

# PAINTED FROM MEMORY

by Stuart Spencer

Characters:

Gene Kaap/Hilton Frye	late 60s
Alan Becker/Young Gene	early 30s
Sally Kaap	late 50s
Young Sally	mid 20s
Leonard Azerif	70-ish

The double casting is important to the play and should not be disregarded.

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Setting:

The back yard of a house in the East End of Long Island - 'the Hamptons.' Upstage is the house, its porch, a screen door leading inside. In the yard - or on the porch, depending on the design - is a small dining table with chairs. Also an Adirondack chair in the yard. Around one side of the house, an exit towards a barn, now serving as an artist's studio. Another exit goes towards the driveway. If possible, a third exit leading to an indeterminate area.

The play moves back and forth between 1954 and 1989, and assumes the convention that the house, yard, and major elements like the table and chairs do not change in that period of time.

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Note:

A double-slash // indicates that the line is interrupted by the following line of dialogue. An ellipsis ... indicates that the line drifts to a close.

1989.

Monday evening. Twilight. The evening of a warm day.

Sally and Gene at the table. They are dressed in summer clothes. She is barefoot. She finishes supper as he holds up a slice of tomato for closer inspection. After a pause.

GENE

What the hell ever happened to tomatoes?

SALLY

I told you - not from the store.

GENE

Make a packing crate out of this. Small but sturdy. Jesus - the nerve of the modern day grocer, selling this crap. It's enough to make you lose all faith in - what. Something.

SALLY

Horticulture.

GENE

Exactly.

SALLY

We'll have our own in a few days. Try not to lose your religion before then, would you?

GENE

(Getting up, restless)

Which reminds me, I need to fertilize.

SALLY

(Still eating)

Good! Tomorrow's project.

GENE

Can't. Not tomorrow. I'll be in the studio.

SALLY

Well, I can do it.

GENE

I'll do it.

(Grandly self-mocking)

I'm the man here. I'm the husband. Husbands ...  
fertilize.

SALLY

Is that right.

GENE

(Ditto...)

Don't you forget it, woman. I don't want to catch you  
out there fertilizing tomato plants, period.

SALLY

Don't worry pal. I wouldn't dream of stepping on your  
prerogatives.

GENE

(Seriously now...)

Might even start tonight.

SALLY

Fertilizing?

GENE

Work.

SALLY

(Slight pause)

Must be going well.

GENE

It's - uh - I'd say it's coming. Slow - but it's  
coming. Thought I might go out and just - sit with it  
awhile. It's about concentration. Focus. Maintaining  
the focus. Continuity.

SALLY

I'm glad it's going well.

GENE

(Ruefully)

I didn't say *that*. We'll see how it's going later,  
won't we.

SALLY

We?

GENE

Behave yourself, you might get a look one of these days.

SALLY

(Done eating now; pause)

I don't want you to the studio, Gene - not tonight. You need your rest. You'll work better if you get your sleep.

GENE

Not necessarily. It's better if I'm tired sometimes. No thoughts - nothing intruding. Gets to be like dreaming ... pure unconscious.

SALLY

Yes, but you need your sleep. That's an order.

GENE

You know, God damn it, who hired you for the wet nurse? I got some momentum today, I could feel it. Do you have any concept what that means?

SALLY

Yes.

GENE

I'm not going to risk losing that. It's everything, sweetheart. It's the *sine qua non*: "without which you are fucked."

SALLY

You're not going to stay focused if you're dead.

GENE

You don't know that. I never tried it.

SALLY

Gene.

GENE

Sal.

SALLY

I'm pulling rank. I'm serious. What if something happened to you in the middle of the night? You'd be out there, all alone, no phone ...

GENE

It's fifty yards away.

SALLY

Fifty yards if you have an attack might as well be Riverhead.

GENE

(Giving in ...)

God you're a miserable tight-ass, you know that?

SALLY

And don't go sneaking out after I go to bed. I can see the light right out the bedroom window. I don't even have to take my pretty little head off the pillow.

GENE

Yeah, yeah, yeah ...

(The phone rings; the old lion again)

Get the damn phone, woman.

(She kisses him on the head and exits; with a defiant gesture)

And no more of your lip either!

(He collects the plates on the table and puts them onto a tray - a clean up ritual. We hear Sally's voice off-stage and the porch light flicks on.

Sally re-enters with a cordless phone. A suggestion of Leonard's half of the conversation, unheard by us, is in italics.)

SALLY

No, it's fine, Leonard, we were just finishing dinner.

LEONARD

*I can call back.*

SALLY

No, really. Don't be silly. We're all done.

LEONARD

*You're eating at this hour?*

SALLY

I know, weird isn't it. Still keeping the city dinner time after all these years.

LEONARD

*Do you miss the city?*

(Unnoticed by Sally, Gene exits into the house with the tray.)

SALLY

*It's funny, nights like this I actually do miss it. There's nothing like the city on a cool summer night, is there?*

LEONARD

*Actually, it's ninety two degrees right now.*

SALLY

*Ninety two? My God, it's not even seventy out here!*

LEONARD

*Is Gene around?*

SALLY

*He's around here somewhere. Probably went out to the studio, the jerk.*

LEONARD

*I'd like to talk to him if I could.*

SALLY

*You know, we bought this cheap cordless and you can't go more than ten steps from the house and it conks out. You hear that static? Another ten yards, I'll lose you.*

LEONARD

*Does he go out to paint often?*

SALLY

*He's not supposed to, but lately - every chance he gets.*

LEONARD

*Really.*

SALLY

*He always loved working at night. You remember. Sometimes he wouldn't get home til dawn.*

LEONARD

*He wasn't always painting.*

SALLY

(Laughing)

Well, I'm talking about the times he was painting.

(Gene re-enters from the house. He has a faraway look in his eye. Sally sees him out of the corner of her eye, but is quickly distracted by what Leonard says next.)

LEONARD

*I was hoping to come out to visit you both.*

SALLY

Oh really?

LEONARD

*Is that okay?*

SALLY

Well, to be honest with you, I - I shouldn't really say this, but ... I mean, Gene hates it when I blabber -

(*sotto voce*)

- but he hasn't been feeling well.

(She turns her back to Gene and drifts away from him. He hardly notices her, and after a moment's contemplation he wanders off towards the driveway.)

LEONARD

*Is there something wrong?*

SALLY

No, it's nothing like that, just - he gets tired, that's all. So we don't have a lot of visitors. Not at the moment. I mean, we'd love to see you, you know that. Maybe in a few weeks. When he's feeling up to it.

LEONARD

*I was really hoping to make it out this weekend.*

SALLY

Oh, well, I - I should really check with Gene. He hates surprises, you know.

LEONARD

*I wouldn't ask if it weren't extremely important.*

SALLY

Yes, right - well, I suppose. But I can't promise you'll see him. He naps a lot. Sometimes all day.

LEONARD

*I understand.*

SALLY

All right then.

LEONARD

*Saturday?*

SALLY

Saturday. Sure. Yes. I'll ... I'll tell him you called. Good bye Leonard.

(She hangs up and slumps, exhausted from the effort of the call. She straightens herself and looks around for Gene.)

Gene? Where are you honey?

(She goes inside the door.)

Gene, you inside? I'm off. Gene?

(She returns still clutching the phone.)

Gene, where are you?

(She looks across the yard towards the barn and crosses in that direction.)

Gene, are you out there? Honey, it's late. I want you to go to bed tonight.

(She waits for a response. Silence.)

If you're out there, honey, turn on the light.

(Silence; then annoyed)

Please, if you're hiding out there in the dark, I'm going to ... please don't make me come out. I haven't got any shoes on and it's getting cold out here.

(Pause)

Gene ...?

(Wearily, but also worried now...)

Oh God.

(She looks down to realize she still has the phone in her hand. She starts towards the house, then waves that decision away as unimportant and exits towards the barn, calling as she goes.)

Gene?! Ge-ene! Gene!

(The lights cross fade seamlessly to ...)

1956. Morning.

Young Gene emerges from the house, still blurry from sleep. He wears painting clothes - jeans and t-shirt - and carries a set of new paint brushes in one hand, cigarettes in the other. A pint bottle of scotch sticks out of his back pocket. He sits down on the porch step, takes the pint out of his back pocket, setting it next to him. He lights a cigarette - inhaling that first delicious lungful of the day.

Young Sally appears at the screen door, still half asleep herself.

YOUNG SALLY

Morning.

YOUNG GENE

(Exhaling)

Sorry if I woke you up.

YOUNG SALLY

'S okay.

YOUNG GENE

Come on out.

(She comes out onto the porch, sits next to him and snuggles against him.)

Smoke?

YOUNG SALLY

Just a hit, thanks.

(She has a hit off his.)

Mmmm.

(He produces the pint from beside him.)

YOUNG GENE

How 'bout some of this?

YOUNG SALLY

(Pushing it away)

Oh God ...

YOUNG GENE

Hair of the dog, baby ...

YOUNG SALLY

No thank you.

YOUNG GENE

Rookie.

(He takes a drink.)

YOUNG SALLY

(Snuggling)

Let's go back to bed.

YOUNG GENE

Can't. Sun's up.

YOUNG SALLY

It'll be up all day.

YOUNG GENE

Time to work, baby. It's primo, right now, before I start thinking too much.

YOUNG SALLY

That's not what you said yesterday.

