

PEOPLE:

The Girl,
appears to be in her mid 20s, feels older

Nick,
a poet and drinker, accidental revolutionary

Joan,
a conscious revolutionary, close to Nick's age

Dave,
younger than Nick, a drinker and poet

Blake,
early 20s, eager to be

Princess,
early 20s, eager to please

Louis,
a little older than Nick,
and somehow different generation

Terence,
the sage and visionary, slightly older than Nick

→ We tend to think of the Beats as a bunch of white guys,
but we are wrong. They were a pretty diverse bunch, so “non-
traditional casting” is not only encouraged but insisted upon.
The audience will go along with it, I promise.

Thank you.

←

PLACE:

San Francisco: Nick's apartment and the hallway outside

TIME:

A kind of 1959

NOTES:

Stage directions in parentheses are suggestions of physical
business. Italicized stage directions indicate moments where
time almost slows down and reality is on the verge of collapsing.

LOUIS is a stutterer—not a serious one, but it comes out from
time to time. I have created some moments in the play when
this is apparent, but the actor playing LOUIS should feel free
to identify other possible moments.

*The first petty miracle of
contemplation, sign from
the body
Look in the mind and
eat the monster there.*

–Allen Ginsberg, “Last Poem There”

*Not to have but to be.
To become the beloved.
As the world ends, to enter
the last note of its music.*

–Denise Levertov, “Not to Have...”

But who among us dares to utter?

–Robin Metz, “Autopsy”

*It seemed like a matter of minutes when we began rolling in the
foothills before Oakland and suddenly reached a height and saw
stretched out ahead of us the fabulous white city of San
Francisco on her eleven mystic hills with the blue Pacific and its
advancing wall of potato-patch fog beyond, and smoke and
goldenness in the late afternoon of time.*

–Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Prologue

In dark we hear the voice of THE GIRL.

THE GIRL:
*Beside still waters
He died
Beside still waters
He still lies
Beside waters
still more still
I stand*

*The sound of typing on an old, very nice
typewriter.*

*As the lights rise we see THE GIRL, kneeling
beside an old heating register, listening to the
typewriter echoing through the ducts. And
though it is her voice we hear we do not see her
speaking.*

THE GIRL:
*But I dare not cross over
Not to be with him
not to be with all the others
I have lost*

*To cross these waters
Is not to come back
Is not to remember
Is to sleep and forget*

Tap tap tap ding

*The tap-tapping of the typewriter stops and
lights come up on NICK at the typewriter, a
large sheaf of paper beside but even more paper
crumpled into little balls on the floor behind
him.*

*NICK pulls the sheet out of the typewriter
and reads.*

NICK:
No! Dammit!

*NICK crumples the sheet and tosses it away to
lie with these others. He sits and considers for a
bit before finally picking up a pencil and
notebook.*

*He sits on the bed
and stares at the page.*

*He gives up, moves to the floor,
and stares at the page.*

*He gives up, goes to the window seat,
and stares at the page.*

He gives up and stares out the window.

NICK:
Fuck!

*He throws the pencil across the room. Or out
the window. Whichever is cooler.*

*He collapses onto the window seat,
staring down at the field of crumpled paper.*

*NICK crawls into the field of crumpled paper,
opening the tightly wadded balls, looking for
the right one.*

*Finally, he finds it. And reads it again.
We hear a whisper we can't quite make out,
echoing from the ductwork, as he reads*

NICK:
To cross these waters
Is not to come back
Is not to remember
Is to sleep and forget...

*NICK half-glances at the door.
He gets up and sets the piece of paper down on
top of the typewriter and throws a sheet over
the lot, grabs his jacket and keys, pockets the
notebook, finds another pencil, and exits the
apartment.*

*THE GIRL is there. They don't make eye
contact, though she watches him as he goes. Just
before he goes down the steps he looks to her but
she is staring sullenly at the floor.*

*He exits. THE GIRL goes back to the door.
Touching it she says...*

THE GIRL:
And I can't forget

*All I am are
the voices I have heard*

(Lights down.)

ACT I

Scene 1.

A small apartment. It's a very sparsely but meticulously decorated room; there's nothing here that isn't supposed to be—everything has a reason for being, a history. It's sort of a shrine to the person who lives here. There's a typewriter. A really good one. When you walk in the door of the apartment it's the first thing you see. The typewriter sits on a small wooden table with a small wooden chair sitting nearby. There are large windows set into one of the walls; the opposite wall is totally solid except for a large heating duct near the floor.

NICK & JOAN are in bed together. NICK is asleep; JOAN is naked and smoking, reading through a beat-up sheaf of papers. THE GIRL is visible in the hallway.

NICK (waking):
What've you got there?

JOAN:
Some...poems.

NICK:
Whose? Mine?

JOAN:
That'd be my guess.

NICK:
Lemme see.
Oh god. Throw those away.

JOAN:
So you are the self-same writer. Hm...

NICK:
What's that supposed to mean?

JOAN:
Terence said you were good but these—

NICK:
I wrote those in another lifetime.
I should've burned them.

JOAN:
How did you ever get published?
Maybe I shouldn't've come back here.

