inspired, to do great things.

BUONARROTI

It's fake, that kind of inspiration. You don't get inspiration from art, you get it from life. Good art only intimidates you into doing a little better.

ENRICO

I'm sorry.

BUONARROTI

You might as well learn it now. You will never, never create such a thing as that!

ENRICO

All right! I hear you!

BUONARROTI

Yes, but do you understand me?

ENRICO

Yes.

BUONARROTI

And that's the end of it? No more talk of going to Florence.

ENRICO

No, not if you say so.

(Pause.)

BUONARROTI

I do.

(Enrico nods his head for a moment, accepting this. He picks up the bottle of wine and carries it back to a side cabinet. He pours himself a cup and drinks it before returning it to the shelf.)

ENRICO

I'm sorry if I upset you.

BUONARROTI

You didn't.

ENRICO

I think I did. I apologize.

BUONARROTI

You had to know, that's all. No one around here is able to tell you. But I could and I did. The truth, remember?

ENRICO

I meant that maybe I upset you because I reminded you of your own shortcomings.

BUONARROTI

Mine?

ENRICO

Isn't that really why you're angry? Because I reminded you that even you won't ever make anything like the statue?

(Buonarroti starts to laugh.)

ENRICO (con't)

Laugh if you want. But you weren't a minute ago. I guess we all have our limitations. I have mine, but you have yours. You told me why I'll never be an artist. But you said something about yourself at the same time, and when you heard it come out -- you didn't like very much.

BUONARROTI

Wrong! Wrong on both counts!

The reason you'll never be an artist? Not because I say so. Because you listened to me when I said it! Because you didn't laugh in my face and say "Ha! Buonarroti! What do you know?!" You'll defend your wine to the death, but your passion tfor art? I talked you out of it in two minutes.

ENRICO

But even you could not do what that sculptor has done! You said so yourself!

BUONARROTI

No ... that's right: I can't.

(He leans forward with enormous conviction.)

I can do better. I'll take what he's done and I'll go farther, I'll be greater, I'll do more. That's why I'm an artist, because I believe that I can. I might be wrong, but I believe. It's all the difference.

(The outside door opens and Giovanni enters followed by Giuliano.)

GIULIANO

Ah, you're back! Good!

GIOVANNI

We went upstairs for a little something to eat but your lazy sister forgot to make dinner.

GIULIANO

Well? Did you see?

BUONARROTI

Yes.

GIULIANO

Good, excellent. Because we've come to an arrangement, financially speaking.

(Giovanni looks to Enrico.)

GIOVANNI

I think you'll be happy with the amount, Enrico.

GIULIANO

Three thousand, plus an order for a shipment of wine from this fine estate.

(He looks at Buonarroti.)

You don't think it's too much, do you?

BUONARROTI

The sculpture is beyond price.

GIULIANO

Just what I thought. Mr. DeAngelo drives a hard bargain but I believe everyone is pleased now.

BUONARROTI

We're lucky he doesn't want to keep it for himself.

GIULIANO

Yes, indeed. Well. Shall we go then?

BUONARROTI

Everything is done?

GIULIANO

We've signed an agreement. I'll be back up tomorrow with some workmen and a carriage.

(Pointedly, to Giovanni.)

And the money. Nothing to do tonight, but go home and get some sleep.

GIOVANNI

It's not raining so hard. And the wind is stopped.

GIULIANO

Yes, well, there you have it then.

(Buonarroti stands.)

BUONARROTI

Thank you for your hospitality. I apologize if I was abrupt, earlier. I was nervous about seeing it.

GIOVANNI

Well it's all worked out, hasn't it. Everybody's happy.

BUONARROTI

Yes, indeed.

(He goes back to Enrico.)

Do you ever come to Rome?

ENRICO

Rome?! No. Why?

BUONARROTI

I thought you might come see my chapel ceiling when it's finished. I already have ideas for it. It will be very beautiful. Not as beautiful as you, but afterall, you are the original, made by God.

(He goes to the outside door.)

Come.

(He exits.)

GIULIANO

Yes, well, good to meet. See you tomorrow, just after noon, I imagine.

(He hurries after Buonarroti. Giovanni closes the door after him. A slight beat.)

GIOVANNI

Did he try something with you?

ENRICO

Oh Papa, for God's sake ...

GIOVANNI

Listen, you bring your goods to market, sometimes you have to throw in a little something extra to close the deal.

ENRICO

He liked the statue enough all on its own.

GIOVANNI

I closed the deal without you.

ENRICO

It's all right. It doesn't matter.

GIOVANNI

Well I apologize. I said I'd wait for you.

ENRICO

You said nothing of the kind. You told me to mind my own business.

GIOVANNI

Enrico, how can you get things wrong so much? I wonder about you. I promised I'd consult you before I closed the deal. And I didn't -- but for three thousand! How could I hesitate? And a shipment of wine, to be drunk by the Medici themselves!

ENRICO

I thought you couldn't care less about the Medici.

GIOVANNI

They drink a lot of wine. I could learn to care about them.

(Enrico moves towards the door.)

ENRICO

Well you have your money, that's the important thing.

GIOVANNI

It'll be yours soon.

ENRICO

Not so soon, I don't think.

GIOVANNI

I could die anytime.

ENRICO

You've said that for years.

GIOVANNI

It's been true for years.

ENRICO

I'm going up to bed, Papa.

(He again goes to the door.)

GIOVANNI

I got a thousand more than either of us dreamed of.
Don't you want to know what I plan on doing with it?

ENRICO

What, Papa?

GIOVANNI

It's enough to send you to Florence. You could study.

(Enrico doesn't know how to answer.)