YOUNG GENE

Oh yeah?

YOUNG SALLY

You said it's primo right after sex.

YOUNG GENE

Yeah, that's the other time.

YOUNG SALLY

You also told me nighttime was the best.

YOUNG GENE

What're you, keeping notes or something?

(She gets up.)

Where are you going?

YOUNG SALLY

You've got to work, don't you?

YOUNG GENE

I've got to finish my cigarette, don't I? Sit down already.

YOUNG SALLY

I want to check the train schedule.

YOUNG GENE

What for?

YOUNG SALLY

I should get back to the city.

YOUNG GENE

What for?

YOUNG SALLY

I have a job, remember?

YOUNG GENE

Tomorrow morning you have a job. It's Sunday, baby. Anyway, what's more important, me or some magazine?

YOUNG SALLY

What am I supposed to do all day while you're out working?

YOUNG GENE

A couple hours, that's it. We'll go to the beach. It's going to be nice.

YOUNG SALLY

What time's the train?

YOUNG GENE

No idea.

YOUNG SALLY

(Starting inside)

I'm going to check.

YOUNG GENE

10:20. Tonight.

YOUNG SALLY

(Stopping)

Not that one. It won't get in 'til after midnight.

YOUNG GENE

It's the only one, sorry.

YOUNG SALLY

Gene, I have at work in the morning.

YOUNG GENE

Sorry. You're stuck.

(He stamps out the cigarette and goes to her.)

Prisoner of love.

(He kisses her, then retrieves his brushes from the steps.)

*No molestare, si?* Behave yourself.

(He exits to the barn. She picks up his cigarette butt and deposits it in an ashtray near the Adirondack chair. She notices that the ashtray is overflowing, so she picks it up and takes it inside.

The sound of a car pulling into a gravel driveway.

Hilton Frye appears in the yard from the driveway entrance. He wears coat, tie, and hat. Though he is polished and urbane, he is without pretense.

Young Sally re-enters from the house with the now empty ashtray. She is brought up short by the sight of him, and remains on the porch.)

FRYE

Good morning. I'm looking for Mr. Kaap.

(Silence ...)

He's expecting me.

YOUNG SALLY

He is?

FRYE

I believe so. I spoke to a friend of his this week. Misha Kansky. Mr. Kansky said he'd phoned ahead to say I was coming by.

YOUNG SALLY

Well - I'm sorry, but he's - asleep.

FRYE

And you are?

YOUNG SALLY

Do you know Gene?

FRYE

I can't say that I do.

YOUNG SALLY

I'm his sister. Sally. Sally Kaap. Nice to meet you.

(She goes to him, they shake hands.)

I come out to tidy up. Gene's a terrible slob. Always has been. Mother despaired, all her life. I come out weekends and do his laundry and his dishes. It's pathetic, but what's a sister supposed to do?

FRYE

(Checking his watch)

How late does Mr. Kaap generally sleep?

YOUNG SALLY

It's hard to say. Very big night. Saturday, you know.

FRYE

I see.

YOUNG SALLY

He's one of those bohemian types you hear so much about. But don't tell him I said so.

FRYE

I won't.

YOUNG SALLY

He hates it when you call him that. Mother used to call him that, made him furious.

FRYE

The problem is, I'm not sure when I'll be out here again.

YOUNG SALLY

You from the city?

FRYE

I'm visiting friends in East Hampton. I was hoping to see Mr. Kaap's paintings while I'm here.

YOUNG SALLY

You're a art collector.

FRYE

Well I do own a few pieces.

YOUNG SALLY

Gene's going to hate missing you. He doesn't have any money at all, you know. It's really pitiful. Mother's very worried about it.

FRYE

I'm actually a writer.

YOUNG SALLY

Oh really.

FRYE

Yes.

YOUNG SALLY

Oh. He likes writers. He knows all kinds of writers out here. Poets, and novelists, and playwrights. There's almost as many writers out here as painters, you know. Don't tell me now. You're a playwright.

FRYE

No ...

YOUNG SALLY

Really? You dress like a playwright. I always think of playwrights as being dapper.

FRYE

You must not know many playwrights.

YOUNG SALLY

No, I guess I don't.

FRYE

I'm a critic.

YOUNG SALLY

Oh, that's interesting! Sort of the opposite of a playwright. Who do you write for? I read all the dailies.

FRYE

I write about art, actually. Painting and sculpture.

YOUNG SALLY

(Beat)

Oh.

FRYE

My name is Hilton Frye. Perhaps you've heard of me.

YOUNG SALLY

(Trapped)

Oh my God. Oh - yes ... I really wish you had called to say you were coming.

FRYE

Misha did speak to Mr. Kaap on Wednesday.

YOUNG SALLY

Oh ...

FRYE

But if it's not a good time ...

YOUNG SALLY

Maybe - ! - you could ... stay. He'll be up soon, I'm sure. He's got to get up sometime.

FRYE

I'm afraid I promised I'd be back in time for lunch.

YOUNG SALLY

- or come by later -

FRYE

We're driving right back to the city after we eat. So this is truly my only chance. I'm sorry about that. But I will be out again sometime, I'm sure. Perhaps in the fall.

YOUNG SALLY

Wait, no - now look. You did make an appointment, right?

FRYE

Well, Misha indicated Sunday morning would be fine - anytime before noon.

(Checking the watch again)

And it's just after eleven.

YOUNG SALLY

Yes ...

FRYE

But if he's asleep, I really don't want to //

YOUNG SALLY

No, uh - you stay here. One second.

(She goes to the barn exit. Calling)

Gene!

(To Frye)

He slept in the studio ... there's a cot.

(Calling)

Gene!

FRYE

Miss Kaap, really, I //

YOUNG SALLY

No, he'd want me to, I know he would. I am his sister, after all.

Gene!

FRYE

Miss Kaap, it's usually best if you take an artist at his word. They're not like you and me - they're tend to be trustworthy. If he told you not to wake him up, there must be a reason. We'd better let him sleep.

YOUNG SALLY

That's not trustworthy, Mr. Frye, that's just stupid.

(Gene enters from the barn.)

YOUNG GENE

Or both maybe.

(Extending his hand)

Gene Kaap.

(They shake)

FRYE

Hilton Frye. It's a pleasure.

YOUNG GENE

You told him I was sleeping?

YOUNG SALLY

Yes, but I thought you'd be - I mean, he had an appointment.

YOUNG GENE

That's all right, baby. You did good.

(Before she can think to avoid it, he kisses her on the mouth.)

Big night, Frye. You want some coffee?

(Sally is mortified; Frye is perplexed, to say the least.)

FRYE

... no thank you.

YOUNG GENE

Go make us some coffee, would you baby?

YOUNG SALLY

(To Frye)

I'm so sorry, I ...

YOUNG GENE

(Oblivious)

Forget about it. Good instincts.

(He slaps her on the butt, further mortifying her. She exits into the house.)

Sweet kid. First time out here, this weekend. She's a little nervous, all that proper girl's school upbringing, you know.

FRYE

Then she's not your sister, I assume.

YOUNG GENE

(Bursting out in laughter)

Is that what she - ? The little pistol. She's my *half* sister.

I'm kidding.

FRYE

And I take it you weren't asleep either.

YOUNG GENE

Hey - you catch on fast.

FRYE

That's my job.

YOUNG GENE

Is that right.

FRYE

In my work you've got to be quick. Ahead of the pack.  
Ear to the ground.

YOUNG GENE

You mean, there's skill involved? I'll be damned.  
(Suddenly the kidding has crossed over that  
indiscernible line into something vaguely  
hostile.)  
Go ahead, have a seat.

FRYE

Thanks, I'd better stay on my toes.

(Gene sits himself though, and lights up  
another cigarette.)

YOUNG GENE

Aw, don't mind me. I'm just punchy that way. Too many  
fights as a kid. Funny thing was, I liked it all the  
same if I won or got my ass kicked. I just liked a  
fight. Can't seem to kick it. I apologize. I haven't  
had my coffee.

FRYE

Maybe it's not a good time.

YOUNG GENE

No, great time. Really. I apologize, sincerely. Smoke?

FRYE

No thank you.  
(Gene lights up.)  
Your names been coming up a lot these days.

YOUNG GENE

Is that right?

FRYE

In certain circles, yes.

YOUNG GENE

What kind of circles? To my knowledge, the only kind of circle I was ever in was a circle jerk when I was fourteen. I gave that up. Swell bunch of guys, just wasn't my style.

FRYE

Misha Kansky, for one.

YOUNG GENE

Misha, that son of a gun. How is he?

FRYE

Very well. He's hung two of your canvasses in his living room.

YOUNG GENE

Is that right.

FRYE

They were the subject of lively debate one evening last week. A dinner party he gave.

YOUNG GENE

Sounds like a raucous good time.

FRYE

Not everyone liked them, but no one seemed to lack an opinion. Struck me, that was a good thing.

YOUNG GENE

Oh did it.

FRYE

Doesn't it you?

YOUNG GENE

I never knew anybody didn't have an opinion - not if you asked. It doesn't sound like a good thing, or a bad thing. Just a fact. Comes with the territory. Opinions are what you put up with in this business.

FRYE

I had an opinion too. Care to hear it?

YOUNG GENE

No need. You're here, aren't you? I think I can put it together.

