IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of SEMINAR must give credit to the Author of the Play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play, and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for the purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line on which no other name appears, immediately following the title and must appear in size of type not less than fifty percent of the size of the title type.

In addition the following credit must be given in all programs and publicity information distributed in association with this piece:

Billing Page:

Seminar opened on Broadway on November 20, 2011 and was presented by Jeffrey Finn, Jill Furman, John N. Hart Jr. and Patrick Milling Smith, Roy Furman, David Ian, David Mirvish, Amy Nouriokas, and James Spry, with associated producers Matthew Schneider, Wake UP Marconi, Jamie Kaye-Phillips, and Charles Stone/Ben Limberg; the executive producer/general manager was 1010 Productions, LTD. The production played the John Golden Theatre.

Sam Gold directed the play. Scenic and costume design was by David Zinn, lighting design was by Ben Stanton, original music and sound design was by John Gromada; the casting was by McCap Casting, the production manager was Peter Fulbright, and the production stage manager was Charles Means.

Programs (bottom of title page) and advertising and publicity:

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SEMINAR premiered on Broadway on November 20, 2011 at the John Golden Theatre in New York City, presented by Jeffrey Finn, Jill Furman, John N. Hart Jr. and Patrick Milling Smith, Roy Furman, David Ian, David Mirvish, Amy Nouriokas, and James Spry, with associated producers Matthew Schneider, Wake UP Marconi, Jamie Kaye-Phillips, and Charles Stone/Ben Limberg; with scenic and costume design by David Zinn, lighting design by Ben Stanton, original music and sound design by John Gromada, casting by McCap Casting, production management by Peter Fulbright, and production stage management by Charles Means. The executive producer/general manager was 1010 Productions, LTD. The director was Sam Gold. The cast was as follows:

IZZY .................................................................Hettienne Park
MARTIN .........................................................Hamish Linklater
RATE .................................................................Lily Rabe
DOUGLAS ............................................................Jerry O’Connell
LEONARD ............................................................Alan Rickman
Scene One

(An apartment. IZZY, MARTIN, KATE, and DOUGLAS.)

DOUGLAS. I mean the place is amazing, the grounds are completely, like it's this astonishingly sculpted landscape, where everything seems to be sculpted out of trees and water so that interiority and exteriority meet, you know, what you are surrounded by is this exquisite, idealized just completely perfect environment –

(MARTIN, behind him, can't stand all this.)

-- and the buildings almost hover over the grass, like on a hot summer day when the air is so warm that it's tangible, the manor seems to hover and there's so much, the trees are so present that you can feel them growing. I'm not kidding! You start to realize that medieval conceptions of magic frankly must have just been completely based in a kind of reality, that things were so green and growing that all the time, it must have seemed a sort of magic, at least that's what it feels like because it was just such a creative environment. Everything so perfectly balanced. The interiority and the exteriority. you know that thing that Indigo Jones was always trying for, there's such a perfect harmony between the interior and the exterior world that –

MARTIN. (overlapping) Inigo.

(then)

Inigo.

(then)

INIGO. You said Indigo. It's Inigo.

DOUGLAS. I said Inigo.
MARTIN. No, you said Indigo.
DOUGLAS. I said Inigo.
KATE. It doesn’t matter.
MARTIN. Not if you don’t care about accuracy in language.
KATE. Come on.
MARTIN. But if you do care about accuracy –
DOUGLAS. I said Inigo.
MARTIN. Then it might matter, a little.
DOUGLAS. Anyway it is an awesome place to write. I mean, MacDowell is good too, it’s serious at least, they don’t let just anybody in, which is so necessary. I won’t go to anyplace except Yaddo or MacDowell anymore. Pretty much everywhere else? Let me tell you, the flavor of the desperation is really not to be believed.
IZZY. What are you working on?
DOUGLAS. A couple of stories, the one that The New Yorker asked to see, I did another draft of that, and my agent had some thoughts about the novel that I took a look at. He’s going out with it next week, so we both thought that I should just take one last pass at it, make sure it was as tight as it could be. I just spewed so much of that thing so there’s always hopefully going to be a kind of On The Road chaos to the sound. Not On The Road, hopefully what I achieved is a little more I don’t know, intellectually rigorous than what Kerouac was going for.
MARTIN. Yeah I hope that too. Because On the Road was such a minor achievement.
DOUGLAS. Well, it’s not exactly a world masterpiece.
MARTIN. What did you say?
KATE. Could we not talk about Kerouac? He was a complete psychotic pig. Guys love talking about him and girls are bored to death.
DOUGLAS. Well, he didn’t exactly have a feminist agenda.
IZZY. Thank god for that.
KATE. What? I’m sorry what did you –
IZZY. I just hate all these women who are so hung up about sex.
KATE. So women who don’t like Kerouac are “hung up about sex?”
IZZY. You can’t deny there’s an associative correlation.
KATE. I can absolutely deny there’s an associative correlation. Kerouac was a misogynistic hack. What’s that got to do with women who like sex?
MARTIN. (overlap) No no no no no
IZZY. That’s a little reductive.
KATE. You said anyone who doesn’t like Kerouac is hung up about sex and I’m the one who’s reductive?
MARTIN. Don’t listen to her. She loves him. She reads him in the bathtub. She lights candles and swoons in the bubble bath. “Jack, Jack – Jaaaacckk – ”
(She is laughing. She shoves him. They tussle.)
IZZY. So you guys like, knew each other before this, right?
KATE. High school.
MARTIN. (chiming in) High school.
IZZY. And you still have a crush on him?
KATE. What? No!
MARTIN. No!
KATE. No!
IZZY. Just checking.
KATE. So Douglas, your agent thinks that your novel is ready to go out?
DOUGLAS. Yeah, he’s really optimistic. I mean, you want to be cautious. But a lot of people saw the story in Tin House so there’s just a lot of interest.
IZZY. That story was amazing.
DOUGLAS. Thanks.
IZZY. Really really elegant.
DOUGLAS. Thanks. I was pleased with how it came out. I mean I was so worried about it, because it was risky, you know. To go on that experimental with the language, people aren't trained anymore to be able to hear it, postmodernism has really fallen on hard times although it's not so much postmodern, really as magical realism. That's more tonally where I finally ended up, and I think that, at least, people are still open to. But god! The novel has fallen on hard times, and I'm not talking about e-books. E-books, don't get me started. And on top of it, all anyone wants anymore are memoirs. And I'm not saying, I think it's an interesting form, I'm as curious about the inside of my own brain as anyone but please! Where's the bathroom, Kate, I need to take a piss.

KATE. Oh, it's through the door and down the hall.

DOUGLAS. You have doors on the hallways, I love it. No seriously it's fabulous. Your family owns this place?

KATE. We have the lease. As long as one of us, is like you know a direct whatever.

DOUGLAS. Oh god yeah.

MARTIN. As long as one of you is what?

KATE. It's, you know. It's rent controlled, or stabilized, whatever you call it.

MARTIN. No come on, how much.

KATE. It's very affordable.

MARTIN. You're so old New York.

DOUGLAS. Seriously how much?

KATE. I thought you had to pee Douglas.

DOUGLAS. I do I'm desperate to pee but I'm more desperate to find out how much you pay for this palace.

KATE. It's been in our family a long time.

MARTIN. You don't know?

KATE. Of course I know.

MARTIN. Well then, what is it?

KATE. (beat) Eight hundred...dollars.

MARTIN. (stunned) Eight hundred dollars? What do you mean, eight hundred a day?

KATE. Eight hundred a month.

MARTIN. You never told me that.

KATE. It's not that big a deal.

MARTIN. That you have a free apartment on the Upper West Side? How is that not a "big deal"? I can't believe you never told me this. How have I never heard this?

KATE. It's lucky.

MARTIN. Lucky is a seat on the subway. You have sixteen rooms and a view of the river!

KATE. We have nine rooms! And you can only see the river from two of them.

IZZY. The living room, the dining room and that bedroom –

KATE. Okay three, three rooms have the view.

DOUGLAS. Eight hundred a month. That – is fabulous.

MARTIN. It's socialism for the rich!

KATE. I didn't ask for it!

MARTIN. The rich never do, isn't that funny? People just keep giving them things that they don't ever even ask for!

KATE. Being middle class doesn't make you morally superior, Martin!

MARTIN. I'm not middle class. I'm a nobody with a shitty, expensive apartment in Queens. And I didn't say it made me 'morally superior.'

KATE. It doesn't make you a better writer, either.

DOUGLAS. No, totally, eight hundred a month, it's like having a grant without having to actually get one. Although grants aren't just about money. You have to be careful, flying too under the radar; people don't like that.

(He goes. They all look at each other.)

MARTIN. "People don't like that?" What people?
KATE. You have to stop being so mean to him, Martin! He’s important!

MARTIN. Holy shit. Indigo Jones. The flavor of the desperation.

KATE. (laughing) He knows lots of people!

MARTIN. I know lots of people too.

KATE. The people you know are nobodies who majored in English at itty bitty liberal arts colleges on the East Coast.

MARTIN. You mean like you?

IZZY. Well, he went to Yaddo! And once you have an in there, you have pull, he could get you into Yaddo!

MARTIN. Where the interiority and the exteriority of the landscape have achieved such a supreme state of harmonic convergence that the whole place is about to lift off.

KATE. You’re jealous.

MARTIN. Jealous? Of that?

KATE. You’ve been rejected by Yaddo three times.

MARTIN. Thank you.

KATE. And McDowell—how many—

MARTIN. Yes, thank you. Thank you! I needed to be reminded. Thank you.

IZZY. Well, he’s been a bunch of times. Plus I’m telling you he’s really hooked up. His uncle is like a world famous what was he.

KATE. He was one of the weathermen, one of the terrorists.

IZZY. No. He was a playwright.

KATE. He was a terrorist!

IZZY. He was a famous playwright who went to Harvard.

MARTIN. So what?

IZZY. People care about that stuff Martin you have to stop being such a snob.

MARTIN. I’m a snob?

IZZY. You are a complete snob. Making fun of the way he talks.

MARTIN. He talks like an idiot; his language is subhuman. It would be more interesting if it were subhuman then we could try and interpret what all the grunts and hand gestures mean, we could pretend he was a very clever chimpanzee who was teaching us how language actually worked but he doesn’t do anything as interesting as that. He just says things, idiotic, meaningless, self important observations about nothing, his words have nothing behind them. There’s no music there’s no joy there’s no curiosity there’s nothing. And I’m not talking about a flat terrifying banality of evil nihilistic nothing, I’m talking about nothing.

IZZY. See that’s what I mean. All this talk about language makes it sound like you don’t like him.

KATE. You guys you have to stop talking about him.