I know it's what you want.

(Pause.)

ENRICO

I don't think so.

GIOVANNI

What do you mean? Why not?

ENRICO

A few years ago, maybe. Not anymore.

GIOVANNI

What are you talking about? You're twenty one years old. People learn to draw when they're twenty one. Besides, you already know how. You only need to get better.

ENRICO

When I was younger, I think maybe then I might have become an artist. But you change, Papa. A person changes. Then it's not possible anymore.

GIOVANNI

Oh what a bunch of crap!

ENRICO

When the grape is ready to be picked, you pick it. If you wait, the grape is no good for wine. Good for other things, maybe. Not for wine. Not for a great wine. There's nothing you can do to change it. You know that, Papa.

GIOVANNI

You're not a grape.

ENRICO

I'm not an artist.

GIOVANNI

(shrugs)

Well, have it your way.

ENRICO

Thank you, Papa.

(Giovanni starts to go, then stops again.)

I do know when to pick the grape, though, don't I.

GIOVANNI

Like no one I ever saw. You have the knack.

ENRICO

It's an honorable profession, wine-making. Isn't it.

GIOVANNI

I always thought so.

ENRICO

So did I. Good night Papa.

GIOVANNI

Good night.

(Giovanni goes out and closes the door.)

Enrico goes to cabinet, gets the bottle of wine and a cup, and sits at the table. He pours a little in the cup and drinks. He likes what he tastes.

He then arranges the grapes in the bowl and sets the candle at a better angle to it. He produces the sketching paper and a piece of charcoal from his pocket.

He presses the paper flat onto the table, eyes the fruit bowl, and begins to sketch the still life in front of him.

The lights fade to black.

End of play.)

LEVELS OF PERCEPTION

1998

The terrace of a house in the East End of Long Island -- 'the Hamptons.' An door upstage leading into the house. Also exits SL and SR. SL exit goes towards a barn, now serving as an artist's studio. SR exit goes towards the driveway.

9 am. Summer. A beautiful, sun-drenched day.

Several chairs and a table are set out on the terrace.

SALLY, 40s, sits in one of the chairs, reading a magazine, sipping at a cup of coffee.

GENE, 60s, enters from stage left. He carries a basket of tomatoes. He goes to look around the corner to the driveway.

SALLY

They're not here yet.

GENE

No, I was just uh ...

SALLY

Enjoying the view?

GENE

Yes.

SALLY

Pretty driveway, isn't it. Gravel's a nice touch.
(SALLY looks back to her newspaper.)

GENE

Well I don't want them getting the jump on me.

SALLY

Three hour drive this time of year. Traffic and all. I say one o'clock at the earliest.

(Pause.)

GENE

How long're they staying?

SALLY

He didn't say.

GENE

You didn't ask him?

SALLY

Gene, don't worry. You know he won't want to spend a night outside the city. He's like a vampire - always home by sunset.

GENE

A vampire would be sunrise I think.

SALLY

You get the idea.

(Beat. Sally reads. Gene examines the tomatoes.)

GENE

Good tomatoes this year.

SALLY

They're wonderful.

GENE

Eat 'em like apples.

SALLY

Mmm.

GENE

What are we going to tell him?

SALLY

We?

GENE

You, I mean.

SALLY

What am I going to ... oh Gene. You wouldn't.

GENE

It's bad, but I would.

SALLY

This is your business, Gene.

GENE

But you're so much better at this --

SALLY

There's nothing to be good at. A fact's a fact. Just tell him the facts.

GENE

Please? I'll get scarce, you tell him, he'll go away, I'll make tomato soup.

SALLY

It's not my place. I'm sorry, it's just not. Now if you want me to tell him to go away, that I can do. I'll tell him to come back some other time. Or call on the phone. But if anyone is going to give him the bad news, Gene, that person is you. You know that. You have to accept responsibility.

GENE

I thought that's what I had you for.

(The sound of a car pulling in.)

GENE

Oh God.

SALLY

Gene, if you explain, he'll understand.

(Gene looks around him.)

GENE

No he won't. I've got to hide.

SALLY

Don't you dare. He's come all the way from the city.

(Car doors open and slam shut. He pecks her on the forehead.)

GENE

Thank you. You've never let me down.

(He exits the way he came, towards the studio. She looks after him, annoyed. She makes a decision, then exits into the house.)

A young man, ALAN, enters. He stops as though sensing something strange.)

ALAN

Damn. It's got a fucking *vibe*.

(LEONARD appears behind him.)

LEONARD

What did you say?

ALAN

This place, it's got his *vibe*. I can feel him.

(He has sunk to his knees, putting his cheek on the earth. Leonard rolls his eyes.)

LEONARD

Alan, this is me. You can save the drama.

(Alan stands up satisfied -- not in response to Leonard.)

ALAN

Amazing. You could feel it too if you weren't such a cynical fuck.

Where do you think he is?

LEONARD

Hiding.

ALAN

Hiding?

LEONARD

Gene likes to hide. It's why he left the city, came here. It was remote at the time. Hard to get to. Suited him perfectly.

(Alan wanders around, inspecting the details of the place.)

ALAN

Well, it's a good pose, anyway.

LEONARD

It's not a *pose*. Gene's not the posing type.

ALAN

You don't take a place in The Hamptons if it's not some kind of pose.

LEONARD

It wasn't 'The Hamptons' at the time, it was the East End: potato farmers and fishermen. It was cheap, and the light was good, and nobody bothered him. That's why they all came -- Pollock, de Kooning. All of them. Gene's not a *poseur*. He's no good at it.

ALAN

That's what makes him good at it: that he's not 'good at it'.