NICK:
My book is very successful. You knew who I was.

JOAN:
No, I didn't.

NICK:
You're still holding to that lie?
Then why did you come onto me last night?

JOAN:
Is that how it happened?

NICK:
I don't come onto women.
I let them come onto me.
(silence)
So?

JOAN:
So what?

NICK:
So what do you think?

JOAN:
I think you're an ass.

NICK:
Of the book—the good poems, the ones that have... “set the nation on fire.”

JOAN:
Didn't read them. I don't read anything that anyone tells me I *have* to read.
That's why I went looking and found these. I wanted to read something else.

NICK:
So you did know who I was.

(JOAN gets up, finds her cigs and goes to the window. Staring out, she lights one.)

JOAN:
I will admit that I've heard of you and seen your very popular, best-selling book on shelves across the city. I did not pick you up last night.
You picked me up.

NICK:
I picked you up.
(He gestures for her to give him a cigarette.)

JOAN:
(She does.)

JOAN (cont'd):

Yes. you picked me up.
Sitting there, at the bar, scribbling in your little notebook—

NICK:

Minding my own business—

JOAN:

While your friends are all around you, drinking, laying down shots of bourbon in front of you, like offerings to the Poet God.

NICK:

Bullshit.

JOAN:

“Bullshit,” he declared.

NICK:

You spoke first.

JOAN:

You were screaming to be talked to.

NICK:

Did you enjoy last night?

JOAN:

And this morning. Both. Very much.

NICK:

Then can we drop this?

JOAN:

So we can talk about your book?

NICK:

It was a *Times* bestseller.

JOAN:

Fine. I read it.

NICK:

I knew it.

(JOAN begins to get dressed.)

JOAN:

Last night. After you fell asleep.

NICK:

You've been up awhile.

JOAN:

I'm a quick reader. And I don't need much sleep.

NICK:
And?

JOAN:
It was pretty good.

NICK:
The *Times* said it was great.
“The voice of a generation.”
Where’s the bottle?

JOAN:
’Fraid we killed it.

NICK:
Shit and hellfire.
You know, Terence thinks it’s a great book—

JOAN:
Terence thinks it’s a great start,
but that your real greatness is yet to be.

NICK:
Terence is a cocktease.

JOAN:
So...you like the boys too...

NICK:
Does that shock you?

JOAN:
Darling, that may shock your friends back in Iowa—

NICK:
Missouri—

JOAN:
But I’ve...seen a lot more shocking.

NICK:
So why’s he such a tease?

JOAN:
He likes you is all.
He thinks that you being in San Francisco is going to be good for you.

NICK:
I hope so. Haven’t written a lick since the book came out.

(NICK begins to crawl through the field
of crumpled paper and on underneath the
sheet that covers his table and typewriter.)

JOAN:
Is that so?

NICK:
Well, nothing to write home about.
The day the review came out, I didn't even know it.
I was in New York, spendin' time with this guy I was seeing at the time
and he wakes me up at 6AM,
"Come on," he says. And I'm still drunk and can't even see
the stairs or the difference between street and sidewalk
and we get to this newsstand, corner of 6th and A, I think.
And he buys *The Times* and there it is: a Rave.

JOAN:
Overnight stardom.

NICK:
Interviews, talk shows, reading tours.
Kids tracking me down.
"I'm the voice of a generation." — A ha!
(From beneath the sheet a mostly full bottle appears.
NICK follows it out.)
And all I wanted to do was move on.
Some of those poems were ten years old by the time I got 'em published.
But no time for the new, everyone wants what's old.
Three years of nothin'...
until Terence knocks my door down,
hauls my hungover ass out of bed,
down the dozen flights and out into the middle
of Tompkins Square Park:
"Smell that?" he says.
"Don't smell nothin'."
"That's a divine wind. From the west.
It's sayin' 'Come with me. To San Francisco.'
All this time in the spotlight and you
ain't never come to visit me in that ole City by the Bay."

I told him I'd think it over. And when Steve Allen calls
and says he wants me on the show, won't take no, I tell him
"I have a prior engagement. In San Francisco."

JOAN:
And how do you like our fair city so far?

(silence)

NICK:
It's ok.

JOAN:
Do you always play the rebel?

NICK:
No. I like it.

JOAN:
But New York is better.

NICK:
No. New York was closing in on me.

JOAN:
Then what's better than San Francisco? Kansas?

NICK:
Kansas *City*.

JOAN:
Right. That part of the country—

NICK:
No... I am glad to be quit of Missouri—

JOAN:
But it was easier to get along there.

NICK:
And harder.
I dunno. It's...complicated.
You can't do there, like you do here. I like it here.
I like that I cross the street and I'm in Chinatown.
I like the way the sky meets the water.
I like that I'm perched on a hill. Like I was in Kansas City—
Like I can look out across all the country I've traveled and can almost see
the hills that Kansas City is perched on and lookin' back at me from.

JOAN:
You are a poet.

NICK:
Go fuck yourself.

JOAN:
No, I'm serious: The way you talk about it all—
Tell me more. Talk to me about it,
the land between here and there.