IZZY. That’s what I’m saying! Stop making such a big deal about “language.”

MARTIN. I’m a writer we’re all writers if we don’t care about language what should we care about?

IZZY. Sex.

(She leans in, suddenly lifts her shirt, and shows him her tits. MARTIN reacts, startled but not uninterested.)

KATE. Izzy!

MARTIN. Oh. Sex. Oh.

(Laughing. IZZY does a little dance and falls back on the couch, throws her arms up in a pose.)

IZZY. I’m going to write one of those drug menace books. You know all those old mass market paperbacks that have the girls with their shirts off on the covers, all about smoking opium and ruining the lives of men. And then I’m going to pose for the cover and I’m going to be in New York Magazine.

KATE. There’s a career goal. Show your tits to New York Magazine.
IZZY. It's ironic and witty. I'm going to be famous.

(She smiles at MARTIN, clearly flirtatious. DOUGLAS reenters, oblivious. IZZY pulls her shirt down.)

DOUGLAS. This place is great.

(He sits.)

What'd I miss?

(blackout)

Scene Two

(Lights up on LEONARD, fifty, fierce and brilliant.)

LEONARD. You got to understand that this is a totally irrelevant dream state you're hibernating in up here. It's irrelevant. I mean I was just in Moldova, doing research for this, thing, and I ate cabbage with a Chechyan psychopath. Then I'm in Dubai with a bunch of Shiites and Sunnis, people wanting to kill each other. I almost got into a fist fight with this Russian prostitute who was of a totally indeterminate gender, don't get me started on that story, anyway the fact is I was stoned out of my mind. It was fucked up, all of it, but it was relevant. The world we live in? It no longer exists! Last year I was in Rwanda. I was hanging out with this guy, he's a genocide survivor, his arms are gone, chopped off, he can't do anything anymore except beg for whatever pittance, half a bowl of rice some fucking U.N. peacekeeper throws him every other day, the rest of the time he just lies in the mud unless someone like me comes along and helps him get drunk. So I spend like three hours with this guy, listening to him tell his fucking story and finally he gets really quiet and he says, you know, he says, listen man. I got H.I.V. I'm going to die. And I'm like forget it, I'm overwhelmed I go, why are you telling me all this? Why am I the receptacle of this incredible fucking story, man? And he says: because you are a writer. You must write this. It must be told.

(a beat)

How did I get off on this. What were we talking about?

MARTIN. Um, Kate had a story...

LEONARD. Right! Kate's story. Where is it?

MARTIN. It's in your hand.

(LEONARD finds it in his hand.)

LEONARD. Yeah. Right. So what were we talking about?

KATE. The first sentence.
LEONARD. *(reading)* Oh yeah, Christ, I remember now. Oh, Christ. "When truth is acknowledged universally it is also universally disdained." I mean what the fuck, I can't even –

KATE. That's not the whole sentence.

LEONARD. *(abrupt)* Yeah I see that I see the semi-colon, I understand that that means there's only a partial stop and that more is coming but I'm not sure I want to continue. Okay? I'm not even making it through your first sentence. So why don't you tell me what you're doing because it's not exactly drawing me in here.

KATE. What am I –

LEONARD. What are you, yes, what are you doing?

KATE. *(stumbling)* I'm it's a referencing of Jane Austen the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*, it's kind of a sardonic commentary.

LEONARD. What's so fucking sardonic about it?

KATE. It's the narrator she's –

LEONARD. I don't give a shit about the narrator. If I can't get past the first five words how the fuck am I supposed to find out enough about the narrator to care about him?

KATE. It's not a him, it's a her.

LEONARD. Well, see that would be my point. If I can't even tell what gender your narrator is, then you haven't really done your job have you?

KATE. *(defending herself)* How if you don't go past the first five words how can you tell?

LEONARD. Listen to me. Don't defend yourself. If you're defending yourself you're not listening. I do know who your narrator is. She's an over-educated completely inexperienced sexually inadequate girl who has rich parents who give her everything and who has nothing to say, so she sits around and thinks about Jane Austen all the time. I don't give a shit about that person. This is what I'm saying. I don't have to go past the first five words because I already know enough and I don't give a shit.

IZZY. I liked it.

LEONARD. No you didn't.

IZZY. I did, I thought she was sort of doing this thing with sexual irony. Like the lack of sex was sort of like a come on.

DOUGLAS. I like it too. I think it's intelligent and thoughtful. Well done.

MARTIN. I like it too.

LEONARD. Guys! This is very sweet you're all adorable. But don't kid yourselves. You're all going to be nice to her now because her story tanked. But you're not in this together. And trust me, you wouldn't think the story was so great if it really were any good. If it were really good? You'd fucking hate it. Writers in their natural state are about as civilized as feral cats. All this "well done" bullshit means you're not being honest and if you're not honest who gives a shit what you're writing. Who's up next.

*(He tosses KATE's story to the floor and looks around. There is a big old pause.)*

See you next week. Cowards.

*(He goes. They all sit there, silent for a moment.)*

IZZY. Oh god I can't believe how late it is! I have to go! My mom is in the hospital.

DOUGLAS. Wow, that's a drag.

IZZY. You need a ride?

MARTIN. You drove to the Upper West Side?

DOUGLAS. No, I meant on the subway.

MARTIN. You're going to give her a ride on the subway?

DOUGLAS. I just thought she maybe needed company. Her mom is in the hospital, Martin.

IZZY. It's not serious. I mean she's not dying or anything.

DOUGLAS. So you want to have a drink? Like on the way?

IZZY. Sure, great.

*(They go.)*
(MARTIN looks at KATE.)

MARTIN. You okay?
KATE. What do you think, Martin? Am I okay? AM I OKAY?
MARTIN. Sorry.
KATE. What an asshole. What a jerk.
MARTIN. Yeah.
KATE. People think he's a genius what is so fucking genius about that?
MARTIN. That is what I've been saying! "Let me give you a ride home." The guy's a moron.
KATE. Not Douglas, Martin! I'm talking about Leonard. Leonard is an idiot!
MARTIN. Oh, I thought you were talking about Douglas.
KATE. Did you think that was smart? Did you think him standing there and telling us all that we're fucking losers if we don't go to Egypt and smoke water pipes, we're we're completely irrelevant as human beings if we read The New York Times, does that seem SMART to you?
MARTIN. That's not really what he said.
KATE. It is absolutely what he said! I'm irrelevant because I live in a nice apartment I love that. How about I'm irrelevant because I'm an overeducated girl -
MARTIN. That's not what he said.
KATE. He said I was sexually inadequate!
MARTIN. He said the story was sexually inadequate.
KATE. How would he know, he didn't read more than six words!
MARTIN. He's not talking about you, he's talking about the story.
KATE. A story he hasn't read.
MARTIN. He read the first page. I mean, we all sat here right, and watched him read the first page.
KATE. Big fucking deal! What is your point, Martin?

MARTIN. I don't have a point! I just mean that's all we get right? Everybody says it. If you don't get them on the first page, that's all you get.
KATE. So it's my fault?! That I stood here and got completely humiliated by that asshole?
(She disappears into the apartment, yelling back. MARTIN waits.)

(Off) Everybody acted like, they all said he's ROUGH but he's a GREAT TEACHER BUT I DON'T SEE WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT JUST BEING ABUSED. THAT'S NOT TEACHING THAT'S JUST BEING A SHITHEAD. IF I WANT SOMEONE TO TELL ME I'M WASTING MY TIME I CAN JUST TALK TO MY MOTHER. EVERYONE THINKS IT'S SO COOL AND FUN TO BE MEAN TO ARTISTS BUT IF WE WEREN'T HERE THERE WOULD BE NOTHING BUT ANARCHY AND IMMORALITY AND CHAOS. WE ARE THE SOUL OF THE CULTURE AND PEOPLE CAN JUST FUCKING BE NICE TO US ONCE IN A WHILE.

(She reappears, carrying bags of chips and diet soda and ice cream. She sits down and starts to eat.)

MARTIN. What are you doing?
KATE. I'm depressed and I'm trying to make myself feel better is that all right with you?
MARTIN. Don't be depressed.
KATE. My story got creamed. I'm depressed. I'm a depressed feral cat.
MARTIN. If you think he's stupid what do you care if he didn't like your story?
KATE. I didn't think he was stupid until he was stupid to me today.
MARTIN. So if he liked your story that would make him not stupid?
KATE. Yes! If he liked my story that would make him smart. Okay? Okay? Okay?
MARTIN. Just wanted to be sure.
KATE. Why are you still here? Douglas is out there having drinks with the love of your life, why are you hanging out with the loser?

MARTIN. She's not the love of my life are you kidding?

KATE. Give me a break.

MARTIN. She's a twit!

KATE. Yeah, guys hate that. It sucks that she's gorgeous, too.

MARTIN. Look. She's all right. No, I mean, okay, she's attractive, no one is going to say she's not attractive.

(He starts to eat, obsessively, everything in sight.)

KATE. Oh my god you should hear yourself. ‘Attractive.’ Why don't you just put a gun to your own head, you're so completely in love with her. Do you think it's not utterly obvious to absolutely everyone who sees you in the same room with her?

MARTIN. I am not ‘in love’ with her. She's clearly got something going with Douglas. How she can even stand to talk to him for more than fifteen seconds at a go, is a mystery. The guy is an unmitigated embarrassment to the human race. Seriously. ‘Can I give you a ride?’ Give her a ride! It's so Darien. Maybe he could ‘give her a ride’ to Yaddo, where the interiority and the exteriority of the landscape is so stunningly in sync with the diasporic essentiality of the mimetic dialogue between self and culture. Maybe that's what he should do.

KATE. Don't kid yourself she would love a ride to Yaddo. Don't eat all the chips I want those.

MARTIN. Fuck me. Fuck her. Fuck him.

KATE. No fuck me! I'm the one who got creamed. This sucks. That story is fantastic. I have been working on that fucking story for six years, people love that story! You love that story.

MARTIN. Well.

KATE. What? What?

MARTIN. Nothing.

KATE. You don't love that story.

MARTIN. It's okay. You've been working on it for six years.

KATE. That's right I've been working on it for six years because people like it, people – Frank Conroy read it, before he died, he was the writer in residence up at Bennington for one month and he read that story and you know what he said to me? He said it was 'much better than most.' Not better than most. 'Much' better than most.

MARTIN. 'Much better than most,' that is so lame, Kate.

KATE. Yes, it would be lame, coming from you but it didn't come from you, it came from Frank Conroy. You know who else likes that story? Tobias Wolf. He read it when I took that summer writing class and he said it had some nice things in it.