LEONARD

Your problem is you have no perspective.

ALAN

(Stung, angry ...)

No Leonard, it's not lack of perspective. It's a different one. My perspective is that I understand perception and the perception is Gene Kaap lives in the Hamptons. That's what people say, Leonard. That's how they think of it. They don't think about old potato farms. They think Gene Kaap/Hamptons, Hamptons/Gene Kaap. One does not see him moving to some other potato farm in some other remote area, does one. A pose is a pose, whether it's stumbled upon by accident or deliberately struck. He's associating himself with the place. It's all about marketing, Leonard, raising the value of the work. A subject you'd know something about.

LEONARD

Gene's got all the money he can use.

ALAN

Yes, and? A man with a lot of money and a major reputation goes to some effort to acquire greater cachet and make even more money. Why.

Because he can, Leonard. Back to Art Dealership School with you.

(Leonard stands.)

LEONARD

I shouldn't have brought you.

ALAN

I'm only telling the truth and you know it

LEONARD

If you embarrass me in front of him ...

ALAN

Oh Leonard, relax. Gene and I are going to get along fine.

LEONARD

Just don't screw it up. This is too important.

I'm going to look for him.

(He goes to exit to the orchard.)

ALAN

Shouldn't you try the house?

(He points to the house.)

LEONARD

He's not there.

ALAN

How do you know?

LEONARD

There's one thing you should know about me: I know Gene.

(Leonard leaves.)

Alan watches him go, then drops down to put his face to the ground again.

Sally appears at the screen door, and, not seeing Alan, she enters. He looks up, she sees him, but it's too late. They look at each other.)

ALAN

You must be Mrs. Kaap.

SALLY

And you are?

ALAN

Alan.

SALLY

(Lightly, not snide.)

What, is that like Madonna? You're 'Alan'?

ALAN

Alan Becker.

SALLY

(A light goes off.)

Wait a second ...

(She picks up the magazine.)

... I was just - aren't you in here?

ALAN

Which one is it?

(He looks at the cover.)

Oh, this is old.

SALLY

(Looking for the article.)

Well, we're a little behind the times around here. Here you are. "Installation Nation: Alan Becker and the Art of Perception."

ALAN

I wasn't that happy with it, actually.

SALLY

No?

ALAN

Not the magazine piece, that was fine. I meant my installation -- it never really seemed to work totally.

SALLY

You're being modest.

ALAN

No, it's true. It was too direct, too -- I don't know ... obviously *emotional*

SALLY

(Encouraging him to go on...)

Uh huh?

ALAN

Too ... *clear*.

SALLY

Right.

ALAN

My work has to be more veiled, more stratified. It's got to ... you can't take it head on. It has to be ...

SALLY

... not as clear.

ALAN

Right.

SALLY

Or emotional.

ALAN

Well, not without some ... *irony* at least.

SALLY

Got it.

ALAN

I've got this new installation coming at Kinesis, downtown. You know it?

SALLY

(Not completely sure.)

Kinesis ...

ALAN

Well, it's new. Anyway, my piece is going to be good, I think. I hope. I mean, if things work out ...

(He wants to say something but can't. She's either unaware of that, or chooses to move on regardless.)

SALLY

Hungry?

ALAN

Uh .. no. Thanks.

SALLY

I hope you like tomatoes. Bumper crop this year. We're having them for lunch.

Where's Leonard?

ALAN

He went to look for Gene.

SALLY

In the studio?

ALAN

(Looking off stage...)

If that's the studio back there. Leonard seemed to think he was hiding.

SALLY

Oh did he.

ALAN

Is he?

SALLY

Oh, I can't speak for Gene. That's a long-standing policy. I'm not about to break it.

ALAN

I wonder if I can ... could I ask you something?

(She looks at him, non-committal.)

Do you think it would be okay I kind of ... talked to him? Alone?

SALLY

To Gene?

ALAN

Yeah.

SALLY

About what?

ALAN

Well -- his work, basically. Not the new work, not why Leonard's here. The old stuff -- from the fifties and sixties.

SALLY

I'm afraid they were all bought a very long time ago --

ALAN

Buy one!? What do you think I am? A millionaire? Jesus, no. I just want to ... I'd just love to *talk* to him about them.

SALLY

Oh, well he *loves* to talk ...

ALAN

I mean, not *just* talk. It's about the project I'm doing. The new one, at Kinesis. I got an idea on the way out here, in the car. I really think it might be kind of genius.

SALLY

What kind of idea?

ALAN

I can't tell you.

SALLY

Why not?

ALAN

It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't come out the right way.

SALLY

How would it come out?

ALAN

Look, I know you're the gatekeeper ...

SALLY

I beg your pardon.

ALAN

Mrs. Kaap, I don't want to dance around. That's what you are, everybody knows that.

SALLY

Well I hate to be the one to --

ALAN

Which I respect. That's why I'm coming to you directly, for permission. Just to talk to him.

SALLY

And you can't say what it's about.

ALAN

It's not about sales or contracts or money. That much I guarantee.

SALLY

I really don't know what to say.

ALAN

I just want his blessing, I guess ...

SALLY

His blessing.

ALAN

For what I want to do.

SALLY

I'm sorry, but this is all just too vague ...

ALAN

Okay, look. What I do in my work -- it's about perception. Getting people to look on different levels. When Gene was starting out, all he had to do was paint.

SALLY

Actually he had to paint *well* ...

ALAN

Of course ...

SALLY

That part was always crucial ...

ALAN

Yes, of course ...

SALLY

But often forgotten ...