NICK:
It's...tormented. Broken and torn.
It's like stepping back in time—
 When I got out of the mountains I stopped on the banks of the Colorado
River and I threw myself into it.
 It was like Baptism, like awaking into a world free from time and history.
 Or else...it's time and history so old you lose yourself in it. But then...
Then you come back to this world. It's unavoidable. It was just a dream

NICK (cont'd):

So whatever. Fuck it. You can't live in a dream. I'm here now. I've crossed mountains and desert and this...is the New World.

(silence)

JOAN:

What are you working on now?

NICK:

Hm?

JOAN:

You're working on something new. I always know when the boys are working on something new.

NICK:

Your magic power?

JOAN:

Yes. I sleep with them and I know their every thought.

NICK:

I wish I had that power.

JOAN:

So what is it? Where is it?

NICK:

Not now. I wanna do other things.

Why do you have clothes on?

(They kiss again.)

JOAN:

Brother, I would—

NICK:

Joan...

JOAN:

But it's getting late and I promised Ray I'd type for him.

(JOAN continues dressing.)

NICK:

Ray? You're Ray's secretary?

JOAN:

No, I'm his "transcriptionist." You know he hates typing. Too mechanical for him or some such shit.

NICK:

Tell him to get a secretary.

JOAN:

Oh, my little Missouri Gentleman. Defending my honor.
But it's okay. I get paid. I like the work. I get to see into the future.
I hear what's comin' before anyone else.
And now, Nicholas, it's your turn. Time to prove that you're
everything that's been reported. Share the new work.

NICK:

It's nothing. I was this close...
to throwing it away—

JOAN:

I'm not asking much.
Just a glimpse at the future.
What's the matter? Scared to share?

NICK:

You first.

JOAN:

Me what first?

NICK:

You prove yourself, to me, first.

JOAN:

I'm not a writer.

NICK:

Bullshit.

JOAN:

I'm not.

NICK:

Then why does Terence talk about you so much?

JOAN:

So you did know who I was when I—
When we...met last night.

NICK:

I hear all these stories about this amazing woman. This Joan.
"She's the heart of the local hip. The beating behind the Beat."
Terence seems to think you're Aphrodite, just risen from out of the waves.
But I don't know anything about her—you. Not really.

JOAN:

With an introduction like that, what more do you need?

NICK:

I need to hear it from you. Are you some goddess? Did you rise up out of the bay, the
spirit of this city? The word made flesh?

JOAN:

You're trying to steal my powers. I'll tell you who I am, you'll know me...
You won't need me anymore.

NICK:

And what do you think it means to have you read my poetry?

JOAN:

You love having people read your poetry, doesn't matter if they're from a big city or
some small town on the coast—probably smaller than Des Moines, even—

NICK:

Kansas City—

JOAN:

Oh right. Kansas City.

NICK:

Is that where you're from? Some small town on the coast?

JOAN:

Would you consider San Fran small?

NICK:

You're such a tease—

Come on. Tell me.

JOAN:

I'd rather leave it to your imagination.

I know how you boys are. You want to eat all of life up. Consume it—

“Somethin' new? Lay it down! Gimme a piece'a that!”

So you can feel like you've been everywhere, known everyone.

Then you're off to the next new thing, forget what's past.

So I'll keep a few things for myself.

But here's why you should show me your new work, and Terence will back it up:

I know when something's good.

NICK:

You know?

JOAN:

I know.

I see.

I feel.

(silence)

NICK:

Under the sheet.

What you want to see, it's under the sheet.

JOAN:

No-no, I know what's under there.

NICK:
There's a lot to be found hiding under the sheets in this room.

JOAN:
Ah! the other sheet.

(She uncovers the typewriter and grabs
the piece of paper.)

JOAN:
So? What is it?

NICK:
Don't even know

JOAN:
Mm-hmm...

NICK:
Just a sketch... Probably.

(She reads.)

JOAN:
Nick, this is totally different than your book.

NICK:
...yeah...

JOAN:
I mean, I was being, yes, coy. I liked the book,
because you were taking the old and making it now.
But this...this is something...so much more—

NICK:
It's one poem,
and it's not done—

JOAN:
I'm not talkin' bout done. I'm talkin' about the real potential.
This is pure soul-shriekin' beat.
Be-attitude. Be-atific. Be-autiful.
This is what I thought you'd be.

NICK:
It's crap—

JOAN:
No. It's the future.

NICK:
...I only just wrote it. Last night, before I found you—

JOAN:
I told you, you found me.

NICK:
It was different writing this.
I was in touch with something—

JOAN:
That was me. In my “spirit of the city” voice.

(NICK laughs.)

NICK:
So you think I should keep on with it?
'Cause I think I should bag it, go home to Nebraska,
get a job at the Office, settle down,
make Mom and Pop proud.

JOAN:
No you don't. That's not what you're thinking.

NICK:
What if it is?

JOAN:
You're just stuck.
You need to break through again.
so you're not a one-timer.
(silence)
I'm right...right?

(silence)

NICK:
I feel like I'm in touch
with somethin', finger right on the pulse of it,
somethin' worth sharing.
And I want people to hear it and feel and move.
I want 'em to remember.
I want 'em to talk about it twenty years from now.