FRYE

So - you don't go in for praise, then.

YOUNG GENE

Can't say that I do. Makes me nervous. I get all the praise I can handle. More than what's good for me, in fact.

FRYE

Is that right.

YOUNG GENE

Everyday - all day.

FRYE

From your - uh, sibling in there?

YOUNG GENE

Her? Mostly she just grunts. Once in a while she curls her lip and says 'nice.'

No sir, you want the head cheerleader, you're looking at him. Go Gene. You're the best damn painter I know. I handle the praise franchise on my own.

FRYE

Then I'll skip that part. But I was very interested in those two pieces.

YOUNG GENE

Well, you talk to Misha about that. He owns those free and clear.

FRYE

I'd like to see the others, Mr. Kaap.

YOUNG GENE

The *others*.

FRYE

Yes.

(Gene gets up and walks away from Frye, apparently wrestling with some thought, but without a pause.)

YOUNG GENE

Well, Mr. Frye, I'll give it to you straight.

(Looking at Frye...)

I don't know.

FRYE

It's not idle curiosity, Mr. Kaap. This is a professional visit. Business.

YOUNG GENE

(Dully)

Yeah, I know that.

FRYE

- and a sincere interest about where this new ... *idea* is taking you.

YOUNG GENE

(His attention finally piqued)

What idea is that?

FRYE

(With a shrug)

Those two pieces are nothing at all like your work of just - well, even a year ago. It's - what do they call it in physics? - a quantum leap.

YOUNG GENE

A quantum leap is somewhere around a billionth of a centimeter.

FRYE

Then I stand corrected. Yours is a very large leap indeed.

YOUNG GENE

You think so, huh?

FRYE

You're not going to pretend otherwise. Is this false modesty? You don't seem the type.

YOUNG GENE

It's not a leap, that's all. Quantum or otherwise. All I do is connect the dots, one little step at a time. If you knew my other stuff, you'd see that.

FRYE

But I do know your 'other stuff.'

YOUNG GENE

(An outright challenge)

Where?

FRYE

Misha Kansky's got three small panels in his front hall, right over the umbrella stand. Tomatoes. I've admired it for years. For another, you had two pieces in a show at the Coomb's Gallery three years ago. Fall of '51, I believe. More tomatoes.

YOUNG GENE

I like tomatoes.

FRYE

And I liked the paintings.

YOUNG GENE

Not enough to come out here and pay me a visit.

FRYE

That's true.

YOUNG GENE

Where else?

FRYE

There were others. I don't remember the exact shows. But I've followed your work for some time and it's apparent to me that those canvasses over Misha Kansky's couch are something quite new. Exciting. I'd like the chance to see any others that might be in the series. That isn't praise, and I hope you see the distinction.

YOUNG GENE

See, but there's a problem. You think there's this leap, this new idea. No such thing. Tiny baby steps, all the way.

FRYE

(Laughs uncomfortably)

Well ... Mr. Kaap - I'm at a loss. I don't see how you can //

YOUNG GENE

And that's another problem. You don't see. You think you do. You sure as hell do a lot of looking, I'll give you that. But you don't see. You're too busy thinking about what you're going to write, what kind of story you're going to tell. Your job is about sparkle, keep the reader amused and delighted.

FRYE

(Laughing with real pleasure)

Ah, flaming youth! I thought I'd seen it all.

YOUNG GENE

There's plenty more where that came from.

FRYE

(Shaking his head, confounded but amused)

I find this all very interesting. I'm usually in the opposite position - painters tugging at my sleeve. All those Oliver Twists down in the Village, imploring me to come take a look at their gruel.

YOUNG GENE

It's not that I don't want you taking a look, Frye. Believe me, I'm not above *wanting* it.

FRYE

Then what's the problem?

YOUNG GENE

Didn't I just say this? There's a pattern here. You look, and you don't see. You listen and you don't hear.

You've been looking at my work for years, Frye - in Misha's front hall over the umbrella stand, galleries, shows. Looking but not seeing.

FRYE

What I saw didn't move me - what can I say? But the two works of Misha's, they're different. I like them.

YOUNG GENE

Why is that?

FRYE

I suppose that's why I'm here - to get the answer. To understand.

YOUNG GENE

But why these? Why not those two at the Coombs Gallery - Spring '52 by the way. Or the Umbrella Stand Triptych as I'm starting of think of it. Why not that?

FRYE

Well - as I've said, they're obviously very different than the //

YOUNG GENE

No, excuse me, they're not.

FRYE

Mr. Kaap ...

YOUNG GENE

On the surface, maybe, sure. Granted. Same as every painting ever made, Frye. We know that, don't we. But underneath, inside, architecturally speaking, thematically speaking, Frye, the work of any artist worth the price of a dime-store tray of tempera paint - that work is connected. Mining the same verities, reaching down deep, extracting the same essential truths.

Those two pieces on Misha's wall - he promised me they'd stay in the bedroom, by the way - they are not a departure. They are not new. They are very much the same, Frye. But if you want to know that, first you have to be able to see.

FRYE

(Remaining preternaturally good-natured)

Well, that's an interesting opinion.

YOUNG GENE

I don't have the luxury of opinions.

FRYE

Thought, then - point of view.

YOUNG GENE

I'm the guy who paints them. That's the point of view that counts, don't you think?

FRYE

I bow to perspective. I humble myself at its feet. Really I do. I'm actually of the opinion that painters are not idiot savants, daubing paint on canvas in some sort of pre-conscious trance. Actually, I suspect some of them do, but you're clearly not one of them. I respect your ... whatever you want to call it: intimate knowledge ... of your own work. But let's be honest, Mr. Kaap. Sometimes the artist himself fails to understand exactly what he's done - where he's come from, where he's going, and especially where he is right now. That's no insult. It's why you're an artist, and I merely a scribe.

But if you're going into new territory on the surface, which I believe I heard you confess was at least possible - then this inevitably changes what you're saying underneath. You won't deny that, I hope, speaking of old verities. It can't be helped. I mean, you have moved, quite undeniably from the figurative to the abstract.

YOUNG GENE

(All becoming clear)

Of course ...

FRYE

That's going to have a profound impact // like it or not.

YOUNG GENE

... of course. What am I thinking? That's what it's all about, isn't it. Figurative! That dirty word. That word for little boys who won't grow up. I've *graduated*, haven't I. I finally grew up. Today I am a man. So you can spank me with your wooden paddle, make me a member of your secret society. That's it, isn't it. Now I will run with the big dogs and piss way high up on the fire hydrant just like they do. Because now I am ... *abstract*.

FRYE

You're the one who isn't listening now, Mr. Kaap.

YOUNG GENE

(Stentorian, mocking)

"You have moved quite undeniably," he intoned with all the authority of his esteemed publication behind him  
...

FRYE

And you have. You may not know it, but that's all right. You're not supposed to. That's my job. The scribe. What exactly you're doing, I don't know - not yet. Which - as I said before - is why I've come. I suspect it's something interesting. I'd like to know for sure.

YOUNG GENE

I bet you would. Sorry to pop your balloon, but there's a flaw in the theory, Frye: I have never been figurative, not the way you mean it. I have only, ever given a hot abstract expressionist damn about what's going on inside.

(He begins to get over-heated until finally he is really yelling.)

And here's where all your scribbling in all your weekly issues is never going to help you, because to know this, you've got to actually pick up a brush and do it. To get to the inside, first you have to work out what things *look like!* Then you get to what they're about. Which is what I did. I thought it was going to take me six months but it wasn't that easy. I got stuck in it. It's harder than you think - seeing what things really look like. Try it sometime. Might make a man out of you.

(Sally enters from the house, having heard the last bit of this.)

YOUNG SALLY

What is the matter with you?!

YOUNG GENE

Hey, excuse me //

YOUNG SALLY

He's here to help you!

YOUNG GENE

We're talking here!

YOUNG SALLY

You're the only one talking. Mr. Frye can't get in two words. I'm standing in the kitchen, I cannot believe what I'm hearing.

YOUNG GENE

We are *talking* here, sunshine. You're making the coffee.

YOUNG SALLY

Don't you talk to me that way. I'm not your wife!

(He takes her by the arm, back to the house.)

YOUNG GENE

(Low but fierce)

Jesus God damned Christ, you're interrupting.

YOUNG SALLY

(She yanks her arm away)

If you ever touch me like that again, I'll bust you right in the chops and don't think I won't!

(He stops, silenced. She turns to Frye - )

You go ahead and go out to the studio.

YOUNG GENE

Hey ...

YOUNG SALLY

Oh stop acting like people have to earn the right to see them. They're just paintings!

FRYE

I couldn't, no - not without his permission.

YOUNG SALLY

You've got it - doesn't he.

YOUNG GENE

He wouldn't know a Rubens from a Rothko, for Christ's sake.

YOUNG SALLY

Gene, stop it!

FRYE

I'm afraid Mr. Kaap and I see things differently, Miss - uh ...

YOUNG SALLY

Barrett.

FRYE

And if that's the case, so be it. Mr. Kaap may be correct in his reluctance. Perhaps I don't know the difference.

YOUNG GENE

There is no difference, not underneath //

YOUNG SALLY

Yes Gene - thank you, we heard you the first sixteen times.

FRYE

In any case, there's really no point.

YOUNG SALLY

There is very much a point. The both of you - really. You don't even hear yourselves, much less each other. You're both saying the same thing.