ALAN

I didn't mean that. Of course. You're right. But that's still my point - you could simply be very good. Which is hard enough - but at least there wasn't this whole other level of having to make some sort of splash that has nothing to do with being 'very good.'

SALLY

I don't see why you're complaining.

ALAN

It's not a complaint -

SALLY

That article seems to say that making a splash is your *forte*.

ALAN

It's an observation. I don't complain.

SALLY

And this idea of yours, the reason you want to talk to Gene - it's about making that splash.

ALAN

It has artistic merit. It's about perception.

(She only stares at him.)

All right. This isn't going to do it justice, because you have to be there and see it to understand. I mean, it would be like explaining one of Gene Kaap's paintings to someone who's never seen one, but ...

ALAN (con't)

Okay, I converted the entire floor of the gallery into a blacktop, like the surface of an old parking lot. Worked into the floor, I have coins, I have matches, I have cigarettes, bottle tops, pop tops, rubber bands, paper clips, condoms, nuts, bolts, screws, old wire, audio tape, gum, candy wrappers. The detritus of a so-called civilization.

So you walk into this gallery and the first thing you notice is that you don't really notice anything. Because there's nothing on the walls. It's all on the floor, and the entire floor is the installation, so you don't see it right away -- you don't *recognize* it. You just think -- 'oh, this building has a really weird floor.' And it's Soho, so you figure, this was a garage or something, and nobody ever bothered to fix up the floor.

Then you wander around for a while and look for the art, but you don't find any. You go into the back, where there's an office, and you ask where the installation is, and they say 'out front.' And you go back out front and you look again, and then -- maybe, if you're smart -- you look down and you think 'Wait a minute. This is it. This is the installation.' Which is when you start to get it.

(He's getting worked up.)

The exciting moment is when they begin to see, to apprehend the true nature of what they're looking at -- the moment of the shift, the revelation of meaning. They're forced to stop looking at it one way, and start looking at it another. That's what it's all about. And the problem is, that's not happening. I have to incorporate another level of apprehension.

SALLY

Which is where Gene ...

ALAN

... comes in. Exactly.

SALLY

How?

ALAN

That's what I can't tell you. I've got to say it to him. It wouldn't feel right otherwise.

SALLY

Well, I'm sorry, I really don't think so.

ALAN

But it's his work. He should be the one to decide – you said so yourself. Otherwise it's really you who's making the decision ...

(Leonard has entered during this. Sally sees him before Alan does and uses it as an escape.)

SALLY

Leonard ...

(She rises, they kiss.)

LEONARD

You're looking very well.

SALLY

Spoken like an expert in press relations.

LEONARD

Whatever he wants, don't trust him.

ALAN

Oh that's nice.

LEONARD

Or at least make him pay for it.

ALAN

This is my own dealer talking.

SALLY

(To Leonard.)

You didn't find him out there?

LEONARD

No.

SALLY

Well, he does disappear, you know.

LEONARD

You don't know where he is?

SALLY

(She shrugs, non-chalant.)
Around somewhere, I'm sure.

LEONARD

You don't know?

ALAN

She doesn't give up much info, Leonard.

SALLY

You know Gene. In the old days he might be gone for
days.

LEONARD

Yes, but that was the old days.

SALLY

Some things never change.

LEONARD

(Tiring of this...)
Sally, where is he?

SALLY

I don't have the foggiest.

(Slight pause.)

LEONARD

Alan, there's lots of weird rusted iron ... *stuff*
behind the barn. Why don't you go have a look.

ALAN

Leonard, I'm a big boy now ...

LEONARD

If you find something you want, maybe Sally will let
you throw it in the trunk.

ALAN

You're so subtle.

(He exits.)

SALLY

Are we going to have a scene now?

LEONARD

I hope not.

SALLY

How about a tomato? They're very good. We grow them out by the studio. Gene's very proud of them.

LEONARD

Sally, stop it.

SALLY

I tried to tell you about his health.

LEONARD

You said he got tired.

SALLY

Yes. He's probably tired.

LEONARD

Then he's inside, lying down.

SALLY

Not last I checked. He might have gone for a walk.

LEONARD

Well which is it?

SALLY

I don't know.

LEONARD

Sally, if you're interfering somehow -

SALLY

I tried to warn you on the phone -

LEONARD

-- you have no right.

SALLY

-- but he was standing there in the room. I couldn't very well spell it all out.

LEONARD

Spell what out?

SALLY

His mind, Leonard.

(Pause. She struggles ...)

It's ... well, it's not gone, not completely. He'll be right here, perfectly fine. I'll go inside the house to answer the phone, come back out and ... he'll be gone. Here, but gone. Disappeared into some ... blank, empty place.

And sometimes it's literal. He went out to the studio one morning and never came back. I finally had to call the police to find him. He'd gotten lost a hundred yards from the house and ended up in Water Mill. Didn't recognize a thing. A week later, he woke up the old Gene again.

LEONARD

(Stunned...)

How long ... ?

SALLY

Years. They say it's probably worse because of the booze and ... well, you name it. He was never exactly Jack LaLanne.

LEONARD

Oh God Sally ... I'm sorry.

SALLY

Oh, please. I'll get through it. I'm used to it now. The only hard part is -- it'll kill him one day. He'll be gone for good. That I won't like.

LEONARD

I always thought you were the only good thing he ever had.

SALLY

Well, I wouldn't go that far ...

LEONARD

I wasn't there for him, not like you. No one was.

SALLY

Well, no one else had the bad luck to be in love with him.

LEONARD

We all thought that was pretty amazing that you stuck by. We never knew what it was you got in return.

SALLY

The work. It was the only way he knew. But that was fine with me. It was always very clear.

Oh Jesus, I've got to stop that.

