

second, waiting to see who was coming up. All right, well ... thank you, Dr. Reid. And thank you all, I don't know, for coming I guess. Okay. So ... Oh! I read this — Okay, well let me just read it, right? *(She reads from her notes.)* "The virtue of the camera is not the power it has to transform the photographer into an artist, but the impulse it gives them to keep looking." Brooks Atkinson said that. And I think he was right. And that's what we have in common, you, me and that strange group like us who spend their lives spying on the world through a lens. We're all searching ... for answers ... for balance. But most of all, we're searching for a shot ... One shot that might bring understanding, explanation ... peace. *(A beat.)* What the hell am I talking about? I don't know ... I'm not sure. *(A pause.)* You're all so fucking young ... Sorry. I'm just — *(She closes her notes.)* Joanne said something about my pictures being haunting or something to that effect, and I was thinking, you're never haunted when you're taking them. You choose your subject, and you stand above it. Separated from it. *(A beat.)* I just read somewhere that in Antarctica, the Wilkins Ice Shelf just snapped loose. It's the size of Jamaica and it — Well, it's not good. I was there, you know, around that area, and I was shooting but I didn't take any shots of — and now it's gone, you know? But it's not just that. I was in Botswana a few years ago, and we visited this village that had an AIDS fatality rate of seventy-three percent. *Seventy-three.* I wanted to take some shots of this family that — this family that was just trying to — *(A beat.)* I guess what I'm trying to say is that it's not the shots you take that haunt you. It's the ones you don't take that stay with you ... lurking. So, well, if the shot you want has an emperor penguin in his natural habitat, you should get down there and take it before it's too late. If the shot you need has an African male between the ages of sixteen and thirty-four in it ... You should go now. The world is disappearing before our eyes. Shoot it. Before it's gone. *(In a grave tone.)* *We're all going to die.* *(A horrible pause.)* Okay, well ... thank you, JOANNE. *(Rushing to the mic.)* Okay, well, that was ... yes. Thank you, Carrie Ann. *(Covering with a smile.)* And now ... A glimpse of Ms. Daly's latest collection, *The Fairest of the Fowl: Portraits of Championship Chickens.* *(She signals to the projection booth.)* *The lights dim. Photos of chickens fill the screen. Odd chicken music starts to play. Blackout.*

Scene 2

Lights up on stage right. Jeffrey sits behind a desk. Terry, his boss and friend, stands in front of the desk and slams down a bucket of fried chicken.

JEFF. What is that?
TERRY. Chicken.
JEFF. Uh-huh.
TERRY. Fried chicken.
JEFF. I'm not hungry.
TERRY. Okay. *(The two men stand silently for a moment.)*
JEFF. Terry?
TERRY. Help me.
JEFF. I have three hours to get this —
TERRY. Help me.
JEFF. Terry.
TERRY. Jeff.
JEFF. What?
TERRY. Help me. *(A beat.)* I love you. *(A beat.)* Help. *(Jeff puts aside what he was working on.)*
JEFF. Let's hear it.
TERRY. Okay. Here we go. Southern — you rock, by the way.
Southern Fried Chicken. We gotta present tomorrow.
JEFF. Tomorrow?
TERRY. That's right.
JEFF. What do you have so far?
TERRY. What do you mean?
JEFF. What do you have? *(A beat.)*
TERRY. *(Pointing to the bucket.)* Chicken.
JEFF. Come on ...
TERRY. Help me. Your dick is huge. Help me.
JEFF. Adam had three months to put together a —
TERRY. Adam's fucked.
JEFF. What do you mean?
TERRY. His wife left him. His mind hasn't exactly been —