MARTIN. Kate do you even hear yourself? You know how long you've been working on that story? Six years –

KATE. That's right, SIX YEARS.

MARTIN. Why have you been writing the same story for six years?

KATE. Because it's a good story! It's a really good story. When I was at Bennington –

MARTIN. Jesus, was there ever a time when you weren't at Bennington? You exist in an alternate universe called Bennington.'

KATE. I learned a lot there, Martin.

MARTIN. What you learned was how to write one lousy story in six years.

(a silence)

MARTIN. That's not, I didn't mean the story was lousy.

KATE. Fuck you did too.

MARTIN. Well why are you writing the same story for six years?

KATE. Because people kept telling me it was good but that it needed more work!

MARTIN. Well then Leonard just did you a big favor, didn't he?
(a beat)

KATE. Meaning?

MARTIN. Now you can write something else.

(a beat)

KATE. You know, this is my apartment, so I can’t walk out. Could you walk out please?

MARTIN. No no, don’t do that. Come on, don’t do that.


MARTIN. No no no

KATE. I mean it, Martin – Martin –

MARTIN. Come on, listen to me. Listen.

(He takes her hands. She looks away.)

I have to tell you something.

(She looks up at him. He holds her hand.)

KATE. What?

MARTIN. I’m getting kicked out of my apartment because I’m a little late on the rent. Can I stay here? I mean, you got like nine extra bedrooms. And it’s free! Who knew it was free? I can stay, right?

(She looks at him. Blackout.)

Scene Three

(LEONARD is taking off his jacket and scarf, looking at the others, who are sitting dutifully around him.)

LEONARD. So who’s got something, who are we starting with today?

(There is silence. No one moves. LEONARD laughs.)

Come on children we don’t have all night. What are we here for? Am I a fucking writer, or am I a fucking piece of shit coward? Am I trying to construct a living breathing cosmos with language or am I just scratching on the wall of a cave? Am I feral cat or am I a useless goldfish in a bowl that would be better off someone flushed it down the toilet? Which is what’s going to happen to it anyway.

(IZZY twitches, nervous.)

IZZY. (blurtting) I have something. I have a story. I didn’t know if Douglas and Martin had something, I was thinking maybe they would want to go, or maybe Kate has something else –

KATE. No.

IZZY. Okay, well, I do have something.

(handing it over)

I haven’t been working on it very long. I just started it. About a week a few days ago.

LEONARD. Yeah I can tell.

(He holds it up; it’s only two pages.)

IZZY. Oh. Well but. Okay.

(He starts to read as he talks.)

LEONARD. No it’s good, if you have something on the page you should let people see it for Christ’s sake. All this rewriting people do, it squeezes the guts out of everything. I read this story last week, couple weeks ago, it was so fucking lifeless, this person had clearly been
rewriting this stupid thing for maybe ten years, there
was just nothing left to it except a sort of desiccated
corpse, it was ludicrous. If you’re going to write, be a
fucking man about it. Kerouac wrote *On the Road* in
like a week or something.

**KATE.** Okay, I’m sorry but what did you say? Did you say
you want us to "be a fucking man" about writing, and
that that we should write like Kerouac?

**LEONARD.** You should write like yourself.

**KATE.** Yes. Yes. I agree with that but if my "self" is a woman,
I don’t see why I then should write like a man.

**LEONARD.** If you’re going to be some fucking feminist
about it, that would be up to you, but I can’t help you
with that.

**KATE.** Feminist, I didn’t say feminist, I said woman. Woman.
What is wrong with being a woman and being a writer.

**LEONARD.** You would have to answer that for yourself.

**KATE.** But you said it. You said, "be a man," be Jack Kerouac
who was a total pig to women –

**LEONARD.** Look, you want to argue about feminist politics,
I’m not here to argue with you about that. I’m here to
talk about writing.

**KATE.** But we’re not talking about writing –

**LEONARD.** Well, no because you’ve commandeered the
conversation. Is it all right with you if we talk about the
story your fellow writer has presented to the group?

**KATE.** Sure. Of course. Sure.

(There is a moment of silence while LEONARD reads. He
laughs at something. **IZZY** smiles. As LEONARD keeps
laughing, **IZZY** is more and more pleased.)

**LEONARD.** Well, this is...It’s fresh. It’s lively as hell. Do you
have copies?

**IZZY.** (happy) Yes, yes I do.

**LEONARD.** Okay, pass them out because people should,
we’ll talk about this one. There is real energy here. A
lightness, a touch, a sexual edge to the language which
is I got to say, it got me on board. Va voom. Like, this
thing I read last week – I don’t remember when I read it – it was like a lump of nothing, there was no forward
motion, it just laid there, the words were like lumps of
shit –

**KATE.** Hey. HEY. Could you, I mean, I just, that’s – if you
don’t –

**LEONARD.** Look, what is your problem? I am trying to teach
a class here!

**KATE.** You’re not teaching, you’re just insulting – me
– you’re just –

**LEONARD.** I’m not insulting anybody I’m telling your fellow
writer – what’s your name again?

**IZZY.** Izzy.

**LEONARD.** I’m telling Izzy about the experience of reading
her story! Which you know you might want to partici-
pat e in. But, if you can’t support your fellow writer,
that would be up to you.

**KATE.** Look, this is –

**MARTIN.** Maybe if we continued to talk about Izzy's story –

**LEONARD.** That’s what I’m trying to do –

**MARTIN.** Without – I think what Kate is getting hung up on
is that you keep insulting her work.

**LEONARD.** This isn’t about her!

**MARTIN.** Yes. That’s right. But it’s hard, because you keep
bringing up that story, from last week –

**LEONARD.** That’s got nothing to do with her!

**MARTIN.** Well, it was her story, so –

**LEONARD.** That wasn’t her story!

**MARTIN.** It wasn’t?

**KATE.** It wasn’t?

**LEONARD.** No, Christ! That was a totally different situ-
ation, that’s what I’m saying! That was somebody else’s
story, this relentlessly talent-free story about some girl
who had this obsession with Jane Austen, Christ what a
soul-sucking waste of words that was.
MARTIN. That was Kate's story.
LEONARD. That was your story?
KATE. Yes, that was my story.
LEONARD. Oh. Oh! That was your story.
KATE. Yes.
LEONARD. Oh. Okay. Sorry. You know. Obviously I didn’t think that story really worked. But this, you know... who wrote this?
IZZY. I did.
LEONARD. This has a great, you know, really great sexual feel to it.
IZZY. Thank you.
LEONARD. The tone of Asian exoticism, it's good. I was in Shanghai once, have you been to Shanghai?
IZZY. I have an uncle who lives there.
LEONARD. I bet you do.
DOUGLAS. Can we talk about the story? I just have some questions. Because I admire it, I really do Izzy, there's a terrific tone that's both sinister and wry, that I think is truly original but I'm actually a little unsure where, of course not that with two pages you'd have to have the whole thing planned out but I'm more or less curious –
LEONARD. Where? Who gives a shit where. Why would you ask that question at this point, don’t ask where, when “where” is the point, am I right?
(He looks at IZZY, who has the good grace to be confused.)
IZZY. Well, it’s just really new. I think “where” is a good question. That’s why I wasn’t sure I should even show it to you. Because “where” –
LEONARD. I’m not saying “where” is not a good question. But that’s what I admire about the energy of the opening. It dares to ask that question and not know the answer. The writing itself is asking the question. See, this reminds me, when I was at Yale with Penn Warren, there was no getting past him, no point even trying.

He was ruthless and religious about sound. Everything else, intellect, idea, motion, character, all were secondary, if the sound wasn’t there, there was no discussion even capable of continuing in a meaningful – I’m not saying this right. No. I am, actually. I am. This has a sound. It rings like a bell. It doesn’t matter that there’s no subject or story or idea or meaning. It’s got power. It’s got sex. Well done. Well done. What’s your name?
IZZY. Izzy.
LEONARD. Well done, Izzy. What else have you got?
(He sits next to her on the couch. The intentions of his attention are clear. She looks at him, smiles.)
(blackout)
Scene Four

(It is later the same night. Martin sits on the side of the couch, drinking a beer, watching Kate move in and out of the room with a bowl of cookie dough. She holds it and mixes it with a blender. The plug pulls out of the wall in the next room. She goes back and plugs it in, then re-enters with the whirring mixer.)

Kate. Two pages. It wasn’t even two pages. It was a page and a half!

Martin. It’s more than a page and a half.

Kate. It’s not two pages.

Martin. It’s almost two pages.

Kate. What can you fucking tell from two fucking pages?

Martin. Two good pages?

Kate. They’re not good! How can you say they’re good! You don’t honestly think those two idiotic pages are good!

Martin. They’re not bad, Kate –

Kate. They’re horrible! Oh my god do you honestly think that shit is good?

Martin. I think –

Kate. You just want to sleep with her; you don’t know what you think. I can’t believe it.

(He watches her eat a big spoon of cookie dough.)

Martin. What are you doing?

Kate. I’m eating cookie dough.

Martin. I can’t believe girls actually do that. Girls actually do that.

Kate. I can’t believe that men think that because they maybe want to sleep with someone that means she’s a good writer. That is what I can’t believe.

(Martin starts to eat the cookie dough with her.)

Martin. She is a good writer.

Kate. I am a good writer, Martin! Just because none of you want to sleep with me, that doesn’t mean I’m not any good! Let me tell you something, if this writing seminar were made up of exclusively lesbian writers, I’d be a fucking star.

Martin. Are you a lesbian?

Kate. Martin! You know I’m not a lesbian!

Martin. People change their minds.

Kate. Well, I have not changed my mind. I’m just a lonely bad writer who’s getting fat.

Martin. Shit. This stuff is delicious.

(They fight over the bowl.)

Listen. You are totally hot. You don’t need a bunch of lesbians to tell you that.

Kate. Izzy is hot.

Martin. You’re hot too. I often go to bed thinking about you in the bath tub with Jack Kerouac. That turned out to be a very potent image for me. “Jack, Jack, Jack –”

Kate. Oh that’s the thumping I’ve been hearing, down the hall.

Martin. “Jack, Jack, Jack –”

Kate. Give me that –

(Laughing, she climbs on top of him. There is a moment which gets just a shred too close. The door buzzes. The buzzer continues, insistent. The moment evaporates. She goes to the wall and hits it.)

Martin. What’s that?

Kate. Chinese food.

Martin. You ordered Chinese food?

Kate. Yes I did. I’m a terrible writer and I am committed to getting fat. It’s a commitment now.

Martin. Kate, I think your story was really good.
KATE. You do not. Leonard hated it so much that within one week it's become legendary in his imagination, how bad it was. And now I'm stuck here. I'm stuck here with that asshole in my apartment for TEN WEEKS. I suck. My life has no meaning.

