

The Exquisite Corpse

A play

By Richard von Ritter

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The Exquisite Corpse

Characters

VALENTINE, 20s

GRETA, 40s

ANDRE, 30s

TRISTAN, 50s

Time

The present. Christmas.

Place

An old house in the country.

Act One

Scene One

Afternoon. A large picture window looking out onto a snowy field, up center. A scarecrow stands in the middle of the field, spectral and abandoned. A black, iron, spiral staircase, leading up to a loft, up left. A serving tray with snacks and drinks midway between the couch and staircase. A hallway, middle left. A Christmas tree that has been abandoned in the middle of being decorated, down left. An old leather chair and an end table with a lamp and phone, down right. Another hallway, middle right. Bookcases crammed with books on the right and back walls, up right. A large, worn Oriental carpet covers most of the room.

It is dark on stage. A point of light appears in the loft above the spiral staircase. Simultaneously, the passacaglia from Bach's *Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor* for organ begins. The light expands gradually illuminating the downstairs area while leaving the loft dark.

VALENTINE and GRETA sit on the couch, right and left respectively. VALENTINE wears a white dress and a small wooden crucifix hangs from her neck. She holds a glass of beer, the bottle on the floor beside her. She looks up at the loft, listening to the music. GRETA is dressed in a dark Chinese pantsuit with a dragon on her blouse. She has her arms up on the back and side of the couch and looks at VALENTINE as if she were prey. As the downstairs is fully illuminated, the music fades away.

VALENTINE

Thank you for inviting me for Christmas.

GRETA

I didn't invite you. Tristan did.

VALENTINE

Oh.

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

The only reason he invited you was because he's depressed.

VALENTINE

I'm sorry to hear that.

GRETA

He's always depressed, especially at Christmas.

VALENTINE

Yes, the holidays can be stressful.

GRETA

Only if you let them stress you out. Personally, I don't give a shit. Why should I? I have cancer.

VALENTINE

Oh, I'm so sorry.

GRETA

Why? You don't even know me.

VALENTINE

I'm sorry when anyone gets cancer.

GRETA

Why? Because you're afraid you'll get it?

VALENTINE

It makes me sad because it's a disease.

GRETA

It's part of life, isn't it?

VALENTINE

I guess.

GRETA

You need to do more than guess. You might get it. Then what?

VALENTINE

Then that would make me sad.

GRETA

I don't mean to minimize it. I'm not hilarious or anything.

VALENTINE

(beat)

Is it operable?

GRETA

No.

VALENTINE

Jesus.

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

You drink a lot, don't you?

VALENTINE

Not especially.

GRETA

You've been drinking ever since you got here.

VALENTINE

I just got here.

GRETA

A pattern is a pattern.

VALENTINE

What do you mean, "a pattern?"

GRETA

You're always walking around with a drink in your hand.

VALENTINE

It's the holidays, for Christ's sake.

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

You evidently don't believe in Christ, even though you're wearing a crucifix

VALENTINE

What?

GRETA

You took his name in vain.

VALENTINE

Are you serious?

GRETA

I'm not making a joke. Aren't you Catholic?

VALENTINE

I'm sort of a lapsed Catholic.

GRETA

Sort of? You're either lapsed or you're not.

VALENTINE

Is everything clearly demarcated in your world?

GRETA

It evidently isn't in your world.

VALENTINE

(beat)

Why are you being so contentious?

GRETA

Maybe because I'm dying. I don't have time to pretend anymore. I've always hated politeness, small talk. It's so unreal, don't you think?

VALENTINE

There's issues beneath the surface.

GRETA

Like what?

VALENTINE

Body language, personal tone. Most communication is nonverbal. You learn that when you visit a foreign country. Even though you don't speak the language, you get along fine. In fact, better than if you spoke it.

GRETA

Where was this you went?

VALENTINE

Italy. The people were so lively. Everything was clear without language.

GRETA

Evidently not to the Italians.

VALENTINE

What do you mean?

GRETA

They use language, don't they? They speak Italian.

VALENTINE rolls her eyes and drinks.

GRETA

Or do you think we should return to the Stone Age?

VALENTINE

I think, in many respects, we're still in it. Morally, do you think we've advanced much?

GRETA

Perhaps, not. I wonder why. Human nature is such a beast, don't you think?

VALENTINE

A beast?

GRETA

Or do you think we have an angel inside us?

VALENTINE

(muses)

Maybe a petrified one.

GRETA

Petrified?

VALENTINE

(beat, changes the subject)

That's a pretty Christmas tree.

GRETA

Every year we drag it out, and then we drag it back.

VALENTINE

It's artificial? I didn't know.

GRETA

You don't think I'd kill a tree just to satisfy my own vanity, do you? Actually, I do it

GRETA (cont'd)

to punish Tristan. He hates Christmas.

Pause. VALENTINE stares ahead.

GRETA

How did you meet my brother?

VALENTINE

Andre? Well, actually, he was my therapist.

GRETA

Your therapist?

VALENTINE

But we weren't dating during therapy.

GRETA

I hope not.

VALENTINE

But afterwards, we met by accident.

GRETA

Tristan doesn't believe in accidents. He thinks I caused my cancer.

VALENTINE

How could he?

GRETA

Because he thinks there's a reason for everything.

VALENTINE

Yeah, but it could be a bug or a germ or a natural process. That wouldn't be an accident, but it wouldn't mean that you caused it.

GRETA

He thinks it's psychosomatic. I thought my way into it because I'm so negative.

VALENTINE

That's not fair.

GRETA

Perhaps, he's right. I deserve it.

VALENTINE

(beat)

You're putting me on, aren't you?

GRETA

Of course, I'm not putting you on!

VALENTINE

This is a weird conversation. One of the weirdest I've ever had.

GRETA

Perhaps, you're more sheltered than you realize.

VALENTINE

Oh, I've had my share of foul weather, let me tell you.

VALENTINE drinks and pours more beer into her glass.

GRETA

Is that why you drink so much?

VALENTINE

You're pretty relentless, aren't you?

GRETA

I see no reason to stand on ceremony. We're both human beings. Where will it get us to lie to each other?

Pause. VALENTINE stares ahead.

GRETA

A penny for your thoughts.

VALENTINE

(unsure if she should say it)

Your son...Joseph, is it?

GRETA

What about him?

VALENTINE

He plays the organ beautifully.

GRETA

Too bad he blew his face off.

VALENTINE

What?

GRETA

(leans toward VALENTINE, articulating vehemently)

He *blew his face* off.

VALENTINE

That's horrible. How did he do that?

GRETA

With a shotgun.

VALENTINE

Are you serious?

GRETA

Of course, I'm serious.

VALENTINE

Oh, dear God.

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

He tried to commit suicide.

(beat)

That just goes to show you: Man proposes, God disposes.

VALENTINE

How can you say that? That's so cold.

GRETA

Is God cold?

VALENTINE

His entire face?

GRETA

The lower half. He has no mouth or jaw now.

VALENTINE

That's hideous.

GRETA

Hideous, terrible, awful. Maybe it's none of those things. From the point of view of

eternity it just is.

GRETA (cont'd)

VALENTINE
(beat)
I don't understand this conversation anymore.

GRETA
Why not?

VALENTINE
I guess I haven't had your tragedies.

GRETA
Yet. Or do you think you can go through life scot free?

VALENTINE
It hasn't been like that so far.