JOAN:
A hundred years from now.

NICK:
Yeah.

JOAN:
They will.

NICK:
You think I'm that good.

JOAN:
You keep writing like this and you will be.
You're in a magical place now.
Be patient. You're young yet. You'll find your way.
(JOAN leans in and kisses NICK long and deep.)
Your reward.

*THE GIRL kneels down at the duct.
She whispers into it. We can hear her,
but we can't make out what she's saying.*

NICK:
Thanks. Now you've gotta go.

(NICK starts to throw on some clothes.)

JOAN (playfully):
I thought you wanted me to stay.

NICK:
Are you kidding? I've got work to do.
Terence is stopping by later today. If I can get this poem in shape
I might just show it to him.

JOAN:
Terence? I should definitely go then. He'll be jealous if he finds me here. He wants
your fresh Midwestern...
(a nether glance...)
...even more than I do.

NICK:
Terence?

JOAN:
You didn't know that?

NICK:
He's just so...

JOAN:
He's like that with all the new boys in town. And like all the new boys in town you're
absolutely frustrated and turned on by it.
I'd tell you how hard it is for me to leave you lyin' there like that, but I
wouldn't want you to think I've lost my cool. So... Maybe if you're out tonight I'll see
you and we'll...talk.
(There is a knock at the door.)
Damn, that's probably him now.

NICK:
No. Terence doesn't knock.

JOAN:
Then he must know I'm in here already.
Thinking I'm trying to steal you—

NICK:
Don't worry. I'll convince him otherwise.

JOAN:
My Missouri Gentleman.
Find me. Tonight.

NICK:
Count on it.

JOAN:
And when you show this to Terence and he declares how much he loves it, don't—
Well...don't forget me.

(There is another knock and JOAN opens the door. A rowdy looking gang of three is there.)

JOAN:
Well, hello, Dave.
You have a visitor, Nick.
A whole group in fact—

DAVE (off):
Outta the way, Joanie. We brought a jug.

DAVE bursts into the room, holding a jug of wine. He's not un-handsome, but he's not particularly attractive either. Ridden rough. Thin. He's followed by BLAKE & PRINCESS, two kids who have found themselves in the form of the movement that NICK and his peers have inadvertently started. BLAKE has a saxophone, makes himself instantly at home, and begins to play. He can, but he's not particularly good at it.

NICK:
Well, I'll be a son of a bitch. How are ya, Dave?

(DAVE & NICK embrace.)

DAVE:
Never better now that you're here, brother, and I'm here beside you, and we can share of this divine fruit.

JOAN:
I'll see you later, Nick.
Good luck with the writing.

NICK:
Yeah. Thanks.

(JOAN exits.)

DAVE:
You didn't tell me you were coming to town.

NICK:
I know. Sorry—

DAVE:
What're you doing at the Mars? Can't you afford better than this?

NICK:
Sure, but...

BLAKE:
This is it, man. This is where life is happening,
not at some fancy Ritz-Carlton joint.

DAVE
That's Blake by the way.
(PRINCESS wanders over and drinks from Nick's glass.)
And this is Princess.
She's a fan of your book.

PRINCESS
Its biggest fan.
And I could be yours too.

(She takes the glass and wanders off to look at the typewriter. NICK goes for another glass but when he sees where PRINCESS is headed he diverts her and throws his poem on the typewriter and the sheet over the lot.)

NICK:
Nothing worthwhile checking out there.
Why don't you have a seat.

PRINCESS:
There's only the one chair.

NICK:
On the bed.

PRINCESS:
Well all right then.

(She sits down on the bed, but is disappointed when NICK doesn't join her.)

DAVE:
Come, friend. Let me fill you a new glass.

NICK:
Where'd you find these two?

DAVE:
Oh they're all right. Kids, sure. But they like the groove.
They look up to us. Don't you, Blake?

BLAKE:
I read it and I wanted to die, man, just die,
but I didn't, and then I knew I had to live.

NICK:
Good?

BLAKE:
Beyond good. Fuckin'...just great.

DAVE:
So what is it brings you to San Fran at long last?

NICK:
Needed to get writing again.

DAVE:
And here we are, busting that up.

NICK:
No way, brother. There will be time and time again.
We ain't seen each other in too long. That's worth celebratin'.

DAVE:
It really is an amazing thing, both the book,
and the way it's taken off.

NICK:
It's blasted a hole right through me.

DAVE:
No way. You are the holy divine illustrator,
I went out and wrote, I don't know twenty poems
after I finished it.

NICK:
That's good. I'm glad to hear that.
What else are you up to—?

DAVE:
You just captured everything, our crazy nights in KC
and those long, magical days we spent with Bull in New Orleans,
and it's...it's poetry, man. The U. S. of A. is in love with poetry.
You transformed the world—

NICK:
I know, Dave. I know what I did

PRINCESS (wandering into their conversation):
You're kind of older than I expected.
But still handsome. Isn't he handsome, Blake?

(She sits on Dave's lap.)

BLAKE
The ruggedest.