MARTIN. Your life has meaning.

KATE. No it doesn't and yours doesn't either.

MARTIN. My life has meaning.

KATE. Please. It does not. On top of which you're afraid that the girl you're crushing on –

MARTIN. I'm not crushing on Izzy –

KATE. It doesn't matter if you are or not because she has other fish to fry, doesn't she, she's not afraid to show off her writing, and she's going to get it published too because Izzy is not afraid of doing whatever she has to and right now she is off having sex with our hideous and disgusting teacher.

MARTIN. Izzy is not having sex with Leonard. That would be completely unethical.

KATE. Which is why of course it would never happen.

(He opens another bottle. There is a knock at the door. KATE answers it.)

Hi Douglas, what are you doing here?

(He bares in and sits. MARTIN stares at him.)

DOUGLAS. She's having sex with him! It's completely unethical. I mean, I wouldn't care, it's not like I'm a prude god knows.

MARTIN. Izzy's not having sex with Leonard.

DOUGLAS. They went home together!

MARTIN. You don't know that!

DOUGLAS. Martin. We left the apartment and went to that shity bar across the street to have a drink. After three glasses of wine each, he looked her in the face and said, you want to come back to my place? And she said sure. And they left. Together.

MARTIN. That doesn't mean she slept with him.

DOUGLAS. They were making out on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant! Right in front of me. The table is here. The plate glass window is here. And they start making out right here. If the window hadn't been there, they would have been in my lap. He was feeling her up right in front of me.

MARTIN. Come on.

DOUGLAS. Do you think I'd make something like that up?

MARTIN. Well, what was she doing?

DOUGLAS. She was participating!

MARTIN. That is so unethical. For Leonard to take advantage of her like that.

KATE. You are insane.

MARTIN. You don't think it's unethical.

KATE. I think that Izzy is going to get her story published in The New Yorker is what I think.

DOUGLAS. You can't get your work published by sleeping with your fiction teacher, Kate.

KATE. I'm sorry what did you say?

DOUGLAS. I just don't think that Izzy is naive enough to think that sleeping with Leonard will help her career.

KATE. Naive? You think it's "naive" of her to think something like that?

DOUGLAS. I think I know a little bit more about it than you do.

KATE. Oh that was helpful.

DOUGLAS. I just meant.

KATE. I know what you meant. Here's what I meant: calling a woman or a man who sleeps with a powerful guy naïve, is naïve.

DOUGLAS. Which is still unethical. It just makes Leonard's behavior coercive.
KATE. Coercive! Maybe it was coercive of Izzy to write two pages of a story that's all about sex and then go have drinks with her fucked up writing teacher who can't remember anybody's name because he's constantly thinking about his dick. Maybe that was the coercive part.

DOUGLAS. And maybe you're jealous.

KATE. Maybe I'm jealous? Maybe you're an idiot —

DOUGLAS. Maybe I'm an idiot? Maybe —

 MARTIN. SHUT UP! Would both of you just — shut up?
 Please. Just shut up.

Really sad and depressed, MARTIN takes another bottle of beer, looks at them, tries to speak, can't, and goes.)

(buzzer)

DOUGLAS. What's that?

KATE. Chinese food.

(blackout)

Scene Five

(LEONARD is looking at some pages. All four sit and watch him. LEONARD paces. He finishes reading a page, drops it to the ground. He reads another page, paces. Drops it to the ground. He starts to read another page. It is excruciating. Finally he glances through the other pages, looks up at DOUGLAS.)

LEONARD. Your uncle said you were talented.

DOUGLAS. Oh, thank you. That's really nice of you to say.

LEONARD. I didn't say you were talented. I said, your UNCLE said you were talented.

(then)

I didn't say you weren't talented. This is not without talent. This section about the top of the girl's dresser, the two bottles of fingernail polish standing next to each other like "lost and terrified soldiers," that's not bad. It's nice that you've already referenced the peeling of the red polish on her toes, so we get the allusion to blood without having stated it explicitly. It's all right. Good, even. Your description of the butterfly poster over the bed is first rate. It's not the pedestrian interpretation one might be tempted to make about teenage girls and butterflies. "There was a time when tribal peoples had carved butterflies into stone, had reckoned them messengers from the gods." Those tribal peoples are fantastic, the way you drop them in, it's a beautiful surprise. You paint her bedroom well.

DOUGLAS. Thank you.

MARTIN. Wow. A teenage girl's bedroom. Wow.

LEONARD. You don't like it?

MARTIN. No, it's terrific. Well done.

LEONARD. No, go ahead.
MARTIN. I like it. I'm a little confused about the relevance factor, just two weeks ago you told us all we should be writing about dying beggars in the Sudan, so I'm not without confusion now, how does that, but it's not without talent. That's what I always said about Douglas, he's not without talent.

LEONARD. Don't be such a pussy.

MARTIN. A pussy.

LEONARD. You don't think you're being a pussy?

MARTIN. Do I think I'm being a pussy?

IZZY. Martin.

MARTIN. "Martin," what? Do you like it?

IZZY. I do, yeah, I like it a lot.

MARTIN. Do you think I'm being a pussy?

KATE. I think it's a pretty good story, too. It's good, Douglas.

MARTIN. Oh it's a "pretty good story" and I'm a pussy, that's great. I thought this was a writing seminar where we discussed, um, "writing" with something approaching intellectual sophistication. "Pretty good story" and I'm a "pussy." We're ascending the heights here.

LEONARD. I think the word "pussy" is pretty intellectually sophisticated. It communicates pretty precisely the meaning I'm looking for.

MARTIN. My point - my point is -

LEONARD. I know your point. You don't like me calling you a pussy, even though you're acting like a pussy, because you're here to discuss the writing, you guys are all paying me a lot of money, because you think I can help you understand the craft of writing better, so that you can go off and have successful so-called careers, as writers of fiction, which is more or less my specialty. Or is something else your problem.

(He is standing behind IZZY. He puts his hand on her hair and strokes it, once. MARTIN looks at them both.)

MARTIN. No, that's pretty much my problem. I'm here to talk about writing, I'd like to do that without the word pussy being involved unless that's a big problem for you.

LEONARD. (a beat) No, I think I can handle that.

MARTIN. Thank you.

LEONARD. So why don't you tell us what you think about the story. Since you want to stay focused on the writing, and you don't think you're a pussy, I think we'd all like to hear what you have to say about today's writing specimen, offered up to us with friendly, indeed almost dog-like equanimity, by our not untalented friend, Douglas. Douglas your uncle mentioned that The New Yorker is seriously looking at one of your stories, is that this one?

DOUGLAS. Yes, I, yes it is, it is actually.

LEONARD. Why don't you tell us what you think about that, Martin.

(There is a pause.)

DOUGLAS. Look -

LEONARD. You stay out of this. Come on, Martin! Tell your fellow writer - the one person in the room who is in fact succeeding at something you are failing at - tell him what you think. And tell the truth. Come on! Come on!

MARTIN. All right -

IZZY. Well I love it. Seriously, the language is amazing, Douglas. I just learned a ton from it. And frankly, I know that Martin thinks so too. He told me last week! We both read your other story, the one in Tin House and Martin flipped.

LEONARD. Did he?

IZZY. Yes he did. He thinks Douglas is a thrilling writer.

That's what he told me at least.

MARTIN. Yeah, I like Douglas's work a lot.

KATE. I like it too, Douglas. It's good.
DOUGLAS. Thanks Izzy. Thanks Kate. Thanks Martin.

(They all sit in silence for a moment, while LEONARD
laughs a little, shakes his head.)

LEONARD. You guys are hilarious. All right. Good for you,
Martin, that Izzy managed to tell us all how much you
liked Douglas's writing before you told him it sucked.
Because that would have been awkward.

MARTIN. It doesn't suck, it's good.

LEONARD. Yes, it is good. There's a level of competence
here that is almost chilling in its thoroughness. This is
the perfection rendition of a New Yorker story. Capable,
graceful in places, a detached tone of perplexed intel-
ligence, you have a relatively famous last name, in
literary circles, not too famous but famous enough. It's
not a home run but it's a standing double.

(He hands it back to DOUGLAS.)

DOUGLAS. Well, but I'd really like to hear some criticism.

LEONARD. Oh you'd like that.

DOUGLAS. I would! I'd love to build on what's here. See
if I can mine the interiority of the Stephanie charac-
ter especially, I feel like she's just, there's a few places
where the complexity of her need for emotional dis-
tance is maybe not fully rendered.

LEONARD. Yeah, that's the problem with emotionally dis-
tant characters, it's hard to write about them because
who gives a shit finally about someone who's got no
interior life.

DOUGLAS. No I don't think she has no interior life, that's
not——

LEONARD. All right. I'm going to level with you. I'm going
to give you some advice here that I think is going to be
totally like on the money useful to you.

DOUGLAS. Great.

LEONARD. It's going to sound a little rough but you expect
that, yeah? I mean, you're not going to turn into a big
baby about the truth unlike some other people?

DOUGLAS. No. Of course not.

LEONARD. Good. Because there is something in your writ-
ing — it's hard to, it's around the tonal perfection,
there's a kind of — its a little like a whore.

DOUGLAS. The character of Stephanie?

LEONARD. No no not the character. You. The way you talk
about writing is kind of stupid. Plus, the way you write
is so unimaginative in the way it attacks the problem
you set yourself. I mean, it's skillful, but whorish. It's
like the way you play your name off, your connections,
you're a name dropper, you're a whore. And that's
in the writing. It's perfect, in a kind of whorish way. I
don't know why you're wasting your time on fiction. I
mean, you're good at it, I'm not saying you're not.

DOUGLAS. No. Oh! No.

LEONARD. It's just — if you can do this? Why not make a ton
of money doing this. You're capable, you've got a few
publications under your belt, a famous last name, they
love that shit in Hollywood. You could make a fuck-
load of money. Or you could spend the rest of your
life writing fiction that nobody reads or respects, even
if they read it. Cause you're talented, like I said, but
you're never going to be great. And there are a lot of
people who are never going to be great, most fiction
writers just evaporate, really, but that's going to be a
problem for you because of your kind of whorish atti-
dude to the whole thing, the name dropping, and of
course the name. It will in fact be particularly degrad-
ing and even humiliating to be ignored to the degree
you will be ignored. Because at the same time you'll
be allowed in, because of the name. You'll be invited
to cocktail parties. You'll get to go to exclusive events
at the Public Library. But you will never be on a panel.
Because too many people who know shit will know: It's
hollow. The work is hollow. I'd think about Hollywood.

DOUGLAS. Oh.