LEONARD

But it's true ...

SALLY

No -- talking in the past tense. There'll be plenty of time for that.

LEONARD

You were the only one who never wanted anything of him. That includes me. And nothing much has changed, I'm afraid.

(Pause.)

I'm broke.

(She looks at him as if she didn't hear correctly.)

Out of money.

SALLY

That's impossible.

LEONARD

I used to think so too.

SALLY

You've got a gallery full of work ...

(Referring to the magazine again)

I keep reading about it. Don't you?

LEONARD

Oh, the work is still there. A year ago it was worth three and a half, maybe four. Million. Today ... well, today I wish there were a market for scrap canvas.

It's over, Sally. The market's gone. Nobody's got that kind of money anymore, and they wouldn't spend it on art if they did. I'm stuck.

SALLY

(With a nod out towards the studio.)
Enfant terrible can't help you out?

LEONARD

Are you kidding?

SALLY

He seems to be all the rage.

LEONARD

Yeea, but it's tough to take an asphalt floor containing 'the detritus of our so-called civilization' and hang it over your couch.

I know about the paintings, Sally.

SALLY

What paintings?

LEONARD

Stop it. Misha Kansky called me last week and said Gene described them to him in detail.

SALLY

He *called* you? That lying fuck. He promised he wouldn't say a -

LEONARD

Sally, these are important works. Maybe the last he'll ever do, if what you're saying is true. The world deserves to see them. Gene deserves to show them.

SALLY

Leonard, I can't.

LEONARD

And you know I'm the person to sell them.

SALLY

You would be, of course, if --

LEONARD

I'd do it right. Tasteful, but profitable.

SALLY

You just said you couldn't sell anything.

LEONARD

(Slight pause. Surprised she needs this explanation...)

New work by Gene Kaap ... that I can sell.

SALLY

You don't know that.

LEONARD

I do know it.

SALLY

You haven't even seen them

LEONARD

Sally, I know.

SALLY

How can you be so sure?

LEONARD

It's been fifteen years. Do you know how badly people want to see what he's done in that time? It's one of the great mysteries of the art world - what has Gene Kaap been up to since ... then.

SALLY

Most of the time, he didn't even walk inside the studio.

LEONARD

I know there's work. He talked to Misha.

SALLY

Leonard, it's not up to me. You know that. Gene and I have always agreed that the work is his. His to sell, his to keep, his to do with as he pleases. I only keep the books.

LEONARD

But if he's not *capable* ...

(He didn't want to have to say this...)

They're going to seize the assets.

SALLY

Your paintings?

LEONARD

Not just the paintings. The gallery. The apartment. My socks and underwear. Everything.

SALLY

Oh my God ...

LEONARD

They'd be gone already but I was able to convince them I had a shot at this. Thank God I found a bank officer who had actually heard of him. I kept dropping his name in front of these blank-eyed CPAs ...

Sally, at least show them to me.

SALLY

I'm sorry. You're going to have to talk to Gene. It's the only way.

LEONARD

Boy are you tough.

SALLY

I'm not tough, Leonard.

LEONARD

You really think you're doing him a favor when you act like this.

SALLY

No, I think I don't have a choice.

(She looks at him, feeling bad.)

I wish you'd take some tomatoes while you're waiting. They're very good this year. You want to go pick a basket?

LEONARD

I don't like tomatoes.

SALLY

You don't have to eat them. You can just look at them.

(She heads to the studio. He still hesitates.)

Maybe we'll find him out there.

LEONARD

(He takes the basket.)

Lead the way.

(They exit.)

After a moment, Gene enters from the house. He looks both ways then goes to retrieve the tomatoes.

Alan enters SR, from the driveway. Gene is caught.)

Shit. GENE

Hi. ALAN

GENE
You must be the ... uh ... in the magazine ...

(He nods to the magazine, which happens to be near.)

Alan Becker. ALAN

Right. Gene Kaap. GENE

I know. ALAN

Where's Leonard? GENE

ALAN
I don't know. They were just here. Maybe she's showing him your studio.

Oh yeah? GENE

We could stop them. ALAN

GENE
No, I don't give a shit.

ALAN

Well, this is an honor.

(He goes to shake Gene's hand. Gene puts down the tomatoes and they shake.)

For the longest time, I thought you were dead.

GENE

Yeah, me too.

ALAN

I hope it's okay I'm here. I happened to run into Leonard last night at an opening and -- well, I really had to beg him. Because of your privacy and all.

GENE

Nice of him.

ALAN

It is kind of perfect, though, isn't it.

GENE

Is it?

ALAN

That we got the chance to meet.

GENE

Why is that perfect?

ALAN

Well -- one generation to another. Former iconoclast to current iconoclast.

GENE

Oh. Right.

ALAN

Well, you were. I mean, you are.

GENE

That's a lot of bullshit. I did it the only way I knew how. If I could have been Norman Rockwell, believe me -- in a heartbeat.

ALAN

(Genuine.)

You know, I respect the hell out of that.

GENE

You do?

ALAN

You are what you have to be -- no complaints. That's exactly why I thought I could --

(He glances out to the studio to make sure they're alone ...)

-- listen, I've got this idea. Do you mind if I just pitch it to you? It's crazy but ... is that okay?

GENE

I don't know. I never got pitched before.

ALAN

I've got a show coming up, an installation at Kinesis. And I had this idea, coming out here in the car, that you -- your work, I want to use it.

GENE

I don't do group shows.

ALAN

No, that's not what I --

GENE

I always come off looking bad.

ALAN

Gene, it's not -- can I call you Gene?

GENE

My stuff is fragile. It's doesn't look fragile but it is.