YOUNG GENE

You don't know enough about this to start saying ...

FRYE

No, no it's not the same thing at all, really ...

(They catch each speaking together and drift to a stop.)

YOUNG SALLY

I know enough to know that when two egos are so big there's no room to breathe. He's saying you went from figurative to abstract - surface to meaning in other words.

YOUNG GENE

How long have you been listening?

YOUNG SALLY

(Ignoring this)

And you're saying you were finding out the meaning by investigating the surface. Is this so insurmountable? My God, how many angels can fit on the head of a pin anyway?

(Pause)

FRYE

I could certainly agree to disagree.

YOUNG GENE

Of course you can.

YOUNG SALLY

Gene ...

YOUNG GENE

What does he have to lose?

YOUNG SALLY

What do *you* have to lose?

(Pause; then to Frye -)

What *does* he have to lose?

FRYE

Well, I - can't give you specifics.

YOUNG SALLY

You must have something in mind. It is a professional visit, after all.

YOUNG GENE

You didn't miss a damn thing, did you.

FRYE

I can't make any promises, Miss Barrett. I'm really here primarily to satisfy my curiosity.

YOUNG SALLY

I didn't ask for a promise.

FRYE

Are you ... representing Mr. Kaap?

YOUNG GENE

No, she isn't.

YOUNG SALLY

I am, for the moment. Mr. Kaap is suffering from a temporary form of dementia. I am his spokesman. What does he have to lose?

FRYE

(Slight beat)

There's a show at the Azerif Gallery in the fall. Mr. Azerif - Leonard - is a friend of mine, a colleague. I think he might be interested in this work if it's what I think it is. I could send him over to Misha Kansky's house, of course, but I'd be much happier knowing the rest of the series first.

YOUNG SALLY

(To Gene)

You listening?

(Gene doesn't move, a good sign.)

I think you should take him out to the studio.

YOUNG GENE

No.

(Pause)

You take him.

YOUNG SALLY

I don't know enough about the work to //

YOUNG GENE

You know enough to know when two egos are so big there's no room to breath, don't you?

FRYE

I believe that's gin, Miss Barrett.

YOUNG SALLY

(To Frye, indicating ...)

You go ahead. I'll be right there. There's a door around the far side.

(Frye exits to the barn.)

YOUNG SALLY

It should really be you, Gene.

YOUNG GENE

Yeah? Why's that?

YOUNG SALLY

What am I supposed to say to him?

YOUNG GENE

You're so God damned sure he ought to go out there, you figure it out.

YOUNG SALLY

(Incredulous)

Are you really *angry* at me?

YOUNG GENE

You're very persuasive, very articulate. Don't go telling me there's no follow through. Don't tell me that was just a pose. I figured you had the chops to back it up.

YOUNG SALLY

He doesn't need a caption editor, Gene.

YOUNG GENE

That's what you think. I'm not so sure. I've got the feeling he could use a few pithy phrases to help him through.

YOUNG SALLY

And that's me isn't it - Miss Pithy Phrase 1954, and her little dog Spunky.

(She starts to go.)

YOUNG GENE

Hey.

(She stops)

It's because I trust you.

(They exchange a silent look. She goes.)

Gene takes the pint out of his pocket and takes a swig. It burns a little. He looks defiantly after them, then turns and goes into the house.

Lights seamlessly cross fade to ...

1989. Friday. Before sunset, several days after Scene One. A brilliant, complex light floods the stage.

Sally (the elder) enters from the house with a cleaning rag and some spray cleaner. She goes to the table to clean up, preparing to have dinner on it.

Gene (the elder) enters from the house. He lights a cigarette and stands facing the sunset, reveling in its beauty. His back is to Sally.

GENE

You know, the sky - at certain times of day, is enough, all by itself, to seriously get on my nerves.

Look at that.

I mean, sense of composition alone. Not a cloud out of place, God damn it. Every night different, every night perfect.

(She passes into his line of sight.)

Oh sorry - didn't see you there. Say, you're pretty cute. Come here a lot?

SALLY

Every day, twice on Sunday.

GENE

Sundays. I'll mark that in my calendar.

(They kiss lightly.)

SALLY

(A nod to the sunset.)

You want to take a crack at it before dinner? You've got time.

GENE

Are you kidding? That's what they call asking for it. A guy's got to know his limits.

SALLY

I thought you were the guy who told me a guy should never know his limits.

GENE

I must have been very young at the time.

SALLY

It was last night.

GENE

(Singing)

"Last night, when I was young ...

(He takes her into a slow cheek to cheek  
dance.)

... life was a song waiting to be sung."

SALLY

I guess I've got you all to myself then.

GENE

Just you, me, and the sunset, baby.

(He gives her a slow spin and when she comes  
back to him, she sinks backwards into his  
arms. Together they look at the sunset.)

The problem would be, see - you could get the  
composition, if you worked at it. The bitch of it'd be  
the colors. The sense of light. How do you ever do  
that? You can't. Nobody can. Well, Turner, maybe.  
Vermeer - but those were interior.

SALLY

You're talking yourself out of it.

GENE

Can you see me? Like the guy on PBS. "We'll take some  
pink on our brush here and just, gently, brush in a  
little bit here, and look there - a little pink cloud.  
We'll call him Mr. Cloud. That's all there is to  
painting, ladies and gentlemen. Anyone can do it."

SALLY

Okay, never mind ...

GENE

I'm never going to get a date with you the way I'm  
going, am I.

SALLY

If you don't want to try, let it go. I'm not pushing.  
You've done a lot of work lately - when you think about  
it ... overall.

GENE

It's not good enough.

SALLY

You keep saying that, but // it's only one man's

GENE

But nothing. It's true.

SALLY

It's one man's opinion.

GENE

I wish.

SALLY

You know, excuse me, but don't insult me. It's your opinion. There might be others - if you could bring yourself to let anyone see them. Like me, for instance. I'm not some rube, if you recall. I do know a thing or two.

GENE

They go right straight across. Never down ... never *in*. I get in there but I just can't keep it going the way I want to.

SALLY

Maybe that's not important - what you want. Some people might find that part of their charm: fleeting glimpses, and all that ...

GENE

Oh please ...

SALLY

What?

GENE

That's bullshit, I'm sorry, but //

SALLY

It is not bullshit. Fuck you, Gene. I will thank you to recall that I do not bullshit you.

(Slight pause. They look at each other. He realizes that she's seriously pissed off.)

GENE

(The diplomat ...)

Well - I guess it's a draw. We need ourselves a tie-breaker.

SALLY

It's not a draw. The fight was rigged.

GENE

I can't show them to you, baby. I just can't.

SALLY

Well, it's your department. You're the boss.

(Angry, she finds something new to clean with her spray and cloth.)

GENE

(Slight pause, at a loss for words ...)

And so another day draws to a close.

(He goes to her)

I never said you were a rube.

(She accepts him, a little grudgingly; then sees her opportunity)

SALLY

There's always Leonard ...

GENE

There's always Leonard what?

SALLY

A tiebreaker.

GENE

(Perplexed, carefully ...)

Leonard's in the city.

SALLY

He could come out.

GENE

Yeah? What are you trying to say?

SALLY

I'm saying he could come out and look. If you wanted him to.

GENE

But I don't want him to.

SALLY

You just said we need a tiebreaker.

GENE

(Sniffing a subtext)

... did he call or something?

(Pause)

Sally?

SALLY

He sounded - *bad*, Gene ...

GENE

When?

SALLY

... depressed and frantic and sad // and ...

GENE

When?

SALLY

(Continuing-)

... I couldn't say no.

GENE

*When.*

SALLY

Monday. It was after dinner and you were //

GENE

When is he *coming*?

SALLY

Tomorrow.

GENE

Oh Jesus ...

SALLY

He's a friend, for God's sake ...

GENE

God damn it all. You were going to clue me in at some point. Am I presuming? At breakfast? As he pulled up the driveway?!

SALLY

I'm telling you now.

GENE

And there was some reason you couldn't speak up before this?!

SALLY

(Pause, then softly but very firmly)

... yes.

GENE

(Brought up short)

... right.

(Angry again ...)

Well, you could've -

(Then despairing ...)

... oh Christ.

SALLY

He's a good friend, Gene. He loves you.

GENE

You've got to call him.

SALLY

I can't.

GENE

Tell him that I'm - uh ... whatever, I'm sick, I'm dead ...

SALLY

Maybe he just wants to see you. Maybe he's lonely.

GENE

He's not lonely. Whenever Leonard gets lonely he sits in the gallery and talks to his Schnabels.

SALLY

Look, we'll have lunch. It'll be like old times. If you don't want him to see the work, then don't say anything. He doesn't know about them.

GENE

He knows ...

SALLY

How could he?

GENE

He smelled them. He put his nose in the air and sniffed the breeze. He's part bloodhound. My blood.

SALLY

That's not fair, Gene. He's been a friend, a good friend. My God, right from the beginning -

GENE

No - not from the beginning, sweetheart. Not then. In the beginning there was me and nothing but. Not even you at the beginning.

SALLY

Then what are you so afraid of?

GENE

It's not fear, baby.

SALLY

What do you call it? Integrity? Is that what you're selling? I think you're terrified. I don't know what of. Leonard maybe? Me? If it's me, Gene - if you're scared of what I might think - then that's very sad.