MARTIN. Yeah but... the story is excellent.
LEONARD. Yes we’ve all heard that you think the story is thrilling. I don’t think it’s thrilling. I think it’s good, in a whorish way, and that that is the level of his writing ambition, and that he could make a fuckload of money in Hollywood.

DOUGLAS. But I, I’m a fiction writer.

LEONARD. You asked for the truth. That’s the truth I have.

DOUGLAS. Yes. No. Thanks.

LEONARD. All right then. I got to go to Somalia tomorrow so I’ll see you pussies in two weeks.

(And he goes. There is a long moment of silence.)

KATE. He’s going to Somalia. Maybe someone will shoot him.

MARTIN. I think it’s a really good story.

DOUGLAS. Fuck you. You think it’s shit. At least he told me what he really thinks.

(then)

Could someone check in the hallway and make sure that he’s gone?

KATE. Sure.

(She opens the door, goes out, looks down the stairs. Comes back in.)

KATE. He’s gone.

DOUGLAS. Good.

(He goes.)

KATE. Douglas, wait. Don’t just go walking off, Douglas wait!

(MARTIN goes after him, leaving the door standing open. MARTIN sits on the couch, morose. IZZY turns back to him.)

IZZY. You’re an asshole.

MARTIN. I’m an asshole? HE’S an asshole! Not Douglas. Leonard. I think Douglas is a shit writer, but he’s not an asshole. He’s not actually a shit writer, either. He’s a pretty good writer, who mostly writes shit.
MARTIN. Yes. I see your point there. You, clearly, you should go ahead and do whatever you think you need to do.

IZZY. Just for the record, however, I did not sleep with Leonard.

MARTIN. It’s none of my business. You’re right.

IZZY. I didn’t sleep with him! Don’t you believe me?

MARTIN. It doesn’t matter if I believe you or not, Izzy, it’s none of my business –

IZZY. Are you calling me a liar now? Now I’m not just a whore, I’m a liar and a whore?

MARTIN. I didn’t say that!

IZZY. Douglas is right. At least Leonard tells the truth.

(She goes and gets her purse, to go.)

MARTIN. Look, why are you mad at me? You’re right! I’m pathetic, I’m a pathetic – chicken – but I just, I think that you could do a lot better than that, that – You’re so beautiful, Izzy, you’re exquisite, really, just – funny and smart and so full of life –

IZZY. Am I?

MARTIN. Well…yeah.

IZZY. You’re right. Since I’m not sleeping with him, I could surely do a lot better.

MARTIN. Well, you could.

IZZY. Could I?

MARTIN. Well…yeah.

(She starts to move toward him.)

IZZY. How much better?

MARTIN. Well…a lot. Really a whole lot. A lot.

(She is close. She kisses him. And kisses him again. He participates.)

IZZY. You know what, Martin? I think you’re right. Where’s your bedroom?

MARTIN. Where’s –

IZZY. The bedroom. The bedroom, Martin. The bedroom.

(He finally comes to his senses and takes her off to his bedroom. There is a moment of silence. Finally, KATE steps inside the open door from the hallway, where she has witnessed the whole scene. She leans against the door, closing it behind her. After a moment, alone, she starts to cry.)

(blackout)
Scene Six

(Two weeks later. DOUGLAS on the couch. He is reading a manuscript.)

DOUGLAS. Kate, get out here. KATE. What is this?

(KATE enters.)

KATE. Do you like it?

DOUGLAS. It's interesting. Who wrote it?

KATE. This friend of mine.

DOUGLAS. Is it true?

KATE. He says it is.

DOUGLAS. A transvestite Cubano gang leader.

KATE. He's pretty extreme, yes.

DOUGLAS. Do you believe it?

KATE. Do I believe it's true?

DOUGLAS. Yeah.

KATE. Well, I knew him at Bennington.

DOUGLAS. So that makes it by default what, true or false?

KATE. I don't know. I thought he was pretty good. The teachers all loved him because he had this exotic Cubano past.

DOUGLAS. How'd he even get there? To Bennington?

KATE. I don't know. Some adult ed prison program.

DOUGLAS. I thought you knew this guy.

KATE. I do know him, he lives in the village. I bumped into him in a coffee shop last week and he told me what he was writing so I said could I see it and...that's what he gave me.

DOUGLAS. He had it on him.

KATE. Yes, he had it on him. Like you, apparently, he has a whorish essence. He'll give it up to anybody.

DOUGLAS. So why am I reading this?

KATE. I'm going to show it to fuckface.

DOUGLAS. Why?

(There is the sound of laughter, then MARTIN.)

MARTIN. (off) Give it to me. Oh my god this is no joke Izzy come on –

(IZZY, in a man's shirt and underwear, runs into the room, laughing, holding several pages. MARTIN grabs her from behind, and they wrestle, laughing as she tries to keep the pages from him. They finally fall against the wall, making out. The kissing keeps going to the extent that it is not clear that they are aware that DOUGLAS and KATE are in the room.)

KATE. (to DOUGLAS) One would say “get a room” but they have a room. It's a huge apartment, they could have six rooms if they wanted. But they seem to like it out here.

(yelling)

HEY. MARTIN. IZZY. WE ARE NOT IN FACT MAKING PORNO VIDEOS OUT HERE. COULD YOU TAKE THIS ELSEWHERE?

(MARTIN pulls away, flustered.)


(IZZY is laughing. She allows herself to be pulled back to the bedroom.)

DOUGLAS. How long has that been going on?

KATE. Two weeks. The night Leonard told you you were a whore, they both felt so bad for you they needed to comfort each other.

DOUGLAS. That's been going on for two weeks?

KATE. Yes.

DOUGLAS. Really.

KATE. Yes. In addition to looking like that, Izzy is apparently, in truth, a total nymphomaniac. Which was, shall we say, good news for Martin.

DOUGLAS. And they're staying here?
KATE. (an explosion of frustration) I said he could live here! He didn’t have a place to live! And she still lives at home with her parents, so that’s out!

DOUGLAS. Yeah, but...

KATE. I’m not going to tell them they have to leave. They’re happy, why would I resent the fact that they’re happy. Leonard’s been gone for two weeks, no one is having their hearts stomped on, and there are two happy people in love in my apartment. Why would I be anything except happy happy happy myself. I’m so fucking happy.

(She is clearly not. DOUGLAS looks at her.)

Is that all you’re going to read?

DOUGLAS. I just don’t know why you want me to read it.

KATE. I want to quit the group. Luis said he would love to meet Leonard, he thinks Leonard might be able to do something for him. So I offered to sell him the last half of the sessions. I could get twenty five hundred bucks back and maybe go somewhere, I don’t much give a shit where, just somewhere else, Ohio is looking pretty fucking good right now, just get away from this until I get a clue. About what I maybe should be doing with my life.

DOUGLAS. (with compassion) Katie...

KATE. Don’t be nice to me. I’m doing this and I’m not going to know you anymore.

DOUGLAS. Okay. Fine. But, you know, if you want to get away from all this – this is your apartment.

KATE. It’s my father’s apartment.

DOUGLAS. My point being, if you want this to be over, you could just kick us all out.

KATE. Yes, I realize that. And I honestly think that slinking off like a dying cat would be better.

(There is a knock at the door.)

Oh goody, that would be Leonard! How splendid.

(She opens the door. LEONARD saunters in, fresh from the jungle.)

KATE. (cont.) Hey, Leonard. How was Somalia.


KATE. Sounds wonderful.

LEONARD. It was fucked! An entire people – erased – you look in their eyes and they laugh and smile and there is nothing there! An entire nation of sociopaths. Eight year-old kids roaming the streets with AK-47s. Warlords sitting like kings on top of huge mounds of food, they use the bags of rice and beans and corn meal, they use it for their thrones. They sit up there and laugh at the people, their own people starving all around them. You sit on top of the food, you get a great view of it all, apparently.

DOUGLAS. It sounds amazing. You going to write about it?

LEONARD. You know – listen to me. Listen. You should go. Honestly, Douglas, you should get yourself on a fucking cargo ship and go over there and take a look at it. There are no embassies, no protections, there’s no one there who’s responsible. Get yourself kidnapped, held at gunpoint by pirates. Fuck them, they don’t think you can write. You go over there, you spend a few years facing the most terrifying nihilism this planet has to offer, no one will dismiss you then.

KATE. Actually Leonard aside from you, no one is dismissing him.

LEONARD. He knows what I’m talking about.

KATE. Go get yourself shot by sociopaths, that will make you a writer. What responsible advice.

LEONARD. Trust me, there’s worse advice out there. I could have told you to keep writing that fucking shitty story. Other people would’ve. Where’s the other two. Am I early?
KATE. Martin! Izzy! Leonard's here! We're ready to start!

(There is an awkward moment while LEONARD tries to figure out what is up. He looks around at DOUGLAS, who shrugs. He looks down at the manuscript on the table, sits in front of it.)

That's from a friend of mine. He's interested in joining the group.

LEONARD. I'm not taking extra students right now; I only take a few at a time, tell him he can submit through a teacher like everyone else.

(He holds it up. She doesn't take it.)

KATE. He, I'm leaving the group. He's really good. We thought, he has a really fucked up story, he used to be in a Cubano gang, in high school, and he's actually a cross dresser. This is true. It's completely the kind of thing I think that you're looking for and I'm not - I'm not interested so much. As I thought I was. In being a writer.

(He sets it down, looks at her.)

LEONARD. (cold) I give a shit.

KATE. No, that's what I'm saying.

LEONARD. Boo hoo, someone has decided not to be a writer. No one cares. No one in New York, no one in America, no one in Somalia - trust me. No one cares.

KATE. I'm well aware. That's why I'm quitting.

LEONARD. I'm not giving you your money back.

KATE. (starting to lose it) Yes I'm AWARE. I am not asking you for my money back!

LEONARD. It's not your money. You paid me for my time. I am here, I show up every week. If that's not enough for you -

KATE. I didn't, that's not -

(to DOUGLAS)

See? See? I can't even - I'm trying to slink off like a dying fucking animal and I can't even -

LEONARD. Slink off then! Why are you still here?

KATE. (loud) BECAUSE IT'S MY APARTMENT.

LEONARD. Fuck you, we'll find someplace else to meet.

KATE. I just want to leave.

LEONARD. So GO. You're a weenie, you're a whiner, you can't take the merest shred of criticism -

KATE. That was not, what you said about my story was not -

LEONARD. The fucking critics will say worse. To all of you. If it gets in. If it gets in, at all, you're doomed.

(There is a sad moment at this. MARTIN and IZZY come out from the other room. Both are fully dressed and pretending that they were not, mere moments ago, screwing their brains out.)

MARTIN. Hey. What's going on?