JEFF: His wife left him?
 TERRY: Yeah. Took the kids. Took the loot, and cut out with one of the New Jersey Nets. Adam's fucked.
 JEFF: I'm just saying, he did all the research on this, he should —
 TERRY: Adam's a douchebag. You're a god. Chicken. Go.
 JEFF: You don't have anything?
 TERRY: No. Yeah. I have new packaging. Fancy containers. Steamed veggie sides. A salad menu. I have "get away from greasy buckets." Cultural trends. Health awareness. Sushi nation. Reposition, repackaging, blah, blah, blah. I've heard it before. It sucks. What do you got?
 JEFF: That's what Adam came up with?
 TERRY: *Adam blows poodles, Jeffrey.* What do you have? I need something I can sell here. Bottom of the ninth, two outs. I'm going to the bullpen. Give it to me.
 JEFF: I don't know. I haven't had time to —
 TERRY: I'll take what you give me.
 JEFF: *(Singing at the bucket.)* Okay, hang on ...
 TERRY: I'm hanging. I'm hanging. *I'm hung.* Not like you, you *stud*, but —
 JEFF: Terry —
 TERRY: Right. Sorry. Take your time. *(Terry watches as Jeff continues to stare. Jeff gets up and circles the desk, looking for it. Finally, he stops pausing.)* What? Give it to me.
 JEFF: Go the other way.
 TERRY: Good. Fuck. I like it. What do you mean?
 JEFF: Don't run *away* from it. Run *back* to it.
 TERRY: Run *back* to it. Listen to you. You're a fucking — You're like — *FUCK!* What's the angle?
 JEFF: We're all tired ...
 TERRY: *Sure* we're tired. *Shit, I'm* tired, right now.
 JEFF: We're tired of being afraid ...
 TERRY: ... I'm listening ...
 JEFF: ... Afraid to live. Hole in the ozone. Lead in our tap water. Watch our carbs. Watch our kids. We're grown men, throwing around cholesterol numbers like we used to throw around bowling scores. We're pissed off. Why shouldn't we be? Every day someone else reminds us that if we don't watch out, we're gonna lose six years off our lives. And deep down, we're thinking, "What six years? *Seventy-eight to eighty-four?*" We just want to live. Right now. Today.

We go out of our way to be careful and then we watch the news and find out that sixteen people just bought it because some bus driver washed his Paxil down with Jack Daniels, took his bus, and made a drive-thru out of a shoe store. Well, *great*. Lotta good the bran muffin and the Lipitor did them. *(A beat.)* We want to live. More than that, we want to *enjoy* living. You know what else we want?
 TERRY: Chicken?
 JEFF: *Fried* chicken.
 TERRY: Fuckin' A. *(Terry grabs a piece of chicken.)*
 JEFF: Run *back* to it. Anchor it in the mind of the consumer. "Remember when you lost that little league game? Your seventh-grade boyfriend broke up with you? The baking soda and vinegar volcano you made for earth science only got you a C? *(A beat.)* Where'd your mom take you?"
 TERRY: *(Mouth full.)* Southern Fried Chicken.
 JEFF: Southern Fried Chicken. Comfort food. Nostalgia. *(Sincerely.)* "You weren't scared then. Don't be scared now. Eat your chicken."
 TERRY: I am. It's good.
 JEFF: Adam wants to change the package? He might be wrong.
 TERRY: He might be an asshole!
 JEFF: *(Pointing to the bucket.)* Look at that. It's timeless. An American classic. You're gonna fuck with that? Why? You're worried about a few grease stains on the bucket? Hey. Grease stains are how you know it's good. *(A beat.)* We're afraid and we're pissed off. "Pleasure Revenge." That's the angle.
 TERRY: See? That's why I hired you. You're my closer.
 JEFF: Hey. Take it easy on Adam. He's a good guy, he just took an elbow.
 TERRY: You hardly know him.
 JEFF: He's a good guy. Go easy.
 TERRY: You're a big pussy, you know that?
 JEFF: Yeah.
 TERRY: I won't hold it against you. *(Terry heads for the door. He turns back.)* You know what? There's a thing tonight, down in the Village. I want you to come.
 JEFF: No. *(A beat.)* What is it?
 TERRY: I don't know. A photo exhibit or something. Some hot new photographer. Eastman is sponsoring. All the brass is gonna be there.
 JEFF: A photo exhibit?

TERRY. Who cares? Hot chicks in cocktail dresses getting bombed on champagne. It'll be a buffer.

JEFF. I can't go.

TERRY. You're gonna go. I'll have Nina email you the info.

JEFF. Fine. *(A beat.)* Don't forget your chicken. *(Terry crosses back to get the chicken.)*

TERRY. Pleasure Revenge.

JEFF. Pleasure Revenge. We all want to live. We just need permission.

'Cause we already know the truth.

TERRY. Sure we do. *(A beat.)* What's the truth?