GRETA
I hope you didn't expect it to be. Didn't Andre tell you about my cancer?

VALENTINE
No. I don't think he knows.

GRETA
Does he tell you everything? That would be hard to believe, wouldn't it?

VALENTINE
Well, I guess you answered that question for me.

GRETA
You don't think men are deceitful?

VALENTINE
Human beings are deceitful.

GRETA
On a scale of one to ten, how deceitful are you?

VALENTINE
Not very.

GRETA
What about with respect to yourself?

Myself? VALENTINE

How much do you lie to yourself? GRETA

Well, I wouldn't really know that, would I? VALENTINE

Sure you would. GRETA

(beat)
Look, what's the point of this conversation? VALENTINE

What's the point of any conversation? GRETA

I'm just trying to be nice. VALENTINE

Why? GRETA

It's Christmas. Would you rather I were mean? VALENTINE

I'd rather you were you. GRETA

I am me. VALENTINE

Are you sure? GRETA

Who else would I be? VALENTINE

Someone other than you pretend to be. GRETA

I'm not pretending anything. VALENTINE

GRETA

Did you never pretend to be anything but what you were? When you're nice, do you always feel like being nice?

VALENTINE

I choose to be nice because it's the decent thing to do.

GRETA

Then you don't always feel nice. Therefore you're not being what you really are.

VALENTINE

Wait a second. I choose to be nice. That's who I really am. I'm not just my feelings. I'm a whole human being.

GRETA

Who told you you're a whole human being? Andre?

VALENTINE looks at GRETA with alarm
then drinks.

GRETA

I notice that anytime you get anxious you drink.

VALENTINE

(beat, confronts GRETA)

Look, what do you want from me?

GRETA

Nothing.

VALENTINE

Nothing at all? I could just evaporate into thin air and you'd go on talking to yourself?

GRETA

I'm not talking to myself. I'm talking to you.

VALENTINE

Do you have some purpose in talking to me?

GRETA

Did you have some purpose in coming here?

VALENTINE

(stands up suddenly)

WHO THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!

GRETA bursts out laughing.

VALENTINE

That's funny?

GRETA

I'm sorry. It was a serious question.

VALENTINE

"What purpose I had in coming here?" I was invited here!

GRETA

But you didn't have to accept the invitation.

VALENTINE

What is this – some kind of interrogation? You sound like a psychiatrist.

GRETA

I am a psychiatrist.

VALENTINE

Good for you. You're making me extremely uncomfortable. Do you have some purpose in asking me all these questions?

GRETA

I want to find out who you really are.

VALENTINE

Why don't you just ask me?

GRETA

You'd lie to me.

VALENTINE

Excuse me?

GRETA

You'd be "nice" – tell me what I want to hear.

VALENTINE

Do you think I'm that much of a hypocrite?

GRETA

Aren't you?

VALENTINE

What is this? A game?!

GRETA

Not at all.

(beat)

But speaking of games, have you ever heard of “The Exquisite Corpse?”

VALENTINE

“The Exquisite Corpse?” What are you talking about? What are you trying to do to me?! WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS ABOUT?

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

You see – you drink.

VALENTINE

What are you trying to say – I have a drinking problem?

GRETA

Don’t you? Andre *is* an addictionologist.

VALENTINE

I thought he was a psychologist.

GRETA

He specializes in addiction.

VALENTINE

(beat)

Oh, I get it.

GRETA

What do you get?

VALENTINE

Why don’t you tell me about yourself, Greta? How’s your cancer coming along?

GRETA

It’s coming along fine, as far as I know.

VALENTINE

It’s inoperable, right?

I told you it was.

GRETA

How do you feel about that?

VALENTINE

Fine.

GRETA

Are you looking forward to death, then?

VALENTINE

In what sense do you mean “looking forward to” – anticipating or liking it?

GRETA

Both, either, I don’t care. This is absurd.

VALENTINE

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

Is that why you drink so much – because you find everything absurd?

VALENTINE

(beat)

You’re the most aggressive, mean, negative witch I’ve ever met in my life! NO WONDER YOU HAVE CANCER!

GRETA

God is punishing me?

VALENTINE

How the fuck should I know?!

GRETA

Please, sit down.

VALENTINE

Why should I?

GRETA

Because it makes me nervous when you stand in front of me.

VALENTINE

That’s too bad. I don’t feel like sitting down. You don’t want me to pretend to be something I’m not just to please you, do you? I mean, you’re so concerned with my

VALENTINE (cont'd)

integrity.

GRETA

I think you should be concerned with your integrity.

VALENTINE

What's that supposed to mean?

GRETA

Do you really think it's wise seeing your therapist like this?

VALENTINE

I'm not seeing my therapist! I'm dating my fiancé!

GRETA

Fiancé?

VALENTINE

What's wrong with that?

GRETA

It's happened before, you know - situations like yours.

VALENTINE

What do you mean - "situations like mine?"

GRETA

Do you think it will last?

VALENTINE

(beat)

Jesus Christ! You're the most obnoxious person I've ever met in my life.

GRETA

You're the one who's drinking all the time.

VALENTINE

Why are you attacking me like this? What have I ever done to you? You must be so miserable!

GRETA

(a sudden, violent scream)

I'M DYING!

VALENTINE
(taken aback, beat)

I'm sorry.

GRETA
What do you want me to be – all cheery and lie through my teeth?

VALENTINE
No.

GRETA
Well, that's what's going on with me. And it sucks. It sucks deeply.

VALENTINE
I know.

GRETA
You don't know anything about it. You're in the midst of life – with all its pitiful illusions.

VALENTINE
(beat)
Is there anything I can do for you?

GRETA
Stop trying to be nice.

VALENTINE
Well, you've cured me of that.

GRETA
I'm not a nice person, in case you haven't noticed. I'm a mean, self-centered, obnoxious busybody.

VALENTINE
I'm sure you have some good qualities.

GRETA
Name one.

VALENTINE
(beat)
You have nice eyes.

GRETA
Thank you.

VALENTINE
You're welcome.

GRETA
Sit down.

(beat)
Please.

VALENTINE sits.

GRETA
Haven't you ever been near the dying before?

VALENTINE
No.

GRETA
Everyone wants to escape from it. It's like they don't want to catch it. If only we could sweep death under the rug.

VALENTINE
(beat)
Are you in pain?

GRETA
Of course, I'm in pain!

VALENTINE
I'm just trying to be nice.

GRETA
(leans toward Valentine and speaking slowly with
unnatural precision, aggressively)
STOP TRYING TO BE NICE!

VALENTINE
(beat)
What do you want me to do? Slap you silly?

GRETA bursts out laughing.

VALENTINE
Oh, brother. No wonder your husband's depressed.

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

You don't know the half of it. His son blew his face off, his wife is dying of cancer, and he thinks it's all about him.

Beat.

Blackout

Scene Two

Twilight. Dark on stage. The point of light appears in the loft above the spiral staircase; the passacaglia continues. The downstairs is gradually illuminated while the loft remains dark. TRISTAN sits on the couch brooding. ANDRE stands near the staircase looking suspiciously up at the loft. The music fades away.

ANDRE

What type of cancer does Greta have?

TRISTAN

I don't know. She won't tell me.

ANDRE

Did you ask her?

TRISTAN

Of course, I asked her.

ANDRE

What did she say?

TRISTAN

"It's none of my business."

ANDRE

That doesn't surprise me. Why should she share anything with you?