(Pause.)

GENE

Well ... we'd have to have the lights on. They don't look the same under lights.

SALLY

You want to wait until morning?

GENE

No.

(Slight beat)

SALLY

You want me to go out by myself?

GENE

Not on your life, baby.

SALLY

You're running out of options.

GENE

Fuck.

Come on.

(He takes her hand.)

I'm not going to like this.

SALLY

You don't have to.

GENE

Just so you know - I'm not responsible for my behavior out there.

SALLY

(With a smile)

Situation normal, darling.

(They exit to the barn as the lights cross fade to ...)

1954. An hour or so after Scene Two.

Young Gene enters from the house, cigarette hanging from his lips. He wanders to the Adirondack chair, taking a nonchalant gander at the barn as he goes. He idly picks up a magazine, flips through it, feigning interest.

Young Sally enters from the barn.

YOUNG GENE

Where is he?

YOUNG SALLY

He's still looking.

YOUNG GENE

By himself.

YOUNG SALLY

Left to his own devices. Yes. And judgement.

YOUNG GENE

That's a dangerous game, sunshine.

YOUNG SALLY

I don't think so. Have some faith. He's not stupid.

YOUNG GENE

You know that for a fact do you?

YOUNG SALLY

I'll tell you what, Gene. I think you're wrong about him. Really. I keep trying to provide some sort of narrative - so that he'd get them? And he'd stand there nodding, very serious, cheek in hand - paying absolutely no attention to what I was saying. Looking right past me to the work. And it finally dawned on me - they're already narrative, every one of them.

(This particularly seems to get his interest.)

And I think to myself, "Sal, he's either going to get it or he's not. He's either going to give into it and let it take him wherever it's going to take him, or he's won't. And none of your sophomore year Sarah Lawrence art appreciation chit chat is going to make one bit of difference. In fact, if anything, it's going to turn him right off." So I shut up. And I left.

(Gene goes to her, studying her closely for what seems like a long moment.)

What.

(He ever so gently moves in and kisses her gently but passionately on the lips. She responds, and they deeply into it when ...

Frye appears. He watches them for a moment, assuming they'll unlock. They don't. Finally, he clears his throat.)

YOUNG GENE

(Out of the corner of his mouth...)

Go away.

FRYE

I left the door unlocked. I hope that was right.

YOUNG GENE

I'll take care of it. Good bye.

(Sally gently but firmly pushes him away,  
straightening her dress.)

YOUNG SALLY

You said you were going to take your time.

FRYE

With your perceptive, dare I say incisive, nay  
penetrating exegesis, I was able to see all I needed to  
see.

(To Gene)

Mind the word.

(Back to Sally)

I must take you along on one of my prowls. You have a  
marvelous gift for unpretentious clarity, among other  
things.

YOUNG SALLY

That's high praise.

YOUNG GENE

It's high something.

FRYE

And so I bid you both a fine morning - or is it - ?

(He checks his watch.)

- afternoon. Not so short after all. You have a  
positively Einsteinian effect on time, Miss Barrett.  
Good day to you.

YOUNG SALLY

Wait a second. Hold on. That's it? You don't say  
anything?

(She looks back and forth between the men.)

What. Don't tell me there's some unspoken rule - some  
ceremonial art world silence that has to be observed.

FRYE

In this case, I'd call it an understanding.

YOUNG GENE

Between men who admire and respect each other - eh,  
Frye?

YOUNG SALLY

That, if you don't mind my saying so, is asinine. You came here to form an opinion. You obviously did that. The least you could do is let us know what it is. I mean, a little common courtesy, for God's sake.

FRYE

I think Mr. Kaap isn't much interested in knowing my opinion.

YOUNG SALLY

I'm interested.

FRYE

It's not your work.

YOUNG SALLY

It was my tour.

YOUNG GENE

She's got a point, Frye.

(He starts to exit to the barn.)

YOUNG SALLY

Where are you going?

YOUNG GENE

I don't need to hear this. I'm more concerned about that open door, frankly. You never know what kind of riff raff might wander in off the road.

(He exits to the barn.)

YOUNG SALLY

He's just afraid, you know.

FRYE

You think I need an apology, but you're forgetting something. I live my life among men like Gene Kaap. I've had swipes taken at me by Jackson Pollock, been lectured on what an ass I am by Mark Rothko. Even DeKooning once told me I was full of gas. I'm not offended. I assume he's slightly mad, like the rest of them. I treat him accordingly.

YOUNG SALLY

With condescension.

FRYE

With envy, Miss Barrett. Envy that I am not slightly mad myself. I'd give a lot to be slightly mad. Wouldn't you?

YOUNG SALLY

(Slight pause)

You know - you keep doing this to me.

FRYE

Make myself likeable? It's possible that's what I am, isn't it?

YOUNG SALLY

Nobody has to like you, Mr. Frye. Least of all, me.

FRYE

But perhaps it's unavoidable.

(He laughs)

Oh smile - please, please smile, Miss Barrett. I'm going to speak to Leonard Azerif tomorrow morning about putting these paintings in the October show and I want to think of you as smiling when I do it.

YOUNG SALLY

That's //

FRYE

No - please. I don't want your gratitude. Anyway, who knows - Leonard may not feel the same. It's anyone's opinion in this business - like it or not. But I do think Leonard is the right man. He's always eager for someone new, the latest thing. Besides, I think he and Mr. Kaap would get along, somehow. Leonard understands temperament. That's going to matter.

So you see - I'm doing very little, when you think of it. Merely casting his bread upon the water, since he seems constitutionally unable to do it himself.

YOUNG SALLY

That's not possible.

FRYE

I'm sorry.

YOUNG SALLY

The October show. It's not possible,

FRYE

Oh please, not both of you. You think they should stay out in that barn, is that it?

YOUNG SALLY

Gene needs his own show. He can't be in some sort of pack.

FRYE

Oh ... I see.

YOUNG SALLY

You know I'm right. Gene may not think you can see, but I know better.

FRYE

You're not bashful at all, are you.

YOUNG SALLY

There are certain things that are going to happen, Mr. Frye. I'm just here to tell you what they are. You want to be drum major, out in front with your baton, that's okay with me. Or don't. That's okay too.

FRYE

Miss Barrett, I do believe that underneath that stern look you're giving me, there's a smile after all. I see your point. I'll make the case to Leonard.

YOUNG SALLY

His own show.

FRYE

His own show.

YOUNG SALLY

And you'll do this in the morning.

FRYE

Tomorrow morning.

YOUNG SALLY

I'll call Mr. Azerif in the afternoon.

FRYE

You're assuming he'll be interested in the work.

YOUNG SALLY

He'll be interested enough to come out for a look. I trust you, Mr. Frye.

(He goes to her)

FRYE

Miss Barrett, it's been business doing pleasure with you.

(He takes her hand)

Mr. Kaap is a very fortunate man, in so many ways.

(He kisses her hand. As he does so, Gene enters and sees this. Frye looks up to see him.)

Until we meet again.

(Frye exits to the driveway)

YOUNG GENE

You know, I just don't take to the guy.

YOUNG SALLY

He likes your work.

YOUNG GENE

I get the feeling his mind wasn't on work - mine or his.

YOUNG SALLY

(Lightly, as if it were a joke)

If that's supposed to be flattering it's not.

YOUNG GENE

(Flatly, but actually angry)

It's not supposed to be anything, baby. You're a big girl. You do what you want. I just came back to tell you I'm going to be busy. *No molestare*. Get it?

(He exits to the barn. She is startled by his tone.)

YOUNG SALLY

Gene.

(He keeps going ...)

Gene ...!

(Hurt, angry, confused, she forces herself not to go after him. She stops to think for a moment, indecisive. Then she turns and stalks into the house.

The sound of a car pulling away.

The lights remain the same - or only the slightest cross fade to ...

1989. Saturday. The morning after Scene Three.

Sally enters from the house with a mug of coffee. She finds a magazine open by the Adirondack chair, and picks it up to look at it. She takes it back up to the table and opens it to read.

Gene enters from the barn. He carries a small basket of tomatoes and another basket, empty. He goes to look around the corner to the driveway.

SALLY

He's not here yet.

GENE

No, I was just uh ...

SALLY

Enjoying the view?

GENE

Yeah ...

SALLY

Pretty driveway, isn't it. Gravel's a nice touch.

(Sally looks back to her magazine.)

GENE

I don't want him getting the jump on me.

SALLY

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



Alan Becker enters. He stops as though sensing something strange.)

ALAN  
Damn. It's got a *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; ignores this for the moment.)

ALAN  
You could feel it too if you weren't so fucking tense. Where do you think he is?

LEONARD  
Hiding.

ALAN  
Hiding?

LEONARD  
Gene likes to hide. It's why he left the city, came here.

(Alan is up now, 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: that he's not 'good at it'.

LEONARD

Your problem is you have no perspective.

ALAN

(Stung, angry ...)

No, excuse me, I do not lack perspective. I understand perception. The perception is: Gene Kaap lives in the Hamptons. That's what people say. 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 outside Utica, does one. A pose is a pose. I don't care if he stumbled into it or what. It's still about marketing, Leonard. Raising the value of the work. A subject you'd know something about.

LEONARD

Gene, I will remind you, has got all the money he can use.