NICK:
But, come on, Dave, tell me what you're working on these days.

DAVE:
Mostly just working, brother. Driving a cab to pay them bills.
I write sometimes, when there's time. And when these two
aren't showing up with a jug or some tea.

PRINCESS:
Do you want some, right now? I could roll us a joint or two.

NICK:
Not just now. The wine suits me fine.

DAVE:
Old Nick there has to get warmed up—

NICK:
Which I am doing—

DAVE:
And he'd get warm faster if you went over there
and gave him some more of your time and attention.

PRINCESS:
Are we going to play yabyum now?

NICK:
You're teaching them yabyum?

DAVE:
As best I can. Japhy's the master of course.

NICK:
Where is Japhy. I'm dyin' to see that cat.

DAVE:
Up in the mountains I think. Meditatin', writin'.

NICK:
I should get up there, pay him a visit.

PRINCESS:
Not before you teach me the secrets of yabyum.

NICK:
Why don't you try it out with Blake for a bit..
Let me and Dave here get reacquainted some more.

PRINCESS:
Do you promise to teach us later?

NICK:
Scout's honor.

(PRINCESS goes and sits by BLAKE.
They fool around some more with the
sax.)

DAVE:
So what're you writing these days?
There's all number of tales to tell from our tramping days.

NICK:
Yeah, but I wrote all those already.

DAVE:
The world has yet to see—

NICK:
I know, man. But I'm... the past is past, I ain't tramping no more
you ain't tramping. We're all doing things different.
Like you said, the world went and changed itself.

DAVE:
With some help from you.

NICK:
Woulda done so with or without me.

BLAKE:
No way, man. Or it woulda done, but for the worse,
(BLAKE starts to take off his clothes.)
We'd all be born in test tubes inside perfectly arranged and
manicured homes with perfectly engineered pieces of lawn outside
and robot trees that look pretty but really they're just there
to wall off the sky and the world and to keep eyes on us.
Step outta line and they'll step on us. Bam sqwoosh.
Next test tube please.

NICK:
You think so?

BLAKE:
Know so. I was slated to be a lawyer,
and here I am: free and naked like the first babe e'er born.

DAVE:
He's true, Nick. So true.

NICK:
Yeah, maybe.

PRINCESS:
No maybe's. Not anymore. Only yes's. Yes to everything that is life.
Did you know I'm a goddess made flesh?

BLAKE:
Mother to us all.

NICK:
You're certainly purty enough to be one.

PRINCESS:
Only I lost all my divine knowledge when I came down among you,
and now I have to learn it all again, before I can return to Heaven.

DAVE:
Show him how divine you are, Prin.

PRINCESS:
But you have to want to see.

NICK:
I do. Didn't I tell you, I'm here looking for visions.

PRINCESS:
You teach me what you know, you traffic with my holy flesh,
and I'll unlock all your desires, all your visions.

NICK:
Maybe it's just the wine, but I really want to believe you.

BLAKE:
Believe it. We ain't here to steal your visions,
just to share them. And being with Princess:
It is seeing through time, man.

DAVE:
The kid is true, Nicholas.

They wait for his answer.

NICK:
Show me what you know already.
So I know where to pick up the lesson.

*PRINCESS starts to take her clothes off.
BLAKE rolls a joint.
DAVE throws a jazz record on the turntable.*

*Time feels like it's slowing down,
but the music is furious: Bop Apocalypse.*

*Lights fade to a silhouette as
BLAKE puts the joint in Nick's mouth and
lights it. He takes a long, deep drag, and hands
it to DAVE, as PRINCESS & BLAKE begin
to take off Nick's clothes.*

*DAVE sits by throughout, smoking and
drinking.*

Scene 2.

The next morning.

DAVE stumbles to his feet, gathers himself, checks his wallet—it's empty. He sees Nick's jeans, digs out Nick's wallet, and takes whatever cash is inside.

DAVE (to NICK):
I'll get you back, brother.

DAVE exits the apartment, but trips over the threshold and ends up face to face with THE GIRL.

They look at each other a while before...

THE GIRL:

*...soon I travel toward you, to remain,
to teach robust American love.*

*For I know very well that I and robust love belong among you,
inland, and along the Western sea*

DAVE:

... You.
I'm sorry. I can't.

DAVE crawls away, vomits, then drags himself down the stairs.

NICK wakes suddenly to find himself entangled in the bed with BLAKE & PRINCESS. In the hall, THE GIRL scrambles to the heating register.

Naked, NICK extracts himself from the bed and stumbles to the window, dawn light just creeping in through it, he throws it open, and looks out over the city.

He finds his notebook and a pencil and tries to write. But the words won't come. He looks back to the bed.

NICK:
fuck...

THE GIRL whispers into the register, a sound more felt than heard.

NICK looks back to his covered typewriter, crosses to it, removes the sheet, wrapping it about himself. He reads the crumpled poem before moving it to one side, cracks his neck, and readies his fingers.

This time when THE GIRL speaks we see her doing so, but the words almost flood out of her; they are not her own.

THE GIRL:
This city...

NICK:
This city-this city-this Kansas City...