TRISTAN

I'm her husband. I love her.

ANDRE

Then why do you treat her so badly?

TRISTAN

What are you talking about?

ANDRE

You're always depressed.

TRISTAN

What does that have to do with anything?

ANDRE

Don't you have any concept of how your behavior affects other people? "Oh, poor me. Look what God has done to me. First, he blows my son's face off, and now he's killing my wife."

TRISTAN

How would you feel?

ANDRE

She's my sister. How do you think I feel?

TRISTAN

Then how can you judge me for my feelings?

ANDRE

I'm not judging you because of your feelings but because of your actions. Depression isn't a feeling; it's a covert form of aggression. You whine in order to torture others. You put yourself down in order to accuse them.

TRISTAN

What am I accusing her of?

ANDRE

Abandoning you, causing you pain.

TRISTAN

(beat)

It's the end of my life.

ANDRE

The end of *your* life?

TRISTAN

What do you want me to do? She's a bitch! I can't sleep! I have heartburn! She's killing me!

ANDRE

She's dying of cancer, and *she's* killing *you*?

TRISTAN

Now she's divorcing me! It's an outrage!

ANDRE

An outrage?

TRISTAN
How would you feel?

ANDRE
Who cares about your feelings?

TRISTAN
(beat)
And you call yourself a psychologist?

ANDRE
Tristan, you have no sense. She's always divorcing you. You've had a broken marriage ever since your honeymoon.

TRISTAN
She's always been mean to me.

ANDRE
Whose house is this?

TRISTAN
Her house.

ANDRE
Does she let you stay here?

TRISTAN
I'm her husband.

ANDRE
What good are you?

TRISTAN
No good.

ANDRE
Don't give me that shit.

Beat. TRISTAN stares ahead
despondently.

ANDRE
Look at you. It's unbelievable. You're a philosophy professor who writes all these books about the nature of reality, but you can't stand the reality of yourself. How logical is it to believe that God is behind everything that happens – and God is good – and yet be depressed.

TRISTAN

Life isn't logical, Andre.

ANDRE

That's no excuse for behaving irrationally. You say you love Greta? Help her – decorate the Christmas tree. Oh, no, you can't do that; you have Christmas angst.

TRISTAN

(sighs)

Between the two of you I'll kill myself.

ANDRE

That'll solve the problem.

TRISTAN

It'll solve *your* problem.

ANDRE

What's that supposed to mean?

TRISTAN

You never wanted her to marry me.

ANDRE

What are you talking about? I'm the one who introduced you.

TRISTAN

You always blame me for everything that's wrong with our marriage.

ANDRE

I don't give a fuck what's wrong with your marriage!

TRISTAN

You don't know anything about it. You've never even been married. You've had five fiancées all of whom happen to be your former patients.

ANDRE

So?

TRISTAN

So look at yourself.

ANDRE

Tristan, you're the one who's depressed. You tell me your wife is dying.

TRISTAN
She said you tortured her as a child.

ANDRE
Tortured her?

TRISTAN
Abused her.

ANDRE
Sexually?

TRISTAN
Is it true?

ANDRE
(beat)
I think it was more like the other way around.

TRISTAN
Oh, Jesus.

ANDRE
(with amused spite)
You can't handle anything. What kind of a husband are you? How can you love if you're so full of yourself?

TRISTAN
Full of myself? I'm empty, ruined, nothing.

ANDRE
Forget about yourself. Aren't you a metaphysician? God's in control of all the details of our lives? Then what's your problem?

TRISTAN
I'm *a human being*!

ANDRE
Who gives a fuck! So am I! So is Greta!

TRISTAN
(a sudden, hysterical tantrum)
WHY DON'T YOU ACT LIKE HUMAN BEINGS!

ANDRE
(unfazed, beat)

ANDRE (cont'd)

Translation – why don't we treat you like you want to be treated.

TRISTAN

No. Why don't you treat me the way you would want me to treat you.

ANDRE

If I were you, I'd want someone to beat the shit out of me – badly.

TRISTAN

(shakes his head in disbelief)

Forget it.

ANDRE

Forget it? My sister's dying, and you can't handle it. You're trampling all over her deathbed.

TRISTAN

How is it trampling on her deathbed when I tell her I love her and she says –

(vehemently mocks GRETA)

“No, you've never loved me! You've ruined my life!”

(beat)

Those are sick games.

ANDRE

Sick games? Maybe that's the way she feels.

TRISTAN

Well, she's divorcing me. You finally got what you wanted.

ANDRE

You moron. You have no idea what I want.

TRISTAN

Now you can marry her!

ANDRE

(raises his hand to strike TRISTAN)

You stupid fuck. I ought to slap you silly.

TRISTAN

You hit me and I'll call the police.

ANDRE

You call the police, and I'll have you removed from the premises.

TRISTAN

Good! You'll be doing me a favor.

Pause. TRISTAN stares ahead.

ANDRE

I can't believe this. Every day you lecture hundreds of students on ontology, epistemology, ethics – and you have the outlook of a fucking rag picker.

TRISTAN

I want you to understand. I know what a shit I am.

ANDRE

We're all shits.

TRISTAN

When death happens, you see it.

ANDRE

We die the way we live.

TRISTAN

What do you mean?

ANDRE

Greta's always been a bitch. What's new? How's Joseph?

TRISTAN

(beat)

How do you think he is?

ANDRE

I don't know.

TRISTAN

How would you feel if you didn't have a face?

ANDRE

Can't it be surgically reconstructed?

TRISTAN

He refuses.

ANDRE

Refuses?

(beat)

ANDRE (cont'd)

Well, there you go. He enjoys his misery.

(beat)

I don't understand him. He could still give concerts. He's a phenomenon.

TRISTAN

Without a face?

ANDRE

He could wear a mask - like the Phantom of the Opera.

TRISTAN

That's absurd.

ANDRE

Absurd? What does he do now? Walk around the mall, scaring people to death so they'll give him money for drugs? The police cite him for being a public nuisance. What do they call him? "No Face?"

(sighs and shakes his head)

There's some things I just don't understand.

TRISTAN

That's because you don't understand yourself.

ANDRE

He's a drug addict.

TRISTAN

You were a drug addict.

ANDRE

Hey, let's not get personal.

TRISTAN

How can you *not* understand him?

ANDRE

I stopped taking drugs. Period. I didn't grovel around in a pit, searching for "understanding." It's not about understanding. It's about action.

TRISTAN

Bullshit. You think life is about control, power, success? You moron, it's to die!

ANDRE

Then *die*! Die to yourself, asshole! What do you think I'm talking about? You think

ANDRE (cont'd)

you're Job? Alright, didn't Job die to himself – in the end – repented in dust and ashes? And didn't he get everything back? But *you!* You haven't lost a thing!

TRISTAN

My son's hideously deformed! I'm losing a wife to cancer!

ANDRE

Stop beating her up with your depression.

TRISTAN

(beat, looks at ANDRE with contempt)

Piss on you! You're just like her – you use your insight to kill, not cure.

ANDRE

(beat)

Listen to me: sometimes you have to kill in order to cure – Mr. Job.

TRISTAN

Alright, I'm sick of myself. Let's talk about something else.

ANDRE

To be sick of yourself is to still be stuck on yourself. You see what I'm saying? Your depression is nothing but egotism.

TRISTAN

Andre, will you stop the psychobabble.