ALAN

And so what? A man with money and a reputation seeks to shore up said reputation and make more money in the deal. Why.

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

LEONARD

I shouldn't have brought you.

ALAN

It's the truth and you know it.

LEONARD

If you embarrass me in front of him ...

ALAN

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 barn.)

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 Cher? You're just 'Alan'?

ALAN

Alan Becker.

SALLY

(A light goes off.)

Wait a second ...

(She indicates a magazine.)

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

ALAN

(Looking at the cover.)

Oh, that's old.

SALLY

(Looking for the article.)

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

ALAN

I wasn't happy with that, actually.

SALLY

No?

ALAN

Not the article. The coverage was fair. I didn't think much of my installation. It never really seemed to work for me, not totally.

SALLY

This is just modesty, I'm sure.

ALAN

No, it was too direct, too - I don't know ...

SALLY

(Encouraging him to go on...)

Yes?

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

... less clear.

ALAN

Right.

SALLY

Less emotional.

ALAN

Well, not without some kind of ... *slant* anyway.

SALLY

Got it.

ALAN

I'm doing this new installation downtown at Kinesis. You know it?

SALLY

I don't think so ...

ALAN

Fantastic place. The people are really amazing. I think this new one - I mean, if things work out - it could be something really major for me.

(She virtually ignores this.)

SALLY

Where's Leonard?

ALAN

He went to look for Gene.

SALLY

In the studio?

ALAN

Leonard seemed to think he was hiding.

SALLY

Oh did he.

ALAN

Is he?

SALLY

Oh, I can't speak for Gene. Long-standing policy.  
Hungry?

ALAN

Uh .. no. Thanks.

SALLY

I hope you like tomatoes. This year's crop, just in.  
We're having them for lunch.

ALAN

... could I ask you something?  
(She looks at him, non-committal.)  
Do you think it would be okay if I ... talked to him?  
Alone?

SALLY

To Gene?

ALAN

Yeah.

SALLY

About what?

ALAN

Well - his work, basically. The old stuff - from the  
fifties.

SALLY

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

ALAN

No, no - I just want to ... I just want to have a  
conversation about them.

SALLY

Oh, well he loves to talk ...

ALAN

It's about the project at Kinesis. I've been looking for a way to take it one more step. I got an idea on the drive out, in the car. I think it might be the answer.

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

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 in the open, 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. I just want his blessing 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 was 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 next level of having to make some sort of splash that has nothing to do with being 'very good.'

SALLY

And 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.

SALLY

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

ALAN

Yes. And also about the art.

(She only stares at him, an implicit invitation to speak.)

This isn't going to do it justice. You have to be there and see it to understand. It would be like describing a Gene Kaap's canvas to someone who's never seen one.

SALLY

Try me.

ALAN

(A beat, then suddenly into it.)

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, 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 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. Nobody ever bothered to fix up the floor.

You go into the back. There's an office back there. You ask where the installation is, and they say 'out front.' 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.

The key 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, then start to see it differently. That's what it's all about.

And the problem is, that's not happening. I need something else. Another level of apprehension.

SALLY

Which is where Gene comes in ...

ALAN

Exactly.

SALLY

How?

ALAN

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

SALLY

I'm afraid I haven't seen him all morning.

ALAN

But he's around ...

SALLY

Sometimes he's gone for hours ...

ALAN

He should be the one to decide - you said so yourself. Otherwise you're the one 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?

ALAN

She's not big on information.

SALLY

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

LEONARD

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, I'm sorry.

(Leonard sees the problem.)

LEONARD

(To 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'll let you throw it in the trunk.

ALAN

You're so subtle.

(He exits.)

SALLY

Like a tomato? They're really 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

No, out for a walk, I think.

LEONARD

Well which is it?

SALLY

I don't know.

LEONARD

Sally //

SALLY

I tried to warn you on the phone //

LEONARD

... if you're interfering somehow //

SALLY

- but he was standing right there. 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. Whole days, weeks even, he's right here, perfectly fine. I go inside to do the dishes, come back out and ... he's gone. Here, but disappeared into some ... blank, empty place.

And sometimes ... he's gone gone. He went out to the studio one morning this spring and never came back. I finally had to call the police. He'd gotten lost a hundred yards from the house - ended up in Water Mill. Didn't recognize a thing. Two days later, he woke up the same old Gene again.

LEONARD

(Stunned...)

How long has this been going on?

SALLY

Years. He had early onset. They say it's probably worse because of the booze and all the other stuff - you name it. He beat himself up pretty badly over the years.

LEONARD

God, Sally ... I'm sorry.

SALLY

Oh, I'm used to it now. The only hard part is - he'll be gone for good one day. That I won't like.

LEONARD

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

SALLY

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

LEONARD

Face it - who was there?

SALLY

(Smiling ruefully.)

Well, no one else was crazy enough to be in love with him. Then again, I had his work. I always had the feeling Gene was speaking right to me, saying all the things he couldn't say any other way

(Her smile evaporates.)

Oh Jesus, I've got to stop that.

LEONARD

But it's true ...

SALLY

No - talking in the past tense. Plenty of time for that later.

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.)

As in flat.

SALLY

That's impossible.

LEONARD

I wish it were.

SALLY

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

(Referring to the magazine again)

I keep reading about it.

LEONARD

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

It's over, Sally. Nobody's had that kind of money since the crash -- and what they've got they aren't spending on art. 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

Yeah, 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. I got a call from Misha Kansky. He said Gene mentioned them on the phone - tried to backtrack, like he'd never said it. But Misha could tell. They're real, aren't they.

SALLY

It's not my place, Leonard.

LEONARD

Sally, these are important paintings. From what you're saying, maybe the last he'll ever do. 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 handle them.

SALLY

You would be, of course, // if -

LEONARD

I'd do it right. Tasteful, low key. But we'd make a little money. All of us. That's not so terrible, is it?

SALLY

You just said you couldn't sell anything.

LEONARD

New work by Gene Kaap? - that I can sell. It's been over ten years. Do you know how badly people want to see what he's been doing? People are hungry for it.

SALLY

Leonard, you know this. Gene and I have always agreed, the work is his. His to sell, his to keep, his to do with as he pleases.

LEONARD

(With difficulty ...)

They're going to seize the assets.

SALLY

Your paintings?

LEONARD

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. I kept dropping his name in front of these blank-eyed twenty something CPAs. Thank God I found a bank officer who'd actually heard of him.

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

SALLY

I think I don't have a choice.

(She looks at him, feeling bad. A little sly)  
Let me show you the garden. Tomatoes really are quite good this year. You want to go pick some?

(She offers him the empty basket.)

LEONARD

I don't like tomatoes.

SALLY

We might find him out there. You never know.

(He gets the hint. He takes the basket and shows her the way.)

LEONARD

Madame ...

(They exit.)

The lights again remain the same - or virtually so - as we shift to ...

1954. A hour or so after the end of Scene Four.

Young Sally enters from the house with her purse and a suitcase, which she sets down. She takes her lipstick and mirror out of the purse and applies some. Gene enters from the barn, watches her in silence.

YOUNG GENE

What the hell's going on here?

YOUNG SALLY

I'm going to catch the 2:10.

(Silence)

YOUNG GENE

(Not a question; demanding an explanation)

What.

(Pause)

*What.*

YOUNG SALLY

You're working.

YOUNG GENE

Yeah, well that's what I do.

YOUNG SALLY

Good for you.

YOUNG GENE

Look, the guy is an asshole. So I don't like him and I don't like him licking your fingers.

YOUNG SALLY

That's not it and you know it.

YOUNG GENE

Oh really? What is it?

YOUNG SALLY

(Snaps the lipstick shut and goes to him; one last try at reasoning)

Gene, this has been a long time coming for you, but now here it is. Why do you have to fight it? Why can't you let it happen?

YOUNG GENE

Nobody's fighting anything.

YOUNG SALLY

You'll have money in your pocket. That's not so terrible, is it?

YOUNG GENE

I've got all the money I need.

YOUNG SALLY

He thinks your paintings are good, Gene.

YOUNG SALLY

I don't give a shit what he thinks. Who asked him to think anything one way or the other. They're mine. I decide if they're good.

YOUNG SALLY

(Pause)

Do you?

YOUNG GENE

Do I what?

YOUNG SALLY

Think they're any good.

YOUNG GENE

You're God damned right I do.

YOUNG SALLY

And he agrees. What's your problem?

YOUNG GENE

I'll tell you the problem, sunshine. The problem is he's a fraud.

YOUNG SALLY

How can he be a fraud? How can you say that?

YOUNG GENE

How is anybody a fraud? It's easiest God damn thing in the world.

YOUNG SALLY

If he likes the work, and if you think the work is good - where's the fraud?

YOUNG GENE

Because any idiot could see that stuff is good. You don't need a God damned genius. You could be the biggest God damned fraud in the business - which would take some doing - you could still see what they are. I mean for Christ's sake, baby, it's *obvious*.

YOUNG SALLY

You've got him all boxed in, don't you. It's all so tidy. It must be so satisfying to put him in his place like this.

YOUNG GENE

You see? You got sucked in by him, didn't you. All that silk tie, *eminence grise* line of crap he purveys. The wise old sage of the mountaintop who really truly knows - and really truly *cares*. It's all so deeply *felt* for him. Well, let me tell you something, sunshine. The only thing that charlatan feels is a trend. And all he cares about is this year's fashion.