JEFF. We're all going to die. *(Blackout.)*

Scene 3

Joanne's office.

Joanne paces around the room checking messages on her cell phone while she speaks. Carrie Ann sits quietly.

JOANNE. We're all going to die?

CARRIE ANN. Jo—

JOANNE. *We're all going to die?*

CARRIE ANN. I haven't been — I'm sorry.

JOANNE. "Well kids, that's the bad news. The good news is, I wouldn't worry too much about those student loans."

CARRIE ANN. I said I was —

JOANNE. *(Dialing her phone.)* Don't move. I'll be back in a minute.

CARRIE ANN. Where are you going?

JOANNE. Where am I — I'm going to clean up your mess. Just stay here. And try not to hang yourself while I'm gone. Little Miss Sunny Pants.

CARRIE ANN. Little Miss Sunny Pants?

JOANNE. Shut up.

CARRIE ANN. Okay.

JOANNE. Don't move.

CARRIE ANN. Fine. *(Joanne goes to exit. Jessie, a young student stands in the doorway holding a manila envelope.)*

JOANNE. *(To Jessie.)* Are you on fire?

JESSIE. Excuse me?

JOANNE. Is any part of your person on fire right now?

JESSIE. I don't think so.

JOANNE. Then get out of my way.

JESSIE. Okay. *(Jessie steps out of the way. Joanne crosses to exit and turns once more to Carrie Ann.)*

JOANNE. *(To Carrie Ann.)* Chickens...?

CARRIE ANN. Yeah.

JOANNE. Fantastic. Really. Just ff — FUUUUCK!!! *(Joanne exits. Jessie and Carrie Ann share some uncomfortable silence.)*

CARRIE ANN. How ya doin'?

JESSIE. Not on fire ...

CARRIE ANN. That's good, I guess.

JESSIE. Yeah. *(A pause.)* I was just gonna give this to Dr. Reid.

CARRIE ANN. She's a little busy right now.

JESSIE. I can see that.

CARRIE ANN. Give it to me. I'll make sure she gets it.

JESSIE. Oh ... Um ... okay. *(Jessie doesn't move. Carrie Ann immediately recognizes the reluctance.)*

CARRIE ANN. Your work? *(Jessie nods.)* It's okay ... *(Jessie hands the envelope to Carrie Ann.)*

JESSIE. How did she discover you?

CARRIE ANN. Who?

JESSIE. Dr. Reid. She said she discovered you when you were —

CARRIE ANN. She didn't discover me.

JESSIE. She said —

CARRIE ANN. She, I don't know, she used to date my father, a long time ago. He showed her my pictures ...

JESSIE. How did she know?

CARRIE ANN. What?

JESSIE. That they were good. That you were good. *(A beat.)*

CARRIE ANN. *(Thinks about this.)* She has a good eye.

JESSIE. Oh. *(Jessie turns to exit, but has to stop.)* They're us, aren't they?

CARRIE ANN. Sorry?

JESSIE. The chickens. They're us. *(Carrie Ann doesn't respond.)*

They are. *(A beat.)* They're us. Proud. Beautiful. Ridiculous. Showing off all the time. But still so fragile. So afraid. Living every

Stage left/Stage right (split).

Terry and Sandra are now on the street. Terry talks into his cell, Sandra kisses his neck.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

A few days later.

The lights come up on Jeff and Terry. They sit on a bench outside a funeral home, both dressed in dark suits.

TERRY. Where are you, man? I've been calling you for the last —
CARRIE ANN. SEAN!!! (*Sean reenters and immediately checks Jeff for a pulse. Mary follows.*)

TERRY. All right, look. You've had a few days off. It's time to forget the birch and get your head on straight.

CARRIE ANN. What's wrong with him?

TERRY. I'm not gonna make the eight o'clock tomorrow. I need you to cover.

CARRIE ANN. *He was standing there, and then —*

SANDRA. Let's go ...

SEAN. Carrie Ann, step back. Hey buddy, can you hear me?

TERRY. *You hear me?* Time to get back in the game. I'm gonna call and leave another message on the home phone. (*He hangs up the phone and dials again. The sound of a siren in the distance.*)

SEAN. (*To Jeff.*) Look at me. (*Jeff slowly turns and looks at Sean.*

Calmly to Mary.) Mary. Why don't you go ahead and call 911. (*As Sean continues to work on Jeff, the siren grows louder. The lights on Terry fade as he holds his phone.*)

TERRY. What the fuck...? (*Blackout.*)

End of Act One

JEFF. I thought it was a nice service.