ANDRE

I'm a psychologist. I'm entitled to babble.

TRISTAN

(pause, stares ahead, sighs)

You and Greta. I can't believe I married a psychiatrist.

ANDRE

Ah, that's what you wanted – someone to “understand” you.

TRISTAN

You have no idea how she tortures me.

ANDRE

You ask for it.

TRISTAN

(beat)

TRISTAN (cont'd)

Sometimes I have the feeling that she's playing a game.

ANDRE

A game? What – to have cancer?

TRISTAN

Our doctor knows nothing about it. He hasn't seen her in years. She says she's seeing another doctor but she won't tell me who.

(pause, broods)

I love her so much I can't stand it.

ANDRE

Now, yes. Before, not so much.

The phone rings. Pause. TRISTAN stares ahead.

ANDRE

Aren't you going to answer the phone?

TRISTAN

No.

ANDRE

Why not?

TRISTAN

I'm afraid I'll die.

ANDRE

Die? For answering the phone?

The phone stops ringing. ANDRE takes out his cell phone and plays with it. TRISTAN stares ahead, brooding.

TRISTAN

Valentine's a sweet girl.

ANDRE

They're all sweet.

ANDRE holds up his phone to photograph
TRISTAN.

ANDRE

Say “cheese.”

TRISTAN smirks. ANDRE snaps the picture
then shows it to TRISTAN.

ANDRE

Job – with a smirk.

TRISTAN stands, crosses to the window, and
looks out. It is dark outside now. Lightning
illuminates the scarecrow.

TRISTAN

That scarecrow is my only consolation.

ANDRE

You *are* the scarecrow. When you speak, no one listens. When you cry, no one is
there. When you feel beautiful, it’s wasted on the wind.

Beat.

Blackout.

Scene Three

Night. Dark on stage. The point of light appears in the loft above the staircase; the passacaglia continues. The downstairs is gradually illuminated while the loft remains dark. The couch is up against the window at back. A long table is covered with a white tablecloth and laid for dinner, at center. TRISTAN and GRETA sit at the right and left end of the table respectively. ANDRE and VALENTINE sit between them, right and left respectively. VALENTINE has her glass of beer and bottle by her. They eat spaghetti, except for TRISTAN, who stares ahead. The music fades away. A flash of lightning, a rumble of thunder.

VALENTINE

This is the strangest weather we've been having. I mean, whoever heard of a thunderstorm on Christmas Eve?

GRETA

Maybe that's why there was no room at the inn.

VALENTINE

What inn?

(beat)

Oh, *that* inn! The Savior of the World has no home.

GRETA

Do you really believe that or are you just saying that?

VALENTINE

No, I believe it. Isn't it obvious – what with the insane commercialization of Christmas?

GRETA

You seem to be overly fond of the word "insane."

VALENTINE drinks then looks at TRISTAN.

VALENTINE

(to ANDRE)

What's wrong with him?

ANDRE

He's contemplating the pit of his life.

VALENTINE

I can identify.

GRETA

You've come to the right place.

TRISTAN

It's true what she said. The essential idea of Christmas is lost.

ANDRE

Which is what, according to you?

TRISTAN

Christmas was originally a pagan festival celebrating the winter solstice - the renewal of life.

ANDRE

Why don't you try renewing your own life?

TRISTAN

It's not exactly something you can do on your own - hence the need of a savior.

ANDRE

You believe in a savior?

TRISTAN

It's not something that's outside us.

ANDRE

You're full of shit. You don't believe in anything. If you did, you wouldn't be depressed.

TRISTAN

If you knew half as much as you thought you did, Andre, *you'd* be depressed.

ANDRE

Oh, so when you're depressed you're enlightened? You know what destroys Christmas more than its commercialization? Wishy-washy, politically correct assholes like you who don't believe in anything but their misery.

TRISTAN

And what do you believe in?

ANDRE

I believe in myself, science, reason.

TRISTAN

Those are deep myths in your brain.

ANDRE

(beat)

What isn't a myth, according to you?

TRISTAN

The soul.

ANDRE

The soul? If all you have is a soul, Tristan, you're doomed. You've got to lose your life in order to save it. Isn't that what it says in the Bible?

Pause. TRISTAN stares ahead, depressed.

ANDRE

Look at you. You can't eat. You're eating yourself alive. You know what that's called? A living death. And you talk about the essential idea of Christmas?

VALENTINE

But I think he has a point.

ANDRE

What's the point? Depression? It's the modern spiritual void. What's new?

They eat. TRISTAN picks at his food.

VALENTINE

(after finishing a mouthful of spaghetti)

Actually, spaghetti on Christmas Eve is interesting.

GRETA

You don't have to pretend for my sake.

VALENTINE

I not pretending. Why would you think that?

(pause)

Won't Joseph be joining us?

GRETA

No.

VALENTINE

Why not?

(beat)

Because of his face?

They ignore her. Pause.

VALENTINE

I don't understand. Doesn't he eat? Don't you feed him?

GRETA

Of course, we feed him.

VALENTINE

But this is insane.

GRETA

What's insane?

VALENTINE

It's Christmas Eve. We're sitting around eating, drinking -

GRETA

You're the only one drinking.

VALENTINE

What does that have to do with anything? Why isn't your son eating with us?

TRISTAN

Joseph lives in an alternate universe.

VALENTINE

An alternate universe?

ANDRE

He's a teenager.

VALENTINE

(beat)

Oh, brother.

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

That really is a beautiful Christmas dress you're wearing. Too bad it's just a pretense.

A pretense?

VALENTINE

Aren't you a fallen Catholic?

GRETA

My grandmother gave me this dress...along with the crucifix...in her will. I wasn't there when she died.

VALENTINE

Where were you?

GRETA

Living my unbearable life.

VALENTINE

If it's unbearable, why don't you end it?

GRETA

What kind of a question is that? You want me to commit suicide on Christmas Eve?

VALENTINE

That might be interesting.

GRETA

What's your problem?

VALENTINE
(looks at GRETA with incredulity, beat)

I'm dying. Do you mind?

GRETA

Exactly what type of cancer do you have?

VALENTINE
(beat)

Drop it.

ANDRE

Why should I?

VALENTINE

Because I said so.

ANDRE

VALENTINE
Since when are you my boss?

GRETA
Isn't he your savior?

VALENTINE
What?

GRETA
Your therapist?

VALENTINE
(beat)
I thought we've been through that.

TRISTAN
(to ANDRE)
She was your patient? Again?

VALENTINE
What do you mean "again?"
(to ANDRE)
You've dated your patients before?
(beat)
Oh, that's nice.

VALENTINE drinks. A flash of lightning.

VALENTINE
Amazing weather.

ANDRE
You already said that.

VALENTINE
(slams her glass down on the table)
So?! You want to cut out my tongue?!

ANDRE
Of course, not.

VALENTINE
Then stop criticizing everything I say!

ANDRE

I don't criticize everything you say.

VALENTINE

Alright, you criticize half of everything I say.

GRETA

Can't you take criticism?

VALENTINE

Can't you keep your mouth shut!

ANDRE

Hey! That's my sister!

VALENTINE

(beat)

You're not the same person you were before we walked into this house.

ANDRE

She's sick!

VALENTINE

Does that give her the right to beat everybody up with her sickness?

ANDRE

Use your head.

VALENTINE

What's that supposed to mean?