LEONARD. Nothing. Just a delightful welcome home from the scariest fucking trip of my life. Kate here was just telling me how happy she is to see me. Almost got shot twice. Didn't quite get a chance to tell that story, she had a lot of whining to do, I'm not nice enough.

KATE. That's not... Oh, god. That's not. This isn't...

LEONARD. Forget it.

(He sits and reads the manuscript on the table. They watch him, glance at each other. No one knows what to do. After a moment, LEONARD starts to laugh, lightly. The writing students look at each other. He laughs again, nods. He turns the page. Everyone watches each other, and him, while he reads.)

(pleased) Shit. Shit!

KATE. You like it. You think it's good?

(He doesn't look up, keeps reading.)

MARTIN. What's he reading?

LEONARD. What's this guy's name?

KATE. Luis.

LEONARD. Get him in here.

(He keeps reading. Blackout.)
Scene Seven

(Later that night. LEONARD is gone. They are having beers.)

MARTIN. (mad) Who is this guy?
KATE. I told you, Martin! He’s this guy I knew from Bennington and I know you think that Bennington is some sort of crazy Vermont hippic commune where people get stoned all the time and no one can actually write—
MARTIN. I never said that—
KATE. You so did and I don’t care, I’m just telling you, this guy was at Bennington when I was there and he’s a good writer and I don’t want to do it anymore so he’s going to take my spot. I need the money. I’m going to Ohio.
MARTIN. You’re going where?
KATE. I’M GOING TO OHIO. I’M GOING TO OHIO.
MARTIN. Why?
KATE. What do you care?
MARTIN. (reaching out to touch her shoulder) What is that supposed to mean? Of course I care. Kate.
KATE. Do not, please do not—
DOUGLAS. Leave it alone, would you, Martin?
MARTIN. Leave what alone? She’s leaving! I’m just I’m catching up. You’re leaving?
KATE. (hissing) Yes. I’m leaving.
(She leaves.)
MARTIN. (to DOUGLAS) What is going on?
DOUGLAS. You’re a total moron, is what is going on.
IZZY. So it’s really good, huh?
DOUGLAS. (a beat) I read a couple pages. It was good.
MARTIN. It’s good?
DOUGLAS. I only read a few pages.
IZZY. Leonard seemed to like it. Like he just sat there. And kept reading it.

MARTIN. Yes, we all saw him, Izzy.
IZZY. Do not snap at me. I have been fucking you for two weeks as you have never been fucked in your life, you are not allowed to snap at me!
MARTIN. I wasn’t snapping.
IZZY. You were, definitely snapping, because you’re worried.
MARTIN. What would I be worried about?
IZZY. You’re worried about this new guy, who might be good.
MARTIN. (yelling) Kate! Hey Kate!

(KATE reenters, pouring herself a glass of white wine.)
KATE. (annoyed now) What?
MARTIN. So you’ve read it, this guy’s story.
KATE. It’s not a story, it’s a memoir.
MARTIN. And it’s good?
KATE. I liked it. I think he’s a really good writer, and he’s kind of cracked, he wears dresses you have to put up with that, but he’s nice and he has an interesting history and he can write!
DOUGLAS. So you think it’s good.
KATE. I think it’s good. I think it’s really really good.

(There is a pause at this.)
MARTIN. You fucker.
KATE. What?
MARTIN. You wrote it.
DOUGLAS. You wrote it?
KATE. Of course I wrote it! His biggest objection to me is that I’m a rich white girl. Maybe if I’m not a rich white girl we can find out if I can write.
IZZY. Wow.

MARTIN. It is! What you write is like Douglas’s butterflies, a messenger from the Gods –

DOUGLAS. Really?

MARTIN. Yes! A messenger from the Gods, which has to be reckoned with! Or you’re f**ked!

KATE. Martin, you don’t get to vote! You don’t have enough money to pay your own rent! You’re such a huge f**king chicken about your own work, you won’t even show it! If it’s a f**king message then what’s the message? Oops! No one knows! Because you’re a writer who no one can read! So you don’t get a vote!

(a beat)

Well done, Kate! You not only pulled one over on Leonard who everyone in the room thinks is a flaming abusive BUTTHOLE, you came up with a terrific piece of writing! We know you’ve been feeling shitty about yourself because of the way Leonard treated you and you’ve been really nice to let MARTIN and IZZY use your apartment as a FUCKING LOVE NEST and well done well done you must feel a lot better, that piece you wrote about the Cubano transvestite gang member is really smart and edgy and funny, you’re a writer after all. Well done.

(then, playing her part)

Thanks, thanks you guys. Thanks!

(She drinks. DOUGLAS laughs. Then he laughs some more.)

Thank you, Douglas. At least somebody appreciates the effort.

DOUGLAS. No, you’re right. You’re absolutely right! It’s no worse than what Leonard did. It’s practically the exact same thing.

MARTIN. Oh yeah? On top of everything else he publishes phony memoirs?

DOUGLAS. Worse. I was really upset after Leonard called me a whore last week so I called my uncle to talk to him about it? And he told me. Leonard’s no saint.

KATE. Who thought he was a sain’t?

IZZY. Your uncle dished dirt on Leonard?

DOUGLAS. Yes, He did.

MARTIN. So spill it. What’d Leonard do?
DOUGLAS. *(a beat)* He’s a plagiarist.
IZZY. Get out.
MARTIN. You’re kidding.
KATE. Are you sure?
DOUGLAS. There was some incident, it got totally hushed up. But that’s why Leonard stopped publishing. This was like an ice age ago, but he did, he totally plagiarized something, it was from like a student, and it wrecked his career. After those first few novels he was done. And then I don’t know what happened, but eventually someone at Random House took pity on him and threw him a copy editing gig and he turned out to be this rock star editor, and then he started doing all those magazine pieces on Africa and after a while people just forgot about it. Nobody really cares now, but it was apparently a big deal when it happened.

MARTIN. Okay wait. I just have to ask you something. Hearing that your writing teacher is a plagiarist consoled you?
DOUGLAS. You know what? It did. And I’m with Kate on this one. No one gives a shit about real writing.
KATE. I didn’t say that.
DOUGLAS. Yeah but you wrote this phony thing and you’re going to act like it’s real and I think that’s smart. I mean what the fuck are we doing, anyway? Fiction is a dying art form. And we’re just eating our hearts out while we throw ourselves off a cliff. But you could make a lot of money with this. And you know what, Martin? Hearing that Leonard is a plagiarist did, it consoled me. See you clowns next week.

*(He goes. MARTIN looks at IZZY and KATE.)*

KATE. It doesn’t console me.
IZZY. You know what? I don’t believe it. Leonard’s no fraud.
MARTIN. Well, I think he did it.
IZZY. I don’t.

MARTIN. I do.
KATE. And I think you’re just looking for yet another excuse not to show him your writing.
MARTIN. What did you say?
KATE. You heard me.
MARTIN. If I’m not showing him my writing, it’s because I don’t care what he thinks about my writing. Particularly now.
KATE. Why because your message from the gods is so precious?
MARTIN. Every fucking corner of everything you write is precious if it isn’t why would you write it? Don’t answer that don’t answer it because I know it’s not a universally held truth but for some people constructing a UNIVERSE out of LANGUAGE is a timeless and reverential act, not an unholy excuse to fuck with people’s heads. So, no. I don’t care to show him my writing.
KATE. Writers aren’t people.
MARTIN. What?
KATE. You said SOME PEOPLE for SOME PEOPLE writing is all this whatever but let me tell you something: WRITERS ARE NOT PEOPLE. That has NEVER been more clear.

*(She goes. IZZY and MARTIN sit in silence.)*
IZZY. Well. I’m going to take off.
MARTIN. I don’t want you to take off.
IZZY. Yeah you do.
MARTIN. No! I don’t. I don’t. I don’t.
IZZY. Martin.

*(She kisses him, then picks up a page of his story from where it drifted under the couch, two scenes ago. She hands it to him.)*

You have things to do.

*(She goes. He looks at it. Blackout.)*
Scene Eight

(All are there. LEONARD and KATE square off.)

LEONARD. Is he coming?
KATE. He's actually not coming. No. He decided that he didn't have the money to do this right now. He was going to buy my half of the class, that was the deal, because I was...
LEONARD. Because you're quitting writing.
KATE. Yeah, I decided not to do that.
LEONARD. So you're staying? Is that the earth-shattering announcement you are making to the group?
KATE. (a beat) Yes, that is the earth-shattering announcement I am making to the group.
LEONARD. There's some good stuff here. Fresh and muscular. And the speed is impressive. I'm glad to have seen this. It's shown me something. Why don't you tell him.
KATE. I will.
(They look at each other.)
LEONARD. Good.
(He turns to the others.)
Anybody got anything? Martin?
MARTIN. I do. Yes I do.
LEONARD. Really?
MARTIN. Yes I do. And before I hand it over I would like to politely ask at this juncture not to be called a pussy. I'm serious. It's unnecessary and the point has been thoroughly examined. I do have something to present to the group and to you, actually that's more the point isn't it; here, Leonard, is my soul carefully articulated and wrapped up in a neatly typed bow, for you to do with as you will, and I know you will behave responsibly toward this exceptionally precious gift that I am presenting you today. So the answer is yes. Yes, I have some pages. Here.

(He hands about twenty pages. LEONARD looks at him, looks at it. He weighs it in his hand, laughs a moment, looks at MARTIN.)

LEONARD. Pussy.
(MARTIN shakes his head, turns away. He can't watch LEONARD read. LEONARD reads the first page. The others watch. LEONARD drops the page on the floor. He continues to read. He paces a little, as he reads, expressionless. MARTIN is in agony but he cannot look. LEONARD drops another page. The others look at each other, not knowing what this means. LEONARD drops another page. He continues to read, then stops himself. He rubs his eyes.)
Unmistakable.
(MARTIN turns to look at him, startled. All the others look at him too)

MARTIN. What's that supposed to mean?
LEONARD. Who's seen this?
MARTIN. Nobody. You.
LEONARD. And you wrote it.
MARTIN. Yes of course I wrote it. I wrote it this week.
LEONARD. It's...very good.
MARTIN. Fuck you.
LEONARD. Fuck you too. How'd you get here anyway?
MARTIN. What?
LEONARD. Here, how did you get here? Am I not speaking English?
MARTIN. What do you mean "here?"
LEONARD. Here in my class, moron. Here. With me.
MARTIN. I knew Kate from before and she was already in the class and she said you were supposedly, the class was supposed to be so great to get in --
LEONARD. Yes yes I know this --
MARTIN. And she didn’t know Douglas, we both had heard of him and I met Izzy at a party and she said she was in it too and that you were some kind of genius –

LEONARD. (impatient) I’m not talking about them! I’m talking about you!