YOUNG SALLY

And what if he does, Gene? That won't do you any harm. He's got something to offer, right now anyway. In the short run.

YOUNG GENE

But it's not about the short run with me, sunshine. It's not about the fall fashion show at the Azerif Gallery. It's about a life. It's about the whole God damned road. *My* road. Where *I'm* going. I do not cede that to anybody. Not you, not Leonard Azerif, and sure as hell not Hilton Frye. Because what happens when old man Frye wakes up one morning and looks at me with my curly locks and my pretty pink bow, and he decides he's had about enough of me and it's time for somebody new to bang.

YOUNG SALLY

(Disgusted, not shocked)

Gene ... !

YOUNG GENE

We get old overnight, baby. Guys like Frye pack up their sword and ride away while assholes like me are still wiping the dew off their eyelids.

YOUNG SALLY

He sticks by what he believes - you know that. He's famous for it.

YOUNG GENE

You wait, sunshine. You just wait. Me - and all the rest of us - we come and go. The Hilton Fryes of this world, they go on and on. They make sure of that.

YOUNG SALLY

He's for real, Gene. I know he is.

YOUNG GENE

He thinks he is. I'll give him that much.

YOUNG SALLY

Well, it's good enough for me.

YOUNG GENE

You can afford to let that be good enough. I can't!

(Silence. She's at a loss.)

YOUNG SALLY

It's just, I don't know - the man comes all the way out here to this God forsaken potato farm - on his own time, for his own private reasons - real reasons, passionate feelings ... and you can't let that be good. You wait all these years for a man like Hilton Frye to show up on // your doorstep and

YOUNG GENE

I was never waiting //

YOUNG SALLY

- so you could get to this //

YOUNG GENE

No no - that's where you're wrong //

YOUNG SALLY

- to those, out there - !

YOUNG GENE

You think I've been working up to those?

YOUNG SALLY

(Furious, loud, shouting him down)

And now here he is and you get busy insulting him to his face and trashing him behind his back!

YOUNG GENE

(When she's finished; but just as angry.)

I work up to nothing, sunshine.

YOUNG SALLY

You're the one just told me how any idiot could see how *fabulous* they are!

YOUNG GENE

Because they fit the fashion, baby! I'm repeating myself here! You're not listening. Nobody fucking listens! Maybe it looks to you like some big finish with the bunting and the marching bands - but to me, sunshine, it's just a pit stop along the way. Sorry if that disappoints, but there it is.

YOUNG SALLY

And for that you'd happily kill this whole thing, tell Azerif to go to hell if he ends up making you an offer. Wouldn't you. And I was stupid enough to think we were going to be celebrating something. I'll just have to have myself a drink on the train.

And for the record, my name is not sunshine. It's Sally. Try not to forget.

(She brushes past him to get her suitcase. He grabs her arm to stop her.)

YOUNG GENE

Hey!

YOUNG SALLY

Let go.

YOUNG GENE

Where are you going?

(She yanks her arm away.)

YOUNG SALLY

Where do you think?

YOUNG GENE

(A change in tone)

Sally, for Christ's sake - I'm not going to get my head turned by some poseur, some self-appointed poobah from some magazine who thinks I'm supposed to do cartwheels because he might try to get a few canvasses into that smorgasbord at the Azerif Gallery.

YOUNG SALLY

(Slight pause)

It's going to be your own show.

YOUNG GENE

No, it's not.

YOUNG SALLY

Yes it is.

YOUNG GENE

Sal, the show in October is a group.

YOUNG SALLY

You're not going to be in that show. You're going to have your own show.

YOUNG GENE

That's not what he said, Sal //

YOUNG SALLY

No, it's what *I* said.

YOUNG GENE

(Confounded ...)

You can't do that.

YOUNG SALLY

You're right. I can't.

(She goes for her bags again.)

YOUNG GENE

(Still bewildered ...)

Sally ...

(She drops the bags of her own accord to better face him with this.)

YOUNG SALLY

As if nobody has a clue but *you!* If he doesn't kiss up to you, he's an ignorant fool. If he loves your work, that doesn't prove a thing because even an idiot can see you're good. If nobody recognizes you, you're just one more unappreciated, undiscovered genius. If somebody comes along and says "Yes, you are embraced, you are appreciated, you are understood" - well, he's just toying with you, using you, giving you a good bang. How convenient that they're just fools and frauds and poseurs. Because then you can dismiss them. How tidy. How neat. Surely you don't want anyone else around to muss up your perfect little world.

(Silence.)

YOUNG GENE

I don't want you getting on that train.

YOUNG SALLY

And I don't want to get in at one o'clock in the morning.

YOUNG GENE

Then don't go.

YOUNG SALLY

I've got a big day. And I think -  
(Pause; not easy to say ...)  
... I think I should go.

YOUNG GENE

Yeah? Well, I think you ought to quit that job.

YOUNG SALLY

I can't quit the job.

YOUNG GENE

Why not?

YOUNG SALLY

Because I'm a working girl and I need the income.  
(Silence; again, with difficulty ...)  
Gene, I've had a good time with you, out here in the potato fields. And in the city. But a girl knows when she's not wanted.

YOUNG GENE

What the hell are you getting at.

YOUNG SALLY

Don't play dumb, Gene, you're no good at it.

YOUNG GENE

Baby, I want you to quit that job because I don't want you running back into the city every Monday morning. Why do you think I asked you out here?

(With difficulty...)

I wanted you to like it. I wanted you to stay.

YOUNG SALLY

Why? So you could throw me out on your own schedule? You think I don't see the way you wake up every morning and give me that look like "what the hell are you doing here?"

YOUNG GENE

Because that's what I'm thinking! "What the hell is she still here for? Haven't I fucked this up yet? What's taking you so long, Kaap?"

(Pause)

YOUNG GENE

So go back if you really have to, if the magazine needs it's God damn captions done so bad - but Sal ... I'm telling you - you have to come back. I mean, I'm sorry, but that's it. You're the only one who gets it.

YOUNG SALLY

(Still resisting, though the cracks show)  
Well, that's ... some line, mister.

(He goes to her intensely, as if angry, a gleam in his eye. She is unflinching.)

YOUNG GENE

Don't laugh at me. Do not laugh at me.

YOUNG SALLY

Gene ...

YOUNG GENE

I want you to stay with me. I want you to move out here.

YOUNG SALLY

Gene ...

YOUNG GENE

I need you for - for *everything*. There's not one God damn thing I don't need you for.

(She gives in, goes to him, and they kiss.)

YOUNG GENE

Did you really say that to him?

YOUNG SALLY

About what?

YOUNG GENE

My own show.

YOUNG SALLY

Yes.

YOUNG GENE

How'd you think you could get away with that?

YOUNG SALLY

I don't know. I just said it.

YOUNG GENE

You see? Good instincts. That's what I'm talking about.

(Gene kisses her, takes her by the hand. They head to the house.)

YOUNG SALLY

Gene, it's your work time ...

YOUNG GENE

Fuck the work. It's Sunday. I got all week to work.

(He picks up her suitcase and takes it with him as they go into the house.)

Lights remain the same as we go to ...

1989. Shortly after Scene Five.

Gene enters from the house. He goes out and looks towards the barn, seeing if the coast is clear.

He proceeds off-stage towards the barn and returns with the basket of tomatoes. He puts it down on the porch and begins going through it, selecting a few that he likes.

Alan enters from the driveway. Gene, taking the chosen tomatoes into the house, sees that he is caught.)

GENE

Shit.

ALAN

Hi.

GENE

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

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

ALAN

Alan Becker.

GENE

Right.

ALAN

You're Gene Kaap.

GENE

Guilty. Where's Leonard?

ALAN

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

GENE

Oh yeah?

ALAN

We could stop them.

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 ran into Leonard at an opening last night and well - he mentioned driving out. I really had to beg him. Because of your privacy and all.

GENE

Nice of him.

ALAN

There's something right about it, though. Don't you think?

GENE

Right about what.

ALAN

Meeting. Like this. Passing the torch. One iconoclast to another.

GENE

Oh. Right.

ALAN

You do realize that's what you were. Still are. Destroyer of all previous perception.

GENE

Ah, bullshit - if I could have been Norman Rockwell, believe me - in a heartbeat.

ALAN

(Thinking fast ...)

You know ... I respect the hell out of that.

GENE

Yeah, me too.

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 ...)

- talk to you. I've got an idea. Do you mind? I can pitch it to you in five minutes.

GENE

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

ALAN

I've got a show coming up. Kinesis, in Soho. And I had this idea, coming out here in the car. About your work and my show. I want to use it.

GENE

I don't do group shows.

ALAN

No, that's not // what I -

GENE

I don't come off in groups. Never did.

ALAN

Gene, it's // not -

GENE

The stuff is too damn fragile.

ALAN

Can I call you Gene - ?

GENE

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 maybe, let's say my show is part of your work. Either way.

(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 I didn't say this. The walls are bare, you see? So you came into the gallery and you see bare walls and you think 'what's this? Bare walls. Nothing here.'

And then after a time, gestation I call it, eventually, you catch onto the floor.

ALAN (con't)

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?" And then I got it.