ANDRE

Human beings are not comprehensible. Are you comprehensible? Don't expect them to be transparent. Don't expect anything. That's your problem – your expectations.

VALENTINE

Don't do that.

ANDRE

What?

VALENTINE

Lecture me. You're not my therapist anymore.

TRISTAN

When he was your therapist did he lecture you?

ANDRE

Stay out of this.

TRISTAN

It's disgraceful the way you treat her.

GRETA

Alright, look...

(to VALENTINE)

I'm sorry for speaking out of turn. I have a nasty habit of probing – the hazards of my profession. I didn't mean anything by it.

VALENTINE

Like hell you didn't.

ANDRE

(to VALENTINE)

You want everyone groveling at your feet.

VALENTINE

You think I'm blind? I don't know what's going on?

GRETA

What's going on?

VALENTINE

I'm being set up.

ANDRE

No...what's going on here is that reality isn't meeting your expectations.

VALENTINE

You think you know what reality is and I don't?

ANDRE

You're drunk! You're halfway across the universe from reality!

TRISTAN

HOLD IT!

They all look at TRISTAN. Pause.

TRISTAN

Can't we just be human beings?

ANDRE

(raps his finger on the table)

This is to be human! You see, that's your problem. You're never satisfied with anything. Nothing measures up. My point is that it's your expectations that get in the way of your accepting things the way they are. Humanity isn't some abstract goal in the future – it's a dark fucking reality in the present.

VALENTINE

Aren't ideals real?

ANDRE

No, they're fantasies.

VALENTINE

Don't you believe in anything?

ANDRE

I believe in facts.

VALENTINE

What about feelings, hopes, goals?

ANDRE

What about stopping drinking?

VALENTINE

(beat)

Why do you always have to throw that in my face instead of listening to what I say?

ANDRE

I'm listening to what you say.

VALENTINE

Why don't you answer my question instead of putting me down?

ANDRE

I wasn't putting you down.

VALENTINE

I felt that you were.

ANDRE

Are feelings facts?

VALENTINE

They're my facts.

ANDRE

How do you know what you're feeling when you're drunk? And isn't that why you drink – to escape your feelings?

VALENTINE sighs, stares at her plate, pulling and twisting a strand of her hair.

VALENTINE

Oh, what an exquisite meal we're having.

Pause. They eat. Thunder and lightning.

VALENTINE

I wonder what Joseph thinks of this?

GRETA

He looks on with his sad glass eye.

VALENTINE

Glass eye?

GRETA

He lost it in a fishing accident.

VALENTINE

How did that happen?

ANDRE

He stabbed himself in the eye with my knife.

VALENTINE

Your knife?

ANDRE

He stole it from me.

VALENTINE

Did he steal your shotgun too?

GRETA

It was my shotgun.

VALENTINE

Your shotgun? What do you have a shotgun for?

GRETA

I like to shoot crows with it. Actually, it was my grandfather's shotgun.

VALENTINE

(sighs)

What do I know? I'm just an airhead.

VALENTINE drinks the last of her beer.

GRETA

You shouldn't put yourself down like that.

VALENTINE

(brings her glass down hard on the table, to GRETA)

No matter what I say you object to it! You just have to dig into to me, don't you? Ever since I walked into this house, all smiles and trying to please everybody, and you cut me to pieces!

GRETA

Well, I'm sorry, little Miss Goody Two Shoes, but I have cancer.

(suddenly screams)

I'M DYING!

VALENTINE

(stands)

I DON'T GIVE A FUCK IF YOU'RE DYING!

ANDRE

Sit down.

VALENTINE

Screw you.

VALENTINE takes her empty beer bottle and exits through the left hallway.

TRISTAN

You disgust me.

ANDRE

Who?

TRISTAN

Both of you.

GRETA

Then you should be glad I'm divorcing you.

TRISTAN

(beat)

You know what depresses me more than anything else?

ANDRE

I couldn't care less.

TRISTAN

Human stupidity.

ANDRE

You depress yourself.

TRISTAN

Who do you think you are? A psychologist? You don't see yourself at all. Every Christmas you bring another sweet young thing with a drinking problem out here. Since you can't cure them, you fuck them. Ethics is no concern of yours since you have all the answers but no insight. You think you can do anything you want without regard to the consequences.

ANDRE

I suffer the consequences.

TRISTAN

What about the consequences to *them*?! Are you even aware of that?!

ANDRE

What about Greta? You don't even know what kind of cancer she has!

TRISTAN

(beat)

What kind of cancer do you have, Greta?

GRETA

None of your business.

ANDRE

And Valentine's none of your business.

TRISTAN

What's happening in front of my eyes is my business.

GRETA

You've never been able to see what's in front of your eyes, Tristan. You're too busy wallowing in your "Dark Night of the Soul."

TRISTAN

Naturally, I'm guilty.

ANDRE

Let me tell you something –

TRISTAN

I'd rather not hear it.

ANDRE

All this guilt and self-loathing you subject Greta to –

TRISTAN

That's none of your business. Will you get out of my marriage!

ANDRE

It's really resentment. You see what I'm saying? Your hatred for yourself is really a hatred for others whom you secretly blame for foiling you.

TRISTAN

Alright, fine. Please, both of you, just leave Valentine alone. She's a nice sweet girl, and she doesn't deserve this.

ANDRE

And you'd like to fuck her too, wouldn't you?

GRETA

Please, Andre, you're giving me a headache.

Silence. They eat, except for TRISTAN who stares ahead. Beat. VALENTINE appears in the left hallway with a beer bottle, smiling.

VALENTINE

Did you miss me?

GRETA rolls her eyes, ANDRE stares ahead, stonily. TRISTAN looks at VALENTINE absentmindedly.

TRISTAN

You know what? How about a game of "Exquisite Corpse?"

With sudden enthusiasm, TRISTAN bounds up and crosses to the end table. VALENTINE crosses to dinner table.

VALENTINE

What's that?

ANDRE

It's a stupid game for airheads.

GRETA

It's aleatory art.

VALENTINE

What's that?

VALENTINE sits and pours the beer into her glass.

GRETA

Vision in blindness, reason in madness.

VALENTINE

That explains it.

TRISTAN takes a pen and piece of paper from the drawer of the end table.

TRISTAN

(crosses to dinner table)

"Suam habet fortuna rationem." Chance has its reasons.

GRETA

Tristan proved that scientifically.

ANDRE

How?

TRISTAN

(puts paper and pen on dinner table)

I tossed a coin ten thousand times, and the outcome wasn't random.

ANDRE

What do you mean?

TRISTAN

Heads came up fifty percent of the time.

ANDRE

But that stands to reason. There's only two sides of a coin – heads and tails.

TRISTAN

Precisely. If it stands to reason, it can't be random, can it?

ANDRE

Wait a second.

TRISTAN

No, you wait a second. Ten separate trials, a thousand tosses in each trial. No single toss was causally influenced by any other toss, yet there was a fantastic order. Why? Why didn't one trial come up all heads or all tails if everything is random? Because there's an inherent *tendency* in things. And that's exactly analogous to radioactive decay. Each atom decays at an unpredictable rate, but in the long run there's a *pattern* of decay. Take the so-called random walk of Brownian molecules. How can it be random if molecules always move in straight lines?

ANDRE

Hold it.

TRISTAN

No, listen. They've discovered a fantastic structure to the motion of free-floating molecules.

ANDRE

Who gives a fuck about free-floating molecules when your wife is dying of cancer?!