MARTIN. – so I knew that our high school English teacher knew you he always talked about how you guys were at Yale together so I wrote to him and asked him and he wrote to you and you let me in.

LEONARD. Your high school English teacher? What was his name?

MARTIN. Mr. Gladeau. Robert Gladeau.

LEONARD. (This does not ring any sort of bell.) Bob Gladeau?

I let you in because you knew Bob Gladeau? That guy was a moron. I let you in because he asked? I don’t remember any of this. Okay. Let’s start over. Did I ever read anything you’ve written?

MARTIN. Yeah, you did. You read that.

LEONARD. I read this?

MARTIN. Well, not exactly that part, The first twenty pages. Of that. It’s the beginning of the novel and that’s further in.

LEONARD. Are the other pages as good as this?

MARTIN. Didn’t you read them?

LEONARD. Fuck if I know

MARTIN. You don’t remember? You don’t remember any of this?

LEONARD. Listen, Martin, I just spent two weeks in Somalia and since the day I came back this one

(indicates Izzy)

– has been fucking my brains out so no, I don’t remember much right now! I don’t think I read it. There is no way I would have forgotten – listen this is good. You know this is good.

(MARTIN looks at Izzy. Izzy won’t look at him.)

Is this all of it?

MARTIN. (distracted) I’m sorry –

LEONARD. Stay with me, Martin. This is a novel, it’s part of a novel, how much of it is written?

MARTIN. (detached) Five hundred and sixteen pages.

LEONARD. What else do you have? And don’t tell me nothing, I’ll know you’re lying. How much writing have you got stuffed in drawers and jamming up the circuits on your computer. How many pages do you have that you haven’t shown a fucking soul.

MARTIN. (depressed) A couple of thousand.

LEONARD. Well, you’re a regular Emily Dickinson. Without the charm. Welcome to the land of the living, Emily. I want to see all of it. Now, right now. Go fire up the printer.

MARTIN. Why?

LEONARD. What do you care why. I just told you, you’re a loser no more.

MARTIN. You don’t know what you’re talking about. You’ve been telling me and and and ALL OF US that we don’t know shit – for weeks! You told Douglas to hang it up and go to Hollywood!

DOUGLAS. Don’t drag me into this.

MARTIN. You are in it! We are all in it, we all paid five thousand dollars to be in it and he – doesn’t know shit!

LEONARD. Are you sure you want to doubt my word right now?

MARTIN. I don’t believe you’ve been fucking her all week. I don’t believe it

LEONARD. (laughing) What?

MARTIN. She said she didn’t. She told me –

IZZY. Martin –

LEONARD. Well, I don’t know what she told you but I got no reason to make it up.

(He goes back to reading MARTIN’s story. MARTIN turns to IZZY.)
MARTIN. I don't believe him. I don't.
IZZY. Can we take this somewhere else?
MARTIN. No! Answer the question!
IZZY. What's the question?

(a beat)

MARTIN. Did you lie to me?
IZZY. Oh come on, Martin. It wasn't much of a lie. Nobody believed it except you.

(LEONARD looks up, around the room.)

LEONARD. Are we done with the soap opera? Are we ready to get back to work?
MARTIN. No. No. I'm not doing this.
KATE. Martin.

MARTIN. He doesn't know anything! Why should I let him, why should any of us - hasn't it occurred to any of you that he's so mean to us because he's over! He can't do it anymore if he ever could and this is, it's just-power, it's the only power he has anymore, to destroy, and the thing he wants to destroy is young writers. It's TWISTED. And we're so desperate, it's pathetic actually, we're so desperate that we're just sitting here letting him - letting him destroy our hope and our curiosity and our talent and our dreams and why? It's NOTHING to him, he's, God, plus plus he's done so many drugs he can't even remember what he's read from one instant to the next plus he's UNETHICAL which I know it's a joke to even bring that up, that's how low ethics have fallen but I don't care he's UNETHICAL and a bad teacher and now I'm supposed to what, just jump up and down for joy because he's said "oh, there's an unmistakable -"

LEONARD. Careful. That bit might be true.
MARTIN. Nothing you say is true. You're a plagiarist. You're just a fucking plagiarist.

(Silence. LEONARD laughs a little to himself, picks up the pages, flips through them.)

LEONARD. Yeah okay. You probably never told off your own father so you definitely needed to get that off your chest.
MARTIN. Fuck you.

LEONARD. And I'm glad to provide the opportunity for you. Feels good, doesn't it, spewing the truth, the truth is like a great fuck, it's one of the few remaining reasons to get out of bed in the morning. It's not for everybody, some people are so crippled they can't stand the truth, but for those of us who partake, nothing else really comes close. But you know what? All those other people, who can't stand the truth? They're going to be a problem for you. This is why: You're a fucking nobody. Who are your parents? Nobody. Who are your connections? NOBODY. Where'd you go to school? It isn't Harvard Princeton or Yale, so wherever you went? It DOESN'T MATTER. You're no Douglas, Martin. You're a talented nobody, everybody is going to hate you. I mean, you'll get this published, and it will get some attention but not what it should, and then you'll write a second novel, which will mess up your brain like nothing you've ever lived through, it will be the worst three years of your life, writing that second novel; you'll feel like you're in the ninth circle of hell, where the betrayers of Christ are frozen in eternal canniblistic silence, only it's not flesh you'll be consuming, it's your mind. Maybe a few years after the second novel you'll be on to something with your third and you'll finally get into one of the big writer's colonies but your bitterness at having been rejected fifteen fucking times will take a lot of the fun out of that. You'll start to hate everyone out there who's more successful than you; what you feel for Douglas right now is nothing compared to what's coming. But the work will be good! Everyone will keep telling you how good the writing is! It's too good to be mistaken and that will become the bane of your existence. You might or might not get nominated for an occasional award. But
you'll never make any money. Hollywood will start to look like something pretty good right about then but you won't feel like sucking up to them either so you'll waste months of your life wandering around that hellhole of a city wondering why so many hacks can make a go of it out there but you can't get arrested. You'll end up taking a university job so you can pay off your credit cards, which you ran up like some fucking woman all those years you let yourself get sucked into the writing, and then you'll be really screwed. One year of teaching and you'll get so sick of how stifling and boring and utterly pointless it all is, teaching writing to a bunch of hyper-privileged droning children, you'll start drinking even more than you already are, you'll start fucking your students, even the freshmen, especially the freshmen, they're the ones who haven't been ruined yet, and they'll be so in love with your genius their adoration will be like a drug and why not? Why the fuck not. The work is still great! You're a fucking artist! You have to feel something to write, something more than just bitterness and contempt for the idiots you write for, the biggest problem with being a writer finally is that ALL YOUR READERS ARE HUMAN BEINGS AND THE HUMAN RACE IS...

(a long silence)

LEONARD. (cont.) You'll get fired for fucking undergrads, which is apparently against the law now. One of those undergraduates will make a reckless, devastating claim which too many people will want to believe by then. Things will continue to spiral. Your few remaining friends — maybe Douglas here, or Kate — will lend you a hand for old time's sake. You'll let them. And then you'll take on a few editing gigs, to make ends meet, and you'll be good at it and people will like it, they turned you into a servant, that will make them all feel great, and you'll get more and more editing work, and then you'll teach private writing seminars, which will feel like shit for a while until you realize that you really could do something, you could help the ones worth helping, if you only take on the best. The best students. And that will make it better. But you'll still be a fucking servant. Because at the moment in your life when someone said, you're a talented nobody but I'm going to help you? You said I don't need help.

(a beat)

LEONARD. (cont.) Class is over.

(He goes. Blackout.)
Scene Nine

(The walls open and we are in Leonard’s apartment. A rat’s nest of papers and books. A ritual African mask hangs on the wall. An exquisite bronze Buddha is wedged between books on one of the shelves. The place is cluttered with the detritus of a passionately undisciplined and curious mind. In the midst of it all, a desk with a typewriter, covered with papers, and an overstuffed couch.)

(The sound of a buzzer being pushed relentlessly.)

(After a moment, Leonard appears. He wears a bathrobe over sweatpants. He answers the door. Martin is there.)

(He is a mess.)

Martin. I have to talk to you.

Leonard. Yeah, well, kid, you know, now is not a good time.

Martin. Then we’ll just, you know, have to make this fast.

(a pause)

III – I –

Leonard. This is fast?

Martin. Look, it’s not easy for me to be here.

Leonard. It’s not easy for me, either. I’m busy!

(He glances over his shoulder, toward the bedroom.)

Martin. I’m sure. No, I’m sure you are. But I, I I I –

Leonard. Martin, I don’t want to be indiscreet but I’m busy here. You understand? I’m busy.

Martin. You have someone here with you.

Leonard. What gave you that idea.

Martin. No, it’s fine, I, it’s fine.

Leonard. Thanks. So if you don’t mind –

Martin. I need my money. We were supposed to get ten weeks, and you only gave us four and I paid five thousand. If you aren’t going to finish the class, that’s three thousand dollars. I need it back.

Leonard. Seriously. Do we have to do this now?

Martin. I have to have that money.

(A beat. Leonard sighs.)

Leonard. Well –

(Kate appears in the doorway behind him, wearing one of his shirts.)

Kate. It’s okay, Leonard, I have to take off anyway.

Leonard. No, no no no –

Kate. Leonard. We’ve been at it for two days. I’m sore!

Hi, Martin.

Martin. Kate.

Kate. Yes, hello.

(She goes to the couch and picks up her bra.)

Where did I leave my panties, do you remember?

Leonard. The kitchen?

Kate. That’s right.

(She goes. Leonard looks at Martin.)

Leonard. You missed the boat, Martin. She’s an animal. This is the thing, the thing about feminists: You catch one, when she’s right about to pop, it’s like, I couldn’t get her to stop and I’m not kidding, she’s sucking my balls so hard I’m seeing stars giving birth to planets on the astral plane –

Martin. STOP STOP STOP.

Leonard. Oh, are you squeamish about sex? Because she sure isn’t.

(Kate reappears, holds up her panties.)

Kate. I’ll be right back.

(She goes into the bedroom. Leonard looks at the door; looks at Martin, looks at the door.)

Leonard. You know what, Martin? I’m sorry about your situation, whatever it is, but this is a bad time.

(He starts to follow Kate.)
MARTIN. I'm not leaving without that money. I don't care about whatever new depravity you have managed to inflict on someone I care about. It doesn't matter. I have no place to live and I have no money and I will become a homeless person in this god awful city if I don't get that money and I'm not leaving here without it.

(He sits on the couch.)