ALAN

It's not a group show. It's an installation. But I want you to be in it -- be part of it. Or it to be part of you -- whichever way you want to think about it.

(Gene is completely confused.)

You're not getting this.

GENE

No ...

ALAN

What I did was, I converted the floor into a blacktop, like the surface of an old parking lot. Then I worked all of kinds of ... *junk* basically -- the detritus ...

GENE

... of a so-called civilization.

ALAN

(How did he know that...?)

Right ...

GENE

I was listening at the window.

ALAN

(Barely a pause to regroup.)

So you -- okay. But what I didn't say is ... the idea was -- originally -- that the walls were bare, so that you came into the gallery and saw bare walls and thought 'what's this? Bare walls. Nothing here.' And then slowly, *eventually* you caught onto the floor.

But in the car, on the way out here, I got to thinking, "Well here I am, meeting Gene Kaap. That's got to mean something. What does it mean?"

GENE

And what did it mean?

ALAN

What if we took posters -- not the actual paintings -- but *posters* of your work from the mid-sixties ... you know, that great, totally iconic stuff ... and we hang them on the wall, so they're sort of like *looking down on this* ... this *trash* really. This remnant of culture. I mean that just sounds so exciting -- and for you, such a great way for people to see your work again. To see it new, fresh.

GENE

Who the fuck are you?

ALAN

Look, I'm sort of excited. I'm not explaining it very well. But it's a way to bridge the gap, you see?

GENE

What *gap*?

ALAN

Between you and me, the past and present, your world and this one.

GENE

This is bullshit.

ALAN

Look, what I do ... it's different than what you did. It's another world out there. You haven't exactly been around the past fifteen years.

GENE

Yeah, and I'm starting to feel grateful.

ALAN

This is a tribute. It's an homage.

GENE

I hate tributes.

ALAN

Well, you could use one, frankly. People don't care anymore, Gene. People aren't talking about you.

GENE

I don't want them to talk about *me*.

ALAN

Or the work.

GENE

This year, they're bored. Next year, a retrospective and I'm re-discovered.

ALAN

Yes, exactly.

GENE

For that I don't need your help.

ALAN

I hate to say it but you do.

GENE

Stuck upon a poster? A decoration on the wall?

ALAN

Because it won't just be your work. It'll be a comment on my work.

GENE

Nobody's putting up any posters of anything of mine, anywhere.

ALAN

Well, I don't exactly need your permission. The posters exist.

GENE

Not for that purpose.

ALAN

No. For advertising. And that's okay I suppose. And for sale in the museum shops. And that's okay too. You're happy to stoop when it comes to merchandising.

(He realizes this is only making it worse.)

Look, I honor you. I admire and respect you. And your work.

GENE

Forgive if I'm not flattered. My work can stand alone, thank you very much. People see it everyday, all over the world, and so far they haven't needed you to help them. Go ask Pollock or de Kooning or Rothko if they want to be in your installation. They're all dead. They can't say no.

ALAN

Oh you can't say no either.

GENE

I just did.

ALAN

I'll put up your posters whether you want me to or not. Anybody can buy a poster of your work and hang it on a wall and say, "This is a poster of Gene Kaap's *Black On Red*." There's no copyright law against that.

GENE

I'll sue.

ALAN

Good, I could use the publicity. Especially when you lose.

GENE

Listen you pipsqueak. I made something. That makes it mine. You can't have it.

ALAN

Oh, come on. Let's put this in perspective. Did you really 'make something'? You put paint on canvas, yes. But you were only translating. 'Create' is this word some egomaniac came up with to convince himself that what he was doing was important. And art was important. But now, we've done it. We've been there. Now we take the world as it is, and we acknowledge, honestly, that there is no such thing as creativity. Only arrangement. And I'm not afraid to say it.

GENE

When I painted the world the way *I* painted the world -- nobody had ever done that before. I created the emotions, in here ...

(His torso...)

... and I created the means by which to express them. That paint and those feelings, together -- that was something new. A painting is not paint on canvas. If you think it is, then you're not an artist.

ALAN

You're really letting this get way too emotional.

GENE

Right! Because you wouldn't know an emotion if it crawled up your ass hole and built a nest there.

(This is stinging -- it's enough for Alan.)

ALAN

You know, I'd heard you were arrogant, but ...

GENE

You heard right.

ALAN

But a philistine -- that I never ...

GENE

Because I draw the line somewhere.

ALAN

(Lashing out)

Because you can't imagine anyone taking what you did and going the next step. No, the work has to stop with you. You're the pinnacle.

GENE

I never said that.

ALAN

You don't have to, do you.

GENE

Go further - yes, but the only way you're going is - well, all this relentless *irony*, this intellectualism, the cool surface, the God awful commentary. Where's the humanity?!

ALAN

(Angry and hurt)

If I knew, I wouldn't have to wonder. Can't you see that? Come down off Mount Olympus. We're struggling down here. I am responding to the world as it is. As I see it, as I *feel* it. It's different now, Gene. You think I wouldn't like it the way it was? You think I'm not jealous of the way you lived and worked?

(Resolved now, sure of himself ...)

But that's over. People laugh at emotion now. *I* laugh at it. And I hate that about the world, but there it is. That's the way it is *now*. What am I supposed to do? Ignore that? I can't make the world a different place, and I can't lie about it either. If it's one thing I won't do, it's lie. Ironic? Yes, guilty -- fine. But that's the truth about the world I see.

(Wondering if he went too far.)

I love your work, Gene. I honor it. All I'm asking is - let me pay you that honor.

Thirty years ago, a lot of people thought you were a junk dealer yourself.