TRISTAN

And what's more, this structure is "self-similar." Do you know what that is? We observe it in the chaotic structure of trees, heartbeats, and coastal lines – the same pattern is repeated at successive levels. For example, the branches, twigs, and leaves of a tree mirror the tree's overall structure. Once again we have order where we thought there was none. "As above, so below."

TRISTAN crosses to the book case, takes a book from the shelf, and leafs through it.

ANDRE

(scoffs)

"As above, so below."

VALENTINE

(toasts with her beer)

Hermes Trismegistus! Thrice-Great Hermes!

ANDRE

You know that shit?

VALENTINE

I was a witch in my past life.

A mocking sigh from ANDRE.

TRISTAN

Here it is. Alexander Pope wasn't exactly a mystic but listen. "All nature is but art, unknown to thee;/ All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;/ All disorder harmony not understood..."

VALENTINE

So there.

VALENTINE drinks. TRISTAN puts the book back on the shelf and crosses back to the dinner table.

GRETA

(to VALENTINE)

That's a cause for celebration, isn't it? But isn't everything a cause for celebration in your world?

VALENTINE

No, it's a cause for mourning.

GRETA

Is that why you're drinking yourself to death?

VALENTINE

What are you talking about?

(to ANDRE, angry)

You told her I had a drinking problem, didn't you? You bastard! That was confidential information!

GRETA

Oh, yeah. It's really confidential when it's obvious to everyone.

VALENTINE gives GRETA the finger with one hand and takes a long drink with the

other. Lightning illuminates the scarecrow.
TRISTAN looks out the window.

TRISTAN

Last night I dreamed the scarecrow climbed down from his cross and ran away.

ANDRE

Why don't you climb down from your cross and run away?

VALENTINE

(to ANDRE)

What's wrong with you? Ever since we've come here you've degenerated into this right-wing prick!

ANDRE

I'm not a right-wing prick!

VALENTINE

You could have fooled me. Who did you vote for?

ANDRE

I'm not going to tell you who I voted for.

VALENTINE

You voted for Bush, didn't you?

(beat)

I can't believe I'm engaged to someone who voted for a Republican.

ANDRE

Voting for the democrats is like voting for the inmates of an insane asylum to take over because the current administration is hopelessly incompetent. That may be true, but can the insane do any better?

VALENTINE

They can't do any worse.

ANDRE

What kind of argument is that?

GRETA

Politics is crime, Andre. I thought you knew that.

ANDRE

So we're supposed to just sit around and let everything collapse?

TRISTAN

Everything's been collapsing since the beginning of creation. Or rather it appears to be collapsing. In reality, chaos masks a deeper order. But let's put aside our petty quarrels for the moment and perform an experiment for the good of humanity.

(to VALENTINE)

We're going to compose an "Exquisite Corpse." The goal is to demonstrate a higher reality than "reality." The method is psychic automatism.

VALENTINE

What's that?

TRISTAN

The essence of surrealism; the royal road to the collective unconscious.

ANDRE

Or the garbage of the personal self.

TRISTAN

Here's how it works, Valentine. Each of us writes a sentence of whatever occurs to him or her. It has to be spontaneous, the first thing you think of. Don't change it or correct it in any way. Got it?

VALENTINE

Got it.

TRISTAN

(demonstrates)

Then we fold the paper over like this to cover the line, so the next person can't see what's been written. The next person, in turn, writes a line, folds it over, etc., until we have our "Exquisite Corpse."

VALENTINE

Why is it called "Exquisite Corpse?"

GRETA

Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau. "The Exquisite Corpse will drink the new wine."

VALENTINE

I don't know if I can handle this.

VALENTINE drinks.

TRISTAN

Alright. No cheating. This is Christmas. Christ is watching.

ANDRE

You don't believe in Christ. It's just words with you.

TRISTAN

Ah, but I believe in the magic of words.

TRISTAN sits down. Thunder. He picks up his pen, looks at the paper, and with a flourish writes a line at the top. He folds it over and hands it to ANDRE, who, after hesitating, writes a line, and then hands it to VALENTINE. She spontaneously writes a line and hands it to GRETA, who dashes off her line then tosses it on the table in the direction of TRISTAN. Lightning.

GRETA

Alright, that's enough. I'm getting nauseous.

VALENTINE

Can I get you something?

GRETA

No, I'm fine.

VALENTINE

You just said you were nauseous.

GRETA

I love my nausea.

VALENTINE

Maybe that's why you're so sick.

GRETA

Excuse me?

VALENTINE

You don't know how to share your pain.

GRETA

No, but I've learned how to spread it around, haven't I?

VALENTINE

That's not exactly sharing it.

GRETA

What do you want me to do? Rip off my blouse and show you the spot?!

VALENTINE

What spot?

GRETA

The spot of death!

TRISTAN

Ladies, ladies...

ANDRE

(to VALENTINE)

What are you trying to do?

VALENTINE

Keep from drowning. Do you mind?

VALENTINE drinks. TRISTAN unfolds
the *Exquisite Corpse*.

TRISTAN

Alright, here's our Exquisite Corpse.

(beat)

"The scarecrow cries in the lightning. Whiteness is the bride of disaster. When you die I'll remember your beauty. What is both here and hereafter?"

(beat)

That's amazing. It even rimes.

GRETA

It's pathetic, as usual.

VALENTINE

(to ANDRE)

Thanks a lot.

ANDRE

What?

VALENTINE

"Whiteness is the bride of disaster?" I'm wearing a white dress.

ANDRE

That doesn't have anything to do with anything.

VALENTINE

Like hell it doesn't. It's an allusion to my dress.

GRETA

But don't you think it goes with your crucifix?

VALENTINE

What? Disaster?

GRETA

Isn't marriage a kind of crucifixion?

(nods toward TRISTAN, who is brooding)

Ask the scarecrow crying in the lightning.

VALENTINE shakes her head at this and drinks.

GRETA

That's right. Drink yourself to death. That way he'll really care.

VALENTINE

Well, you ought to know how that works.

(mocks GRETA)

"I'm dying! I'm dying!" Why prolong the agony? Why don't you just *drop the fuck dead!*

ANDRE

You bitch...

ANDRE spontaneously grabs his fork and stabs VALENTINE in the back of the hand.

VALENTINE gasps in pain and stares ahead in shock. Beat.

ANDRE

I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.

ANDRE holds VALENTINE'S hand down with one hand and pulls the fork out with the other.

VALENTINE emits a brief gasp of pain and then leans over the table, light-headed, her hand trembling. GRETA, trying not to pay attention, eats. TRISTAN looks on in dismay.

TRISTAN

And you were her therapist?

ANDRE

You don't know what the fuck you're talking about! Stay out of this. It's just a scratch.

TRISTAN

A scratch?

(outraged)

A *scratch*?! She's bleeding profusely!

ANDRE

It's not profusely!

GRETA

(beat, to VALENTINE)

Can I get you something?

VALENTINE

No, I'm fine.

GRETA

You don't look fine to me. Andre, you're such a klutz.

TRISTAN

A klutz?

(shocked)

A KLUTZ?

GRETA

You wanted to play "Exquisite Corpse," didn't you? To tap into the reality behind reality?

ANDRE

There's no such thing.

TRISTAN

Is there such a thing as humanity?

(jumps up, to ANDRE)

Your fork was filthy!

ANDRE

Sit down.

TRISTAN

Don't tell me what to do! She'll get an infection!