THE GIRL:
This city—the last real city

NICK:
—the last real city

BLAKE crawls up behind NICK and begins to kiss his neck.

NICK:
Dammit, no...
Not...now...

BLAKE
There's only now. You said so yourself.

NICK starts to relent, but THE GIRL begins to whisper again. And NICK hears the echoing.

NICK gets up and crosses away, finds Blake's shirt and throws it at him. Then he crosses to the bed and kicks PRINCESS awake, pointing to the door. BLAKE & PRINCESS oblige by dressing and getting ready to go.

But BLAKE finds his sax and starts to play a few notes and PRINCESS finds an unfinished bottle and has a drink.

NICK:
Aw, fucking hell. I'm old. I need sleep. Go.

BLAKE & PRINCESS don't seem to hear him.

NICK:
I've gotta crap and I'll do it right here in the middle of the floor

BLAKE & PRINCESS don't seem to hear him.

NICK:
You want me to work, to write “the next great thing?”
You gotta go.

*BLAKE & PRINCESS look at each other.
And decide to find another party*

They open the door. And LOUIS is there.

BLAKE:
Hey, Man.
Nick. You’ve got...
Someone to see you?

*BLAKE & PRINCESS exit.
THE GIRL watches them go, and when they
are gone, she listens to the scene unfolding in
Nick’s apartment.*

*LOUIS stands in the doorway, waiting to be
invited in. He holds a single piece of paper.*

*NICK crosses to the typewriter, throwing the
sheet he’s wearing over the poems he’d been
working on as well as the typewriter before
crossing to the door.*

NICK:
Louis...

LOUIS:
I... I, um, brought you...
(He offers NICK the paper.)
It’s a present.
(No response.)
It’s the first poem you showed me.
The one that really knocked everybody’s socks off.

*(He offers the poem again.
No response.*

*(LOUIS leans into NICK and kisses him
awkwardly on the lips. NICK backs away,
taking the paper.*

*(LOUIS tentatively enters, closing the
door behind him.)*

NICK:
Je-sus...

*(NICK crumples the poem and tosses it at
the trashcan. LOUIS should retrieve it or
at least consider it. NICK lights a*

cigarette and starts dressing.)

LOUIS:

I... I, um, suppose you want to... to know what I'm doing here...
I left her, Nick. I left my wife. She's back in Kansas City and I have come here.
To be with you.
I'm not going back. I don't know if she's accepted that fact yet. But that's what I
told her.
I've left it all.
I've thought a lot about what you said back in Kansas City
I've thought and thought and...
I think you had the right idea.
Getting out of that...square...town, going to New York,
and now... Coming here. To San Francisco.
Living the real...Bohemian life.
And I'm ready to do that too.
I mean, I just—the tie... That was just for traveling purposes.
It's not easy. Letting go of everything. I need time, but I'm ready to let it all go.
Just like you did.
The hat too. I'll get rid of it. I suppose the overcoat is pretty...square too.
I'll lose it all. Lose it all for you.
I just—
Who were—?
Kind of early for visitors...and you're only just now...getting dressed.

(silence)

It was damned odd to find you in Kansas City after so many years away.
I hadn't even been down to 18th & Vine since you left.
But that night... I just had to get out. And there you were. Returned.

NICK:

And I told you I wasn't staying, I wasn't there to see you.

LOUIS:

But it didn't stop you kissing me.

NICK:

Thank the wine, the whiskey, for that...

LOUIS:

It was more—

NICK:

Didn't I leave the next morning while you were still asleep?

(silence)

LOUIS:

Getting here was... gosh...
There's nothing between here and Kansas City. It's... Empty...
It made sense though, you know. After you left—
I started driving and... Of course there was nothing.
Nothing between there and here. The wasteland you left behind.

LOUIS (cont'd):

You landed on my life like an H-Bomb.

And then, my-my-my car broke down across the Bay. In Oakland.

Were they some of your Bohemian friends?

Or should we call them Beatniks? You're going to have help me here, Nick. I'm still not...down with the lingo...

I left it there. My car.

I took the ferry across. It was— That California sunlight on the blue water.

It made me think of Shelley, actually. In Italy.

Right before the squall blew up out of nowhere. And he drowned.

1822. Barely a year after Keats died. Also in Italy.

So, Nick...

(silence)

Look, it's...been a long time, I don't

expect you not to have taken other...others...

since we were together. I just. I didn't expect...

You know...the girl. I mean, you never before...

A girl?

(silence)

I had a hell of a time finding you. But then...

the trail wasn't too hard to find. If you know what to look for...

Jesus, Nick, please—

NICK:

Yeah, Lou, I fucked her.

Last night. And him, and then her again

and I watched them fuck each other—

Is that what you want to hear?

LOUIS:

...don't do this to me.

NICK:

Don't do what to you?

What the fuck are you doing here, Louis?

LOUIS:

I told you, Nick, I left—

NICK:

You didn't leave your wife.

LOUIS

See, Nick, you're wrong there. I did. I left her. I left Julie and the kids and our house.