We take your work ... posters - not the actual canvasses - but *posters* of your work from the mid-fifties ... you know, *Inversion #5* or *Black On Red* - and we hang them on the wall, so they're sort of like *looking down on this* ... this *trash* really. This remnant of culture. People will see it all over again. New, fresh.

GENE

Who the fuck are you?

ALAN

Look, I'm sorry. I'm excited. I'm not explaining it right. But you get the ideas. It's a way to bridge the gap.

GENE

What *gap*?

ALAN

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

GENE

What if I like the chasm?

ALAN

(A breath to retrench)

Look, what I do ... it's different than what you did. You haven't been around.

GENE

Yeah, lucky me.

ALAN

This is a tribute. It's an homage.

GENE

I don't like 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. 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 up on a poster? A decoration on a wall?

ALAN

Because it's not just your work. It's be a comment on my work. It forces comparison. If I come out of it the asshole, okay. Fine with me.

GENE

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

ALAN

(Slowly, tough, but with some regret)

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

GENE

Not for that purpose.

ALAN

No. For advertising. And postcards. And placemats. And that's okay I suppose. It's not like you never stooped when it came to merchandising.

ALAN (con't)

(He realizes this is only making it worse.)  
Look, I admire and respect you. And your work.

GENE

Pardon me. I'm not flattered. People see my work everyday, all over the world. So far they don't need you to help. Go ask Pollock or Newman or Rothko if they want to be in your installation. They're all dead. They can't say no.

ALAN

You can't say no either.

GENE

I just did.

ALAN

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. Win or lose, it's all the same to me.

GENE

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

ALAN

Oh, come on. "Made something." You put paint on canvas. That's what you did. There is no "made something." You were translating. "Create" is this word some narcissist came up with so he could tell himself he was doing something important. And maybe it was. Then. But we've done that, Gene. We've been there. There is no such thing as "making", as "creativity." There's arrangement. And re-arrangement. And that's it.

GENE

When I painted the way I painted - that was me. Nobody got there first. That was my paint. It was my take. It was honest. It was from inside. In here ...

(His torso...)

ALAN

You're really letting this get way too emotional.

GENE

That's right, mister. 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 thought.

GENE

Because I draw the line.

ALAN

(Lashing out)

Because you can't allow anyone to take what you did and go the next step. No, it all has to stop with you. You're the pinnacle.

GENE

I never said that.

ALAN

But you don't have to, do you.

GENE

You go ahead, you take the next step. That's all right. If that's what you're doing. But you're not. All you've got is this God damned *irony*. This intellectualism. Your cool surfaces. And that endless fucking commentary.

ALAN

(Angry and hurt)

I respond to the world as it is. As I see it, as I *understand* it. It's different now, Gene. Come down off Mount Olympus ... we're struggling down here! You think I wouldn't like it the way it was? You think I'm not jealous of the way you lived, the way you worked?

(Resolved now, sure of himself ...)

But that's over. People laugh at that 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, but I sure as hell won't lie about it either. I don't do that. Say what you want, I don't lie.

(He wonders if he went too far.)

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

GENE

You call it honor. I call it an act of God damned thievery.

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

LEONARD

You've obviously met.

GENE

You keep your God damned hands off my work!

(He sits down. Sally goes to him.)

SALLY

(Worried...)

Gene ...

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.

(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 damn carbon out of my pistons, that's all!

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

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 this little twit with you? Give me a stroke?

LEONARD

Gene, I'm sorry if he - whatever he said. He's got a mouth ...

ALAN

Hey, knock off the apologies ... !

SALLY

Gene, you're going to overdo it.

GENE

Good. Let's overdo it!

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 the article.

(He indicates the magazine.)

ALAN

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 this.

SALLY

Fine - you boys have your fun. I'm going to make lunch.

(She turns and goes to the house. To Alan.)

You, with me.

ALAN

You can't talk to me // like ...

SALLY

Now.

(She opens the door for Alan, and he has met his match. He lurches angrily into the house. She follows and lets the door slam.)

LEONARD

Gene, I'm sorry - 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 - so be it.

LEONARD

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. Frankly, it's pretty God damn interesting. I think he's going someplace new. It's courageous. It's daring.

GENE

Sequential apprehension? Jesus, what the hell is that? Is that English? You're talking out your asshole. Or his asshole, I don't know which.

LEONARD

Gene, that's where he's going. If we don't go there with him, we're safe. Since when do we like safe?

GENE

I can't talk about this. You want to talk, let's talk about the tomato crop.

LEONARD

Because you're trying to make a comparison.

GENE

I just want to know what the kid *does*.

LEONARD

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

GENE

And I never got an answer either.

LEONARD

But it's beneath you -

GENE

My ass is beneath me -

LEONARD

You don't understand him. Okay. But some people don't understand you either.

GENE

They understand what I did.

LEONARD

Not everyone -

GENE

If it was any good, they did. A lot of it wasn't, I'm the first one to say it. But if it was good, they got it. They got *something*. Because it was honest to God *me*. My shit, my wonder, my confusion. My love. It was always me. If it wasn't me, I threw it out.

LEONARD

And there was never anything like it. 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 called you last week. You talked to him.

(A slight beat...)

Gene, I want to see them.

GENE

Can't do it. Can't help you.

LEONARD

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

GENE

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

(He indicates the house.)

LEONARD

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

I know that, Lennie. That's not it.

(The tomato...)

Beautiful, isn't it? The soil is just right out 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

(Smiles ruefully.)

I'm not a still life kind of guy.

LEONARD

Gene, I'm asking you. Please. I only want to look at them.

GENE

Oh come on ...

LEONARD

I don't say we have to put them up for sale. We don't even have to show them. I'm not going to pressure you.

All right, I'll pressure you. But you can do what you like, Gene. You know that.

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

You're not sharp like you used to be.

LEONARD

Why, because of this kid? That's a new thing. It's a whole other business.

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

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.

GENE

I had five years. Nobody said they were good.

LEONARD

But you must have something!

GENE

Lennie, listen. I might have a few good hours, maybe a day or two if I'm lucky. 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 go back to the canvas, it's like starting over. I try to remember what it was like to get that flow, that rhythm - time disappearing, like a trance.

Trying to draw it out, trying to find the heart of it. But I look back at the work I do, and it looks like a child, playing with brushes. Scrawls, Lennie. Kid stuff. It's all washed out, plain. And all I can think is, oh god, that's not me. It's some *child* - some person I never was, some *other*.

I can't live with that.

GENE (con't)

So we built a bonfire, Sally and I. Last night. 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 we took every canvas, forty-two of them, threw 'em into the fire. And watched them turn to vapor.

Not the first time, either. Been a lot of fires, the past few years. Nice pile of ashes out there. Turned out to be good fertilizer. Good for tomatoes.

(He holds up the tomato.)

LEONARD

All of them?

GENE

It felt so right, Len.

LEONARD

... they're all gone?

GENE

I didn't know how to tell you. I was chicken shit.

(Alan enters from the house.)

ALAN

Leonard, listen, I'm going to take the train back.

LEONARD

No, you don't have to -

ALAN

I didn't come out here to peel tomatoes, okay? I can catch the one oh five.

LEONARD

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

(Sally has entered.)

SALLY

You can't go. I'm making lunch.

LEONARD

I'm sorry.

ALAN

Right now?

LEONARD

Yes.

ALAN

Give me one minute ...

(He exits to the studio.)

SALLY

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

GENE

I told him.

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 what ... ?

SALLY

Other times I helped him - yes - but this time I begged him, save a few. *One*, even. They were gorgeous. Like Matisse at the very end, the way he blossomed into the cut-outs ... so simple, but so glorious. That's what these were.

LEONARD

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

SALLY

No - it's better you know. They were beautiful. I want you to know. I want you to know ... at least he could do it.

LEONARD

Good bye, Sally.

SALLY

Good bye.

(Alan enters from the studio with a rusted iron ... *thing*. Leonard exits to the driveway. 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 ...

Young Sally enters from the house, post-coital, barefoot. She leans lazily against a post and tries to do something with her hair..

Sally turns back to Gene.)

SALLY

Well. Glad that's over.

GENE

I'm sorry ...

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

I know.

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

(A vague memory ...)

Yes ...

SALLY

Go ahead. Try one.

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

Young Gene enters from the house, also barefoot, perhaps buttoning his jeans. He comes up behind Young Sally, nuzzling her.)

GENE

Mmm. That's good.

YOUNG GENE

Hi.

SALLY

You see?

YOUNG SALLY

Hi yourself.

SALLY

You want me to make a sandwich with tomatoes?

(Gene nods, his mouth full.)

YOUNG SALLY

Going to work?

SALLY

You go ahead and eat the rest of this.

YOUNG GENE

Yeah.

SALLY

There's lots more. We've got a lot of tomatoes.

YOUNG SALLY

Well, get goin', big boy. I can take care of myself.

(Sally crosses to the door.)

Young Gene kisses Young Sally and crosses into the yard, passing Sally on the way.

Sally, on the porch, stops and turns back to Gene in the yard - and at the same moment Young Gene, in the yard, stops and turn to Young Sally on the porch. Their lines almost - but not quite - overlap.)

SALLY

Don't go away.

YOUNG GENE

Don't go away.

(Sally and Young Gene both exit in their respective directions. Gene is left alone on stage with Young Sally. He happily eats his tomato and she stares dreamily into the yard as if watching him as ...

The lights fall.

End of play.)