VALENTINE holds her forehead with her left hand, seemingly on the verge of passing out.

TRISTAN
(to ANDRE)

And you just sit there?!

TRISTAN pours water on his napkin, crosses to VALENTINE, and wipes her hand. ANDRE stares ahead.

GRETA
Your napkin is filthy, Tristan.

TRISTAN reflexively throws his napkin away.

TRISTAN
(to VALENTINE)
Hold on. I'll get you some iodine and bandages.

TRISTAN exits through the left hallway.
GRETA looks at VALENTINE in stoic agony.

GRETA
Aw, poor sweet girl – such a martyr to her sex.

VALENTINE
(looks up at GRETA, with slow and emphatic articulation)
Drop – the fuck – dead!

GRETA bursts out laughing. VALENTINE looks at her.

VALENTINE
You're evil.

ANDRE
(stares ahead, vehemently, through gritted teeth)
Will you please shut the fuck up, Valentine?

With her right hand VALENTINE violently sweeps ANDRE'S plate into his lap.

ANDRE
What did you do that for?!

ANDRE (cont'd)
 (jumps up and looks at his pants)
 Now I've got spaghetti on my crotch!
 (takes napkin and wipes his pants off)
 Shit! This will stain! Fucking, evil shit on my pants!

GRETA
 (to VALENTINE)
 I must say I'm impressed.

VALENTINE
 (to GRETA)
 All this is just a joke to you, isn't it?

GRETA
 Ah, but it's a serious joke – a surrealistic one.

VALENTINE
 (beat)
 You must be in such pain.

GRETA
 But misery loves company.

ANDRE
 (looks at his pants, incensed)
Goddamnit!

TRISTAN enters from the left hallway with bandages, iodine, and crosses to VALENTINE.

TRISTAN
 Let me see your hand.

VALENTINE
 I'm alright.

TRISTAN
 You're not alright.

TRISTAN takes VALENTINE'S hand and examines it. He takes out some gauze and pours iodine on it.

ANDRE
 (wipes off his pants)

ANDRE (cont'd)
Shit! What the fuck!

GRETA
It'll dry, Andre.

ANDRE
Dry?! It's caked on there! My pants are ruined!

VALENTINE
More than your pants are ruined.

ANDRE
What's that supposed to mean?

TRISTAN
(to ANDRE)
You had an accident, did you?

ANDRE
It was no accident.

TRISTAN
I didn't think so.

ANDRE
(looks at his pants)
Fuck!

TRISTAN wipes VALENTINE'S hand with the gauze. ANDRE looks at them.

ANDRE
(to VALENTINE)
I said I was sorry.

VALENTINE ignores him.

ANDRE
She's my *sister*!

VALENTINE
She's a psycho.

GRETA
Well, you'll be happy to know that I'll be disappearing soon.

VALENTINE

I don't think you get the human bit at all.

GRETA

"The human bit?" We're all road kill, sweetie.

VALENTINE

(beat)

I don't think you're aware of the complexity of yourself.

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

She'll drink to that.

VALENTINE

Why are you so obsessed with my drinking?

GRETA

How many have you had since you've been here?

VALENTINE

I don't know!

GRETA

Nine bottles already.

VALENTINE

You're actually counting my drinks?

TRISTAN

I think that's her way of telling you that you might have a drinking problem.

VALENTINE

I don't have a drinking problem, I have a sobriety problem.

VALENTINE drinks.

GRETA

(watches TRISTAN wrapping up VALENTINE'S
hand)

And you're wounded now. Aren't you proud?

VALENTINE smirks at GRETA. TRISTAN
finishes tying bandage.

Is that too tight?

TRISTAN

No, it's fine. Thank you.

VALENTINE

Such a noble knight.

GRETA

TRISTAN heaves a sign, crosses to his chair, and sits.

VALENTINE
(looks at GRETA, trying to fathom her)

Maybe it's Joseph? You know, the musical prodigy without a face? That would derange me, too.

GRETA

What mortifying observations.

ANDRE
(violently wipes the spaghetti off his chair)

Look at all this crap in my chair!

VALENTINE

You don't count anymore, Andre.

GRETA

Telling him he doesn't count is only a way of telling him that he does – especially now that he's wounded you.

VALENTINE

He didn't wound shit.

ANDRE
(to VALENTINE)

It's kind of mutual, isn't it?

VALENTINE ignores ANDRE. He sits.

TRISTAN

What – sadomasochism?

VALENTINE
(stares ahead)

An imaginary life.

GRETA

Oh, you have one too?

VALENTINE

(to GRETA)

What species do you belong to? It's like you don't have a heart.

GRETA

(suddenly and brutally screams at VALENTINE)

IT'S BEEN BROKEN!

VALENTINE

(taken aback, beat)

Well, don't take it out on me, *you bitch!*

ANDRE

(stares ahead, seething, to VALENTINE)

Do you want me to stick a GODDAMN FORK IN YOUR NECK?!

VALENTINE suddenly and involuntarily grabs her fork and stabs ANDRE in the left side of his chest near his upper arm.

ANDRE

(yells)

Ahhh! Goddamnit!

TRISTAN

(beat)

Well, the iodine and bandages are on the table.

ANDRE

(sheepishly panicked)

Pull it out!

VALENTINE

You pull it out! Asshole!

VALENTINE drinks from the bottle quickly.

GRETA

You see how much he counts, sweetie? And now *you* count because you wounded *him*.

ANDRE

(stares ahead, beat, referring to VALENTINE)

ANDRE (cont'd)

Bitch!

(pulls the fork out of his shoulder)

Ah!.. Fuck!

TRISTAN

(to ANDRE)

You evidently fail to see the justice involved.

ANDRE violently flings the fork to the back of the room.

GRETA

Such a promising engagement.

VALENTINE

The engagement is off.

GRETA

Then it looks like whiteness *is* the bride of disaster.

VALENTINE

(beat, to GRETA)

Jesus, I'm glad I'm not you –

(to ANDRE)

and you! –

(to TRISTAN)

and you!

GRETA

Does that mean you're glad you're you?

VALENTINE

(shakes her head in disbelief, sighs, and stares ahead)

Christ is truly homeless. Excuse me.

VALENTINE stands up with her beer and crosses to the leather chair. A desolate mood descends on the table. VALENTINE turns on the lamp and sits. She crosses her legs, swings her foot, and looks up at the ceiling. Silence.

VALENTINE

You know, I actually like this house – the vaulted ceiling, the rats, the bats.

GRETA

My grandfather built it with his own hands. He was a ruined aristocrat who hid himself in the wilderness.

VALENTINE

Too bad there's such swine living in it now.

Beat. The phone rings. Pause. Nobody appears to hear it but VALENTINE.

VALENTINE

The phone's ringing.

GRETA

Tristan's too afraid to answer the phone.

VALENTINE

Why?

ANDRE

He thinks he might die.

VALENTINE

From answering the phone?

GRETA

It's symbolic.

VALENTINE

Of what?

ANDRE

Fear of the unknown, the void that might swallow him.

TRISTAN

(broods, beat)

The void of people.

VALENTINE

Fuck people.

(picks up phone)

Hey, asshole, get off the line. I'm expecting an important phone call from God.

VALENTINE hangs up phone. Beat.

GRETA

Joseph calls sometimes.

TRISTAN

(beat)

He moans into the phone.