TERRY. You thought it was nice?

JEFF. Yeah.

TERRY. Okay.

JEFF. You know what I mean.

TERRY. Sure.

JEFF. I thought Adam looked good.

TERRY. Yeah. (*A beat.*) He was dead ...

JEFF. Terry ...

TERRY. I'm just saying.

JEFF. Could you not act like, I don't know, like you for ten minutes?

TERRY. Okay.

JEFF. Thank you. (*A pause.*)

TERRY. Who should I act like?

JEFF. I don't know. How 'bout like a human being?

TERRY. Wow. Okay. (*Terry takes a flask out of his breast pocket.*)

You want?

JEFF. No. You brought — No. Thanks.

TERRY. Suit yourself. (*Terry takes a swig and tucks the flask away.*

Another pause.)

JEFF. Anyway, I thought it was nice, you know, for a ... thing.

TERRY. I thought it was fucking sad.

JEFF. Well, yeah it's sad. It's a —

TERRY. No, I mean like pathetic sad. There were, what, a dozen people in there?

JEFF. I don't know.

TERRY. No, I counted. There were thirteen people, if you count the priest.

JEFF. What's your point?

TERRY. My point is that while Adam was sitting around, planning to kill himself, I'm sure he was imagining more than a dozen people at his funeral. That's fucking sad. *(A beat.)*

JEFF. At least his wife and his little girl were there.

TERRY. Yeah. She had a hot little ass. *(A beat.)* The wife.

JEFF. Jesus Christ ...

TERRY. She was checking me out, too ... *(Terry takes a small vial of cocaine from his pocket.)* You want?

JEFF. What are you — No.

TERRY. Okay. Don't judge. *(Terry takes a couple of snorts and tucks the vial away.)*

JEFF. I wonder what was going through his head that night.

TERRY. Well, let's see, he was wandering around the city, after downing an entire bottle of Xanax. My guess is he just wanted an orange soda and a pillow.

JEFF. Hey. The man is dead. Could you just — I don't know, could you just have a little —

TERRY. What? *Respect?* *(A beat.)* Fuck that. He made his choice.

Fine. But I'm not gonna sit around and feel guilty, because that's exactly what he would've wanted, the little prick.

JEFF. Why would you feel guilty?

TERRY. *(Doing another bump.)* Fuck you. You know why. Don't play that shit with me.

JEFF. I don't know why. Tell me.

TERRY. You're serious.

JEFF. Yeah.

TERRY. I let him go.

JEFF. *What?*

TERRY. Come on. You're saying nobody — Fuck. I fired him, all right? In his time of desperation. I am what some might call a contributing factor to his aggregate misery. And you know what? I choose not to feel bad about that.

JEFF. You knew what he was going through.

TERRY. *(A threat.)* Jeff, I swear to God —

JEFF. You knew about his wife.

TERRY. *Shut up! Shut the fuck up!* I didn't know shit. I didn't know

what was going on in that loser head of his. All I know is that his worked sucked. All I know is that he had three months to deliver on the Southern account. *Three months.* You know what he came up with? Nothing. He gave me nothing. I came to you, it took you about ten minutes before you —

JEFF. Don't do that ...

TERRY. What?

JEFF. Don't include me in any of your bullshit rationalization. *What the fuck is wrong with you?* He was a human being ...

TERRY. *And I'm not.* Yeah, you already made that clear. *Twice.*

Don't do it again. Who are you — *(A beat.)* Look, I get it, okay? You're in there, looking at that — I love you, brother. You're the smartest guy I know. But, what'd you wanna be when you grew up?

'Cause I'm pretty sure it wasn't my bitch. You're looking into that casket, and you don't see Adam. All you see is yourself, so you're freaked the fuck out. And I can appreciate that. But that's not me in there. I choose to live. I am not *subject*. I look in that box, all I see is the coward. Well, fuck him. His life was his life. He lived it the way he lived it. Check came due, he paid it the only way he could. Fine. That was his decision. I was his boss. My only responsibility was to the — was to the — *IDIDN'T KNOW, ALL RIGHT?*

JEFF. We all get a check.
TERRY. The fuck is that supposed to mean?
JEFF. *(After a beat.)* Nothing. It doesn't mean anything. *(A beat.)* Let me have a shot of whatever that is. *(Terry takes out his flask and hands it to Jeff. Jeff takes a long swig. A pause. Handing back the flask.)* I'm quitting, Terry.