(Leonard and Sally have entered on this last line. They have a basket of tomatoes.)

LEONARD

You've obviously met.

SALLY

(Worried...)

Gene ...

GENE

God damned thief.

(He sits down. Sally goes to him.)

LEONARD

I'm sorry -- whatever he said ...

ALAN

Hey, I'm not some *criminal*.

LEONARD

We have yet to determine that.

ALAN

I'm allowed to have a point of view.

LEONARD

No you're not.

(Alan storms off towards the driveway, hurt. Leonard looks to Sally, who has gone to Gene.)

SALLY

Are you all right?

GENE

I'm fine.

SALLY

Your breathing is off.

GENE

Oh for Christ's sake I'm all right. Blew the carbon out of my pistons, that's all. He did me a favor, the little prick.

(Gene laughs proudly at himself, a conquering warrior again.)

SALLY

You're going to give yourself a stroke.

LEONARD

Gene, I'm sorry if he – whatever he said. He's a little young.

GENE

How the hell are you, Len? Get over here.

(Leonard goes to him. Gene grabs him in a bear hug, then looks at him.)

You prick. What are you trying to do, bringing that twit here? Give me a stroke?

LEONARD

He's full of himself, okay – but he's also talented.

GENE

Oh gimme a break ...

LEONARD

You've never even seen his work.

GENE

I saw *this*.

(He indicates the magazine.)

LEONARD

And I suppose you'd want people to judge your work based on a magazine spread.

SALLY

Look, he's had enough for one day ...

GENE

You stay out of it.

SALLY

Gene, you're going to overdo it.

GENE

Good. That's what I want then. Let's overdo it.

SALLY

(To Leonard.)

He gets like this. I can't do a thing.

LEONARD

What do you mean, 'gets'? He's been like this his whole life, Sally.

GENE

Exactly.

SALLY

Fine – you boys have your fight. I'm out of it.

(She exits into the house.)

LEONARD

Gene, I'm sorry about Alan. What can I say?

GENE

(Dismissing it.)

You like his stuff. That's your business.

LEONARD

You're angry at me.

GENE

Lennie, it's your business.

LEONARD

He's very good.

GENE

All right then, so be it.

LEONARD

It's different than your work, it's ...

GENE

What.

LEONARD

(Suddenly wary.)

Different, that's all. But he's very good.

GENE

At what?

LEONARD

Gene -- it's not what you do. It's environmental. It's experiential. He's got this whole theory about levels of perception and sequential apprehension, and frankly it's pretty God damn brilliant. I think he's going someplace very brave, very daring.

GENE

You see, that's the problem. Nobody even speaks the same language anymore. We're all just talking up our own assholes.

LEONARD

Well that may be but if we didn't go there with him, we'd be cowards. We'd be safe. We wouldn't be artists.

GENE

If we go there, there's no point in *being* an artist. The word ceases to mean anything.

You see? It's impossible. We can't even talk about it. Let's talk about the tomato crop.

LEONARD

Because you're trying to make a comparison.

GENE

I'd just like to know what the kid *does*.

LEONARD

You've been asking me that for thirty years, Gene. You said the same thing about Roy Lichtenstein. "What the hell does that God damn kid *do*?"

GENE

And never got an answer *then* either.

LEONARD

But it's beneath you, Gene --

GENE

My ass is beneath me --

LEONARD

Gene, you don't understand it. Okay. But some people don't understand you either.

GENE

But they understood what I did.

LEONARD

Not everyone -

GENE

If it was any good -- and a lot of it wasn't, I'm the first to admit -- but if it was any good at all, it was honest to God *me*. My horror, my wonder. My confusion. My sorrow, my search. My joy. My longing. My love. It was always me. If it wasn't me, I threw it out.

LEONARD

And there was never anything like it, Gene. Before or since.

GENE

You're God damn right.

LEONARD

Which is why I'm here.

(Pause.)

I talked to Misha Kansky.

GENE

(Ready as he'll ever be...)

So?

LEONARD

He was out here last week. You talked to him.

GENE

I don't remember.

LEONARD

Gene, I want to see them.

GENE

It's impossible.

LEONARD

I'm in a bad spot here, Gene, I -

GENE

I know. I heard. That's my bedroom, right there.

(He indicates the house.)

Yeah, I was hiding, okay?

LEONARD

Gene, I'm the right one for your work. I understand it, I know how to handle it.

(Gene has picked up a tomato and is examining it.)

GENE

Oh yeah, I know that.

(The tomato...)

Beautiful, isn't it. The soil is just right out there behind the barn. You can almost taste the color. If I were a still life kind of guy, I might try to put it on canvas.

LEONARD

Did you?

GENE

Sorry?

LEONARD

Try to put them on canvas?

GENE

(Smiles ruefully.)

I'm not a still life kind of guy.

LEONARD

Gene, I'm asking you. Please.

GENE

I thought you went out to the studio.

LEONARD

We picked tomatoes.

GENE

That's all?

LEONARD

The door is locked.

GENE

Not even a peek through the window?

(Leonard looks guilty.)

You did, didn't you. You couldn't resist.

LEONARD

Sally said to go ahead, but I couldn't see a thing.

I only want to look at them, Gene.

GENE

Oh come on ...

LEONARD

It's up to you whether you want to put them on the market. You know that. I'm not going to pressure you.

All right, I'll pressure you, but for your own good.

GENE

Lennie, I don't know how to say this ...

LEONARD

You don't trust me? Is that it? You don't think I'd handle them the right way?

GENE

Of course I do.

LEONARD

Then what is it?

GENE

It wasn't a good time. I wasn't working well.