VALENTINE

What's the matter? Can't he speak? I guess not, if he blew his face off. But if he moans he must have some kind of an opening.

ANDRE

(turns around to VALENTINE)

Will you shut up!

VALENTINE

No, I will not "shut up!" What do you think – you have some kind of moral authority? You pusillanimous dick-head!

Thunder. The phone rings again.

VALENTINE

Demanding little bugger, isn't he? But what's a House of Darkness without a spook in the attic?

(yells up to the loft)

Hey, No Face! Is that you? Why don't you come down here and join the family mayhem!

VALENTINE drinks. Beat. Unable to stand the ringing, she jumps up.

VALENTINE

Answer the goddamn phone, man!

GRETA

(beat)

Answer it.

ANDRE

(beat)

Answer it.

Beat. TRISTAN stands up slowly and with a grim expression crosses to the phone. He hesitates then picks it up.

Hello?

TRISTAN

A brilliant flash of lightning. TRISTAN is electrocuted by the phone and falls to the floor.

Jesus Christ! Holy shit!

VALENTINE

Tristan...

GRETA

GRETA jumps up and runs to TRISTAN. She kneels down beside him and shakes him.

Tristan!

GRETA

Do something.

VALENTINE
(to ANDRE)

What the fuck should I do?

ANDRE

I don't know. Give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

ANDRE

You give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

GRETA
(shakes TRISTAN)

Tristan, wake up!

VALENTINE
(to ANDRE)

Jesus, are you cold.

ANDRE

I am who I am. You don't like it, fuck you.

VALENTINE
(beat, desolately)

And I thought you could save me.

ANDRE
You thought wrong.

GRETA
TRISTAN!!

VALENTINE
(beat, to GRETA)
Is he alright?

GRETA
(frantically afraid and angry)
Of course, he's not alright! HE'S TURNED BLUE!

VALENTINE
Is he breathing?

GRETA
(hysterically shakes TRISTAN)
TRISTAN! TRISTAN!

VALENTINE
(to ANDRE)
You fucking, despicable asshole!

ANDRE
(jumps up)
What the fuck did I do?!

VALENTINE
Nothing! You're doing nothing! Can't you see he's dying?! Go tell Joseph!

ANDRE
You think he doesn't know?! He hears everything that goes on down here. He's the cause of it!

VALENTINE
What?

ANDRE
What he did to himself!

VALENTINE
(beat)
Alright, you fucking coward.

VALENTINE crosses to the spiral staircase, looks up into the darkness, and climbs up the staircase. Simultaneously, ANDRE crosses to TRISTAN and taps him lightly on the leg with his foot.

ANDRE

Get up, bro.

GRETA

(hysterically)

I'm sorry! Tristan! I lied! I lied! I'm not dying! Wake up!

ANDRE

(brutally violent)

SHUT THE FUCK UP!

ANDRE reaches down and feels TRISTAN'S neck. GRETA looks at up at ANDRE.

ANDRE

I can't feel a thing.

GRETA

(anguished)

No... Tristan... Wake up!.. Wake up!..

GRETA collapses onto TRISTAN and moans softly.

GRETA

Baby... Please...

VALENTINE reaches the top of the staircase and peers into the darkness.

VALENTINE

Joseph?

Beat. VALENTINE screams in horror at something we can't see and runs back down the staircase. She hangs onto the railing at the bottom and stares ahead, horrified

VALENTINE

Oh, God... Oh, God...

ANDRE stares ahead, winces, and holds his shoulder.

ANDRE

Fuck.

The ending of the passacaglia plays. The light downstairs fades and congeals to a point in the loft above the spiral staircase. When the passacaglia ends the light goes out.

Act Two

Scene One

Midnight. Dark. TRISTAN lies on the table under the tablecloth, his head to the left. The debris from dinner has been swept off the table onto the floor to make room for TRISTAN. GRETA sits on the floor in front of the table with her legs crossed, holding the *Exquisite Corpse*, crying loudly and obnoxiously. VALENTINE enters from the left hallway with a bottle of beer. She stops and looks at GRETA with annoyance. Beat. She sighs impatiently, turns around, and exits. GRETA'S crying turns to traumatic gasping. Beat. The point of light appears in the loft above the spiral staircase, and the fugue from Bach's *Passacaglia and Fugue* begins. The light spreads slowly, illuminating the downstairs area while the loft remains dark. Simultaneously, TRISTAN sits up. Beat. GRETA turns around and sees TRISTAN in the transfigured light – grotesque like a scarecrow from having been struck by lightning, his face blackened, and his hair standing straight. GRETA gasps in shock.

TRISTAN

(to the air)

What is is not. What is not is.

GRETA screams in terror, jumps up, throws the “Exquisite Corpse” in the air, and runs to the right hallway.

TRISTAN

Wait, Greta. I'm alright. When we die we don't die. It's fantastic.

GRETA exits through the hallway. TRISTAN climbs off the table. Unsteady on his legs, he falls to the floor on his hands and knees. He looks up at the loft, listening to the music. As if inspired, TRISTAN stands up and staggers to the right hallway. The music fades away as the downstairs is fully illuminated. TRISTAN exits through the right hallway. Beat. VALENTINE

enters from the left hallway, followed by
ANDRE. They stop.

VALENTINE

Look. He's gone.

ANDRE

I can see that.

VALENTINE

Where did he go?

ANDRE

How should I know?

VALENTINE

You're a big help.

(drinks)

What was that scream about?

ANDRE

Maybe she dragged him out back.

VALENTINE

Why would she do that?

ANDRE

To bury him in the field.

VALENTINE

The field?

ANDRE

He loved the field.

VALENTINE

You mean by the scarecrow?

ANDRE

No, she hated the scarecrow.

VALENTINE

Because he identified with it?

ANDRE

Did I say that?

VALENTINE
No, but you implied it.

ANDRE
Whatever.

VALENTINE drinks and looks at
ANDRE.

VALENTINE
Big he-man. He stabs his fiancée in the hand with a fork.

ANDRE
You got me back.

VALENTINE
You like that? You think it's normal?

ANDRE
Whatever people do is normal for them.

VALENTINE
Oh, that's such bullshit.
(drinks)
You lost all your credibility in my eyes.

ANDRE
Why are you persecuting me?

VALENTINE
Because ever since we walked into this house you've become unlike yourself. There's nothing normal about this situation. Now your sister's dragging around the corpse of her dead husband.

(beat)
At least, she stopped wailing. Jesus, that was like a cat.

ANDRE
My sister's not a cat.

VALENTINE
(beat)
What is it with you? Am I nothing?

ANDRE
What do you mean "are you nothing?"

VALENTINE

She has some kind of hold over you.

ANDRE

She's my *sister*.

VALENTINE

Other people have sisters, but they don't act like you do.

ANDRE

How am I acting?

VALENTINE

You're not yourself.

ANDRE

What is "myself?"

VALENTINE

(shakes her head)

I can't talk to you.

ANDRE

You think if I pay attention to someone else besides you it negates you?

VALENTINE

Stop lecturing me. Don't I have one right idea? Maybe it's not your sister. This is the real you. And this is the goddamn House of Darkness.

VALENTINE drinks.

ANDRE

Your drinking is more important than me. Alcohol is your fiancé, your lover, and your god.

VALENTINE

Well, it's a damn sight nicer than you! You could have crippled my hand, you stupid son of a bitch!

ANDRE

You can still hold your beer with it.