TERRY. What? What are you talking about?
JEFF. You heard me.
TERRY. Why? Because of this? Because of *me?*

JEFF. No, not because of you.
TERRY. Then what? You can't — I need you, buddy. *(A beat.)* Listen, about Adam ... I feel — I don't know, I feel ...

JEFF. It's not about Adam. Not really.
TERRY. Not really? See, you're just — Hold on. Okay? Just — Look. Talk to me here. Talk to *me*. As a friend.

JEFF. As a friend?
TERRY. Yeah. What the fuck is that look about? What, we're not friends all of a sudden?

JEFF. We're friends.

TERRY. Then what?

JEFF. *(As much truth as has ever been between them.)* I don't have the time anymore.

TERRY. You don't have the time?

JEFF. No.

TERRY. What does that —

JEFF. I'll come in this week and go through my accounts with Craig. He can handle them.

TERRY. You're serious about this.

JEFF. Yeah. *(Terry stares at Jeff. This is for real.)*

TERRY. Fine.

JEFF. I gotta go. *(Jeff starts to walk away.)*

TERRY. Yeah, all right. This is — Fine. Fuck. Fine. *(A beat.)* Hey!

JEFF. *(Turning back.)* What?

TERRY. You're fucked, man.

JEFF. *(If you only knew.)* Yeah. *(Jeff exits. Terry can do nothing but watch him go. Blackout.)*

Scene 2

A small table in a quiet restaurant.

Jeff and Carrie Ann sit, sipping at their after-dinner drinks, a bit drunk.

JEFF. I wanted to be a carpenter.

CARRIE ANN. Really?

JEFF. Yeah. I remember sitting with my father, having one of the, like, six conversations we had while he was still around. I must've been, I don't know, eight, and he asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up. I told him I wanted to make furniture for poor families. You had to see his face. I guess he was sure I'd say I wanted to be a fireman or a ball player. I told him I thought poor people needed furniture, and maybe they couldn't afford it. I said I would charge them forty dollars. I remember asking if that was a lot.

CARRIE ANN. That's sweet.

JEFF. You think? 'Cause he just sat, looking at me like I was this pathetic — He looked at me and said, "You're gonna end up a loser. You know that, don't you?"

CARRIE ANN. You're shitting me ...

JEFF. No. That's what he said. And I don't know why — I was just a kid, and I figured this would be an airright defense, so I said, "Jesus made furniture, He wasn't a loser." And he just snorted and said, "Yeah, and look how it turned out for Him."

CARRIE ANN. What an asshole.

JEFF. I guess. *(A beat.)* What about you?

CARRIE ANN. What?

JEFF. What did you want to be when you were —

CARRIE ANN. A photographer.

JEFF. Figures.

CARRIE ANN. I don't know. Yeah.

JEFF. How did you know —

CARRIE ANN. Let's not do this.

JEFF. Why?

CARRIE ANN. *Why?* What do you want me to — You just got finished demonstrating what a monumental prick your father was.

JEFF. And...?

CARRIE ANN. And mine wasn't. I'm not gonna sit here and —

JEFF. It's okay. *(A beat.)* We never — Just talk to me about him.

(A beat.) Please ...

CARRIE ANN. Fine. I don't know what you want me to — *(A beat.)* He was ... He was bigger than life. And when he wrapped his arms around you, you felt — I don't know. He was ...

JEFF. What?

CARRIE ANN. He was an artist. Or everything I thought an artist should be. Whatever that means. Optimistic. Curious. Compassionate. *(A beat.)* Maybe I didn't always know that I wanted to be a photographer. But as far back as I can remember, I wanted to be like him.

JEFF. He was a photographer?

CARRIE ANN. Yes.

JEFF. Was he good?

CARRIE ANN. Good?

JEFF. Yeah, was he as talented as —

CARRIE ANN. You don't define art in terms of good or bad.

JEFF. Okay. *(A beat.)*