I told her she could have it all. I told my neighbors to go...jump in a lake, I quit my

job—I even stopped off at the parish and told Father Pinns that I was a...Sodomite

and that I was going West to live the Bohemian life and... and...

NICK:
Fuck boys in the ass?

LOUIS:
...Essentially...yes.

NICK:
Say it.

LOUIS:
Hm?

NICK:
Say it.

LOUIS:
What?

NICK:
“I’m going West to fuck boys in the ass.”

LOUIS:
...All right!
Alright, alright. The truth then!
I— I—
I didn’t leave my wife.
I told her a... a... cousin had died. And I had to go the funeral.
She didn’t bother to question me. She probably knew I was lying even.

NICK:
So why are you here?

LOUIS:
I’m here... I guess I thought I could convince you to come back.

NICK:
You can’t.

LOUIS:
You don’t understand. I need to be with you, Nick. I—
Dear god...
A week ago I was standing up in front of my class.
We were discussing Wordsworth. “Tintern Abbey.”

NICK:
Please don’t—

LOUIS:
“...feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man’s life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love.”

NICK:

Louis! I left you. Take your Wordsworth and go...home.

LOUIS:

That day, when I first saw you. In that diner,
talking to the room about "Tintern Abbey."
You spoke truth like it was a foreign tongue—
If only you hadn't spoken...

NICK:

I won't do this again—

LOUIS:

I was standing in my classroom, one week ago,
in front of those eyes,
trying to make them love a poem, my favorite poem...
But I couldn't make them love it, because
I didn't love it anymore myself. Not without you.
I was fighting to remember why I loved Wordsworth
so I went out, wanted to hear some jazz, and there you were.
Wordsworth brought us together. Twice.
I couldn't lose you twice.

NICK:

Wordsworth is dead.

LOUIS:

Why did you stop in Kansas City on your way here?
You didn't have to stop in Kansas City.

NICK:

Please go.

LOUIS:

You took Wordsworth from me.
I just had to start driving. And now...
Nick, you're the—the...um... the only thing—

NICK:

No, Louis. You can go back—

LOUIS:

I can't.

NICK:

You can. You've got an out from this—an in back to that: You've got Jesus and
Father Pinns. Forgiveness. You can still be reconciled with God and your wife and
your whole little life.

LOUIS:

I won't go back without you.

NICK:
I'm not going back.

LOUIS:
Then I'll stay.

NICK:
You couldn't survive here. You're just playing at finding out who you are.
"Here be monsters," Old Man. Turn back now while you still can.

LOUIS:
I mean if it's because of that girl, I guess I could understand,
but I don't really believe she...and you—

NICK:
I've never really cared much about whether they were boys or girls, as long as they
were a good lay. Not now. Not when I was your student and we... had our thing—

LOUIS:
Even in Kansas City?

NICK:
I never stopped fucking whomever I wanted to fuck.

LOUIS:
You were—
No you didn't.
We... We had each other.

NICK:
I had...whomever I wanted.
I didn't sit around waiting for you when "Daddy" or "Hubby" had to go home.
I may have been a unique part of your life, but you were just another lover.

LOUIS:
I don't believe that.

NICK:
Jesus Christ, Louis!

LOUIS:
I can't believe that.
I held you in my arms. In your apartment. Our bodies...
Shamefully naked—that's what I was brought up to feel.
But I felt only peace. For the first time—
You told me it was real love.

NICK:
Really, Louis, this is easier than you're making it out to be.

LOUIS:
You told me you loved me.
It was truth.

NICK:
It's easier for you to let go if I don't care.

LOUIS:
We shared Wordsworth—

NICK:
Wordsworth—!
Wordsworth lived to be an old man, right?

LOUIS:
Eighty years: 1770 – 1850.

NICK:
An old man who lost the gift, lost the vision?

LOUIS:
Well—

NICK:
Well I'm Keats. Dead young and loving it,
because I was at the height of my powers.

LOUIS:
Don't talk like that—

NICK:
I've crossed over to the other side, old man,
I'm shimmering, a being of light
And I don't want your shriveled old man cock.
You have to go back now.

(silence)

(LOUIS throws over a chair.)

LOUIS:
F— Fuck you, Nick.

NICK:
A glimmer of life in the corpse!
Too little, too late.
We are all rotting away—

LOUIS:
But I—

NICK:
You're a part of the dead part.
Go home and try to enjoy it.

LOUIS:
You're wrong, Nick. I'm not a dead man. Not now.
I was. But you brought me back. And now...

LOUIS (cont'd):

(silence)

I didn't call the school to tell them—
I don't— I don't— I can't—
And Julie, she knew I was lying. She must have.

Foolish... stupid... old man!

NICK:

Louis...

You're not a...a stupid old man.

LOUIS:

Leaving was so easy for you, but I—
I crossed mountains and desert.

NICK:

You crossed—?

LOUIS:

Mountains and desert.

NICK:

...So did I, Lou.

LOUIS:

I won't go back into that grave...I can't.

NICK:

So don't. But you can't come on this ride with me.

(They look at each other for a while.)