LEONARD. Why were you even in my class?
MARTIN. What?
LEONARD. Why did you even sign up? You walked out even before you walked in.
MARTIN. I didn't walk out, you walked out –
LEONARD. You walked out.

(KATE opens the doorway and comes out, putting clothes on. Both turn and look at her.)

KATE. Leonard, I need a favor.

(She gives him a long wet kiss.)

I have to talk to Martin for a minute.

LEONARD. You want me to go take a shower?
KATE. Could you?
LEONARD. I could use one after that.
KATE. Thanks.

(LEONARD looks back at MARTIN, shakes his head and goes.)

MARTIN. What, what are you doing here?
KATE. You know what? That is a stupid question.
MARTIN. You slept with him?
KATE. Wow. We went so far beyond that, it's not really worth answering that one either.
MARTIN. You hate him!
KATE. I wouldn't say that, no.

MARTIN. You think he's disgusting! He IS disgusting! And now you're here — doing — things — with that, that, FUCK ME I cannot think of words BAD ENOUGH to describe that TOXIC PIECE OF SHIT ASSHOLE. It was bad enough that Izzy was sleeping with him. That was bad enough.

KATE. But it's worse if I do? Why?
MARTIN. Because you — have a brain!
KATE. There are other parts of my body as well, Martin, a fact you never quite noticed. But guess who did.
MARTIN. Is that why you're doing this? To get back at me?
KATE. Wow. That is classic.
MARTIN. Well, is it? Is that why you kicked me out?
KATE. I kicked you out because I finally grew a spine! I kicked you out because you were completely using me! I was the one, I TOLD you about the whole seminar because I knew you would let yourself just disappear, if someone didn't — and then you you you had no respect. I took care of you. I was taking care of you and you took advantage —

MARTIN. (overlap) I know. I know. I know! Because you care about me.

KATE. Well — I did.
MARTIN. You still do.
KATE. Oh no I don't.
MARTIN. I may not deserve it.
KATE. You don't.
MARTIN. But it's there nonetheless. You can't tell me it isn't. Come on, Kate. I'm an idiot but the truth remains that you — you-you're —

KATE. Oh. Oh no. Oh no no no no —
MARTIN. You're — night and day.
KATE. Okay, Martin.
MARTIN. You're stars and moon and wind.

(He kisses her.)

KATE. I said okay!
(a beat)

MARTIN. Kate, come on. We were good together. And I admit, I blew it. My head was so, that class was so poisonous, Leonard was so poisonous –

KATE. Don’t start on Leonard, a lot of what he said worked. He actually got me to write something new and fresh –

MARTIN. And fraudulent –

KATE. Fraud is a way of life, in a capitalist culture. Especially in the arts. You should hear what Leonard has to say about it.

MARTIN. I don’t want to talk about Leonard!

KATE. Then why do you keep bringing him up?

MARTIN. Why do I, why do you, you you you –

KATE. He’s done a lot for all of us. He got Douglas a meeting with the Weinsteins. He introduced Izzy to Salman Rushdie who is a huge flirt and wants to help her with her drug whore book. And he set me up with this guy in prison who has one hell of a story. Random House needs someone to ghost write it for him.

MARTIN. So Leonard got you a job as a ghost writer! And you took it.

KATE. Martin, I would be crazy not to take that job and I thought it was pretty nice of Leonard to set it up. He was, actually, an asshole about it. He managed to mention to my editor about six times that I had written a really shitty story about a girl who was obsessed with Jane Austen. But he was nice enough about the Cuban cross dresser. And I like this job. I think it’s a good start for someone like me. I’m excited about it.

MARTIN. A ghost writer.

KATE. I knew you’d look down on it. You know what? You have a screw loose, Martin, you really do. He stood there and told all of us how good you are. He said it. And you may think he’s a fucking asshole, but you know in your heart he would never lie about something like that. And you’re still, you’re just still eating your soul out over what? Why don’t you just live it, Martin?

MARTIN. So what are you, you actually LIKE him?

KATE. (a breath) Life is complicated. People are complicated. If you can’t figure that out, you’ll never be much of a writer, I don’t care what Leonard says. Honestly he’s convinced you’re the next big thing. I think it’s some sort of narcissistic projection. Boys boys boys you just never get enough of yourselves, do you?

(She goes to the door, and leaves. He sits there, alone. He thinks about going after her. He doesn’t. He looks around the room. He goes to the wall and looks at the artifacts crammed in among the books. He goes to look at the Buddha, on the desk. While there, he starts to poke about. He looks at Leonard’s pencils. He looks at pages that have been left on the desk. He looks up, to see if anyone is looking. He starts to read.)

(Like LEONARD, he drops the page to the floor, still reading.)

(LEONARD appears in the doorway. He watches for a moment as MARTIN reads.)

LEONARD. Okay, that’s enough.

(He grabs the pages from MARTIN, who backs up, startled.)

Get out of here.

MARTIN. I was just looking at –

LEONARD. You were just spying, you little rat. You were just – give me that. GET YOUR HANDS OFF THAT.

(MARTIN is still trying to get the pages together. He shoves him aside. They stare at each other.)

Sorry. I don’t like for people to look at that.

MARTIN. Why not?

LEONARD. That’s hilarious, coming from you. You’d spend five thousand dollars on a writing seminar, and then not let anyone read your shit. Take your money and get out of here.
(He finishes writing a check, holds it out. MARTIN doesn't take it.)

MARTIN. Your novel's really good.


MARTIN. You're not a plagiarist.

LEONARD. Jesus. How long is this going to go on? Because if you're thinking we're actually going to have a conversation, I'm getting a drink.

(He goes into the kitchen. MARTIN goes back to the desk. finds the pages, and starts to read again. He reads eagerly, fascinated. LEONARD reenters, balks, then bolts into the room.)

Did you think I was kidding? I do not want you reading that! No one is allowed to read that!

MARTIN. Why not?

LEONARD. I don't have to tell you why not! Give me the fucking pages, Martin.

(MARTIN takes a step back, holding them.)

MARTIN. Why don't you show this to anybody? Why do you let people think you're not writing?

LEONARD. I don't give a shit what people think.

MARTIN. Yes you do, you put on this whole - act - that you're an embittered old psychopath -

LEONARD. Hey. That's no act.

MARTIN. Who can't write! You gave us that whole speech, boo hoo, my career is over and I'm stuck with these losers who can't write - and meanwhile you, you're, you can, this is great. This is, like - It's like a nineteenth century novel. It's....

(He stops. He has no words.)

LEONARD. This the twenty-first century. And I actually don't like people scraping their eyeballs on my words.

MARTIN. Why not?

(He takes the pages from MARTIN, and goes to the desk. Picks up all the pages and dumps them in a drawer.)

LEONARD. (beat, simple) I have no skin anymore. Once it's written I can't - live with it. I can't sit in offices and talk to people about it. I can't look at "cover art." I can't talk to editors; these people are so nice and I just want to strangle them, it's completely unfair. It makes more sense to just put it out on the sidewalk and let it blow away. Not blow away, not - Jesus. I have no skin. After I write, I want to evaporate. And you don't evaporate, you're still here, your body is just, it takes up so much space. Plus, there's so much noise. Novels need silence. Trust me. It's not the writing that's the problem. It's everything else.

(then)

That kid was a liar. To be called a thief of words. I can't even. That was thirty two years ago and I can't even...

(beat)

Here's your check.

MARTIN. That's bullshit. What you just, that is the stupidest shit I've ever heard come out of your mouth. And as you know many really fucked up stupid things have come out of your mouth.

LEONARD. (overlap) Yeah yeah yeah. Nevertheless, everything I tell you is true.

MARTIN. Get away from that desk.

LEONARD. This is my apartment, you moron.

MARTIN. I don't care. Get away from that desk or I will hit you on the head with the Buddha.

(He picks up the Buddha and tries to figure out how to do that. LEONARD considers this, then stands.)

LEONARD. I need a drink anyway.

(He stands and goes to the other side of the room, pours himself a drink. MARTIN goes to the desk drawer and takes out the novel. He sets it on the desk. He looks at it.)
MARTIN. This doesn’t belong to you.

LEONARD. Really.

MARTIN. It is not you, and it’s not even of you. It is not yours.

LEONARD. Then whose is it?

MARTIN. It is itself. And you are not hiding it in a desk and just burying it alive. It’s immoral.

LEONARD. Please. Don’t talk to me about morality.

MARTIN. I’m taking this away from you, so you can’t hurt it anymore.

(He picks up the novel and edges toward the door.)

LEONARD. Why’d you come over here anyway?

MARTIN. I came over to – get my money.

LEONARD. Then why are you leaving without it. I offered it to you twice, you never even looked at it, you just told me endlessly yet again that I’m full of shit. I mean, I am well aware I’m full of shit, why do you need to go over and over it? What more do you want from me? You want my balls?

MARTIN. No I don’t want your balls. God, I don’t even know what you’re talking about half the time!

(LEONARD reaches onto the desk and finds a folded sheaf of papers. He holds it up.)

LEONARD. Here.

MARTIN. What’s that?

LEONARD. I finally read those pages that idiot Bob Gladeau sent me. The first twenty pages of your masterpiece. I did a line edit for you, show you what you got.

(He holds out the pages, then indicates that MARTIN had better give him his own pages back. They exchange pages. LEONARD goes to the desk and puts his novel in a drawer. MARTIN sits, and reads.)

MARTIN. (after a beat) So you think I...

LEONARD. You’re just hearing too many words.

(MARTIN continues to read. LEONARD goes to the bottle of booze, fills up his own and a second glass. MARTIN continues to read. After a moment he looks up.)

MARTIN. This is – fantastic.

LEONARD. It really is the only way to learn anything about writing, to have a decent editor go through it word by word for you. Help you see what it is, what you meant. What you didn’t even know you meant.

MARTIN. No, it does it really....

LEONARD. Yeah, you hear it different, you hear the ding.

MARTIN. Thank you.

LEONARD. Don’t mention it.

(a beat)

So. You want to try this?

(MARTIN looks at him, nervous, looks around.)

MARTIN. What, try what?

LEONARD. Relax Romeo, you’re not my type. I’m just saying. I’ll work with you.

MARTIN. Really? Well. What, um, what – what, what would that mean?

LEONARD. I’m not exactly an unknown quantity, Martin. What do you think it would mean?

MARTIN. I have no idea.

LEONARD. It would mean, I will fuck you up in so many different ways you won’t even know who you are anymore. That seminar was the prelude. You want to make me your servant, you got Mephistopheles in your pocket. That’s what it means. So what is it? How serious are you? You want to be a writer, or not?

(MARTIN looks at him. LEONARD holds out his drink. After a long moment MARTIN reaches out to take it.)

(blackout)