LEONARD

Why don't you let me be the judge of that?

GENE

Because you're not as sharp as you used to be, frankly.

LEONARD

So you're going to hold this kid against me.

GENE

It's just an observation.

LEONARD

He's only a part of what I do, Gene. He's young, he's hot, and he's very, very smart. And you -- you're a little bitter, Gene. And you were never bitter.

GENE

Lennie, the work was not very good. Period.

LEONARD

And what if you're being too hard on yourself?

GENE

I can't let you see them.

LEONARD

Gene, if it's a question of selling, you know I wouldn't make a move without your say so.

GENE

It's not that.

LEONARD

You owe this to me.

GENE

I know I do. But it's impossible.

LEONARD

So you're just turning your back on thirty years. On us.

GENE

I can't show you something that doesn't exist.

LEONARD

You had five good years. Sally said so.

GENE

I had five years. Nobody said they were good.

LEONARD

But you must have something!

GENE

You heard Sally. I'll have a few good hours, maybe even a day or two at a time. But that's not enough for me. You know the way I work. A day or two? That's nothing! It takes me months -- years even.

Every time I went back to the canvas, it was like starting over. So everything got very simple, very plain, but I kept going. I toughed it out, by God. I worked for five years like that. Trying to draw it out, trying to find the heart of it. And one day I looked back at the work I'd done, and it looked like a child had been playing with my brushes. Scrawls, Lennie. Kid stuff. And I thought, oh god, that's me. Now I'm the kid. It was the one thing I couldn't live with.

So we built a bonfire, one night, Sally and I. Out in back of the studio. Built a nice big pyre, lit it and waited until the flames were shooting up, licking at the night sky, and then we took every canvas, forty two of them, and we threw them into the fire, and we watched them turn to vapor. In the morning, nothing but a pile of ashes. Turned out to be good fertilizer, though. Good for the tomatoes.

(He holds up the tomato.)

LEONARD

All of them?

GENE

It felt so right, Len.

LEONARD

... they're all gone?

GENE

I'm sorry you came all the way out. I didn't know how to tell you. I should have taken the phone from Sally and told you. I was chicken shit. I'm sorry.

(Alan enters from the driveway.)

ALAN

Leonard, listen, I'm going to call a cab and get a train back to the city.

LEONARD

No, you don't have to -

ALAN

No it's fine. I checked the schedule and I can catch the twelve twenty.

LEONARD

No, we're going. We're done.

(Sally has entered with a plate of sliced tomatoes and other lunch things.)

SALLY

You can't go. I made lunch.

LEONARD

I'm sorry, Sally.

SALLY

Now you haven't been *fighting*, have you, because --

GENE

I told him.

(She stops, still holding the plate.)

SALLY

Oh.

LEONARD

I've got lots of business to uh ... take care of. I don't want them to think I'm stalling. Better I get it over with.

GENE

Len, I disappointed you.

LEONARD

Yes. And also no, in a funny way.

GENE

I did the right thing. I know I did.

(Leonard goes to him, takes his right hand into his left.)

LEONARD

Yeah.

GENE

You'll get through this with the bank. I'm not worried about you.

LEONARD

Good bye Gene. I can't stay, I hope you understand.

GENE

Drive safe.

(Leonard crosses towards the driveway. Sally follows.)

SALLY

(So that Gene doesn't hear.)

I begged him not to, Len.

LEONARD

You ... ?

SALLY

I told him, let me save a few. *One*, even. They were gorgeous. Like the final flowering of an incredible talent. Like Matisse at the very end, the way he blossomed into the cut-outs ... so simple and so glorious at the same time. That's what these were.

LEONARD

Oh God, don't do this to me ...

SALLY

Well, that's just what I thought. You might have agreed with Gene, thought they were rotten.

LEONARD

I don't want to think about this.

SALLY

So maybe he's right after all. Who needs another excuse to tear apart whatever's left of the art world? Maybe it's better they're gone. We can all agree on his old stuff, anyway. We need a few things to agree on in this world, don't we.

LEONARD

No. No, we don't, Sally.

SALLY

In that case, they were awfully beautiful. Good bye Len.

LEONARD

Good bye.

(Leonard leaves. Alan takes one furtive shot at Gene.)

ALAN

Think about it. You deserve it.

(Gene stares blankly at him, but Alan doesn't see that. He hurries away under Sally's glare.)

She watches him go. We hear the car start, doors slam. As the car drives away, she turns back to Gene.)

SALLY

Well. Glad that's over.

GENE

I'm sorry, I ...

SALLY

Oh don't worry about it. I knew you'd come through when you had to.

GENE

... I don't remember your name.

(A slight moment.)

SALLY

Sally.

GENE

Sally. Sally Sally Sally.

SALLY

And you're Gene.

GENE

Oh yes. I know. And I remember you now.

SALLY

Are you hungry?

GENE

... yes. Yes, I am.

SALLY

I can make lunch for you. Would you like that?

GENE

Yes.

SALLY

How about a sandwich, with tomatoes?

GENE

Tomatoes?

SALLY

Right here. Tomato.

GENE

Oh ...

SALLY

You like tomatoes.

GENE

Yes?

SALLY

Oh yes. You like them very much. Go ahead. Try a piece.

(She hands him a slice. He bites into it. He likes it.)

GENE

Mmm. That's good.

SALLY

You see? You want me to make a sandwich with tomatoes?

(He nods, his mouth full.)

You go ahead and eat the rest of this. There's lots more. We've got a lot of tomatoes.

(She goes to the door.)

Don't go away.

(He nods his head no. She kisses him on the forehead and exits into the house. He eats as the lights do down.

End of play.)