LOUIS:

But you're everywhere, Nick. I stand up in the classroom
and I see you sitting there. I go to the library, you're gazing at me
through the stacks.
And then I go to the bookstore and you're there, but this time
it's actually you. Your picture, everyone is buying a copy of your book.
I open a magazine or the *Times Book Review*, it's you, you, you.

NICK:

Yes, I'm very famous now. Or hadn't you heard?

LOUIS

I did, yes, obviously—

NICK:

Sarcasm.

LOUIS

Of course.

The point is, the you I see looking back at me from the pages
of that book. That's not you.

LOUIS (cont'd):
You're the kid in the diner, in the stacks.
The boy I found in that jazz club one week ago.
That's you.

NICK:
What the fuck does that mean?

LOUIS
I hated the book.

NICK:
You hated—?

LOUIS
Completely and utterly.

NICK:
...Why?

LOUIS
It was just this Beatnik, stream of consciousness garbage.
No consideration for words, their
singularity, their simple power.

NICK:
You're probably the only person in America who thinks that.

LOUIS:
I'm just the only person in your life
who will actually tell you what you don't want to hear.

NICK:
That's not true.

LOUIS:
Very well then...
I'm... I'm sorry I followed you here, burdened
you with my own problems, with no warning.

NICK:
It's okay.

LOUIS:
No, it isn't.
But I really was lost...to find you again and lose you so quickly.

NICK:
...I'm sorry.
I didn't mean to run into you. I wasn't even going to stop in Kansas City.
But when I did... I don't know...
There were feelings of rightness.

LOUIS:
Between us.

NICK:
And the world, the universe, the Buddha himself.

LOUIS:
(chuckles)

(They sit for a while in silence.)

LOUIS:
This isn't so bad, is it?

NICK:
No. This isn't so bad, Old Man.
(silence)

I didn't want to hurt you.
You were a point of stability.
You were the person who told me to go, see the world,
"Make it work."

LOUIS:
So what you said? About me? About the others
when we were together in Kansas City?
You were faithful?

NICK (a lie):
Yes.

LOUIS:
Oh thank god!
How do you do manage to make me both love and hate you so much?

NICK:
I'm a spoiled rich kid. We're brought up knowing how to do that.

(They laugh.)

NICK:
I need a cigarette.
You want one?

LOUIS:
No, my wife—
Yeah.
So how have things been going for you?

NICK:
Finding the city's energy. Catching up with old friends.

LOUIS:
Writing?

NICK:
Not yet.

LOUIS:
But...you always wrote most in the fall.

NICK:
It's been a few falls since that was true.

LOUIS:
Well it's a different season here. Nothing like
back home. Of course things would be different.

NICK:
Except, Louis, I'm here now.
These are my digs. Haven't had a KC fall in...
And I can't be two places at once.

LOUIS:
It's funny though...

NICK:
Huh? What's funny?

LOUIS:
I've crossed all that distance, but here I am in your room, and there's someone
playing jazz nearby, and it's almost like we're still in Kansas City. You and me
together.

*NICK listens and indeed there is the sound of
someone playing a jazz record in a nearby
apartment. And the echoing whisper of THE
GIRL into the heating register*

*NICK looks to LOUIS and then grabs his
notebook and a pencil.*

LOUIS:
And you're working...
All that distance and I'm right back where I started.

NICK:
I just gotta get some thoughts down.

LOUIS:
You don't have to explain that to me.

*(NICK scribbles while LOUIS watches
adoringly.)*

LOUIS:
So, you won't come back, but...
Maybe I could stay.

NICK:
Are you kidding? You have to stay. This single fucking stanza is about as much as I've written in three years.

LOUIS:
Oh, well sure—

NICK:
Look, I'm famished, I'm going out to get some grub, I'll bring it back here and we will feast. Get to know each other again.

LOUIS:
Sure. I could go with you.

NICK:
No. Rest up. Clean up. You look beat.

LOUIS:
I did sleep in my car last night.

NICK:
I'll be back in no time.

NICK leans in and kisses LOUIS. It is both tender and passionate. LOUIS is caught off-guard but soon gives into the kiss.

NICK:
Don't go anywhere.

LOUIS:
Where would I go?

(NICK exits.)

LOUIS settles in a bit and makes himself comfortable. He goes to the window and looks out. He turns back to take in the whole of the room. He investigates all its little details of being lived in by Nick. He eventually finds the manuscript of older poems that Joan was reading at the start of the play. He sits down at the sheet-covered typewriter and leafs through them, smiling, as if seeing old friends for the first time in a long while.

In the hall, THE GIRL is listening for whatever she can hear.

LOUIS turns towards the typewriter and removes the sheet. He runs his finger across the keys. In the hall, the girl begins her whispering into the register. The whispers echo faintly,

more felt than heard.

LOUIS is breathing heavily, on the verge of typing something.

And then we hear very clearly:

THE GIRL:

*On the bluffs and overlooking
Two rivers and two states.
The world stretches away from me—*

LOUIS stands up quickly and steps away from the typewriter. He grabs up the old manuscript and covers the typewriter.

Lights fade to silhouette.

NICK reenters with the promised feast. They start to eat but NICK turns it into a flirtatious game. Soon they are kissing and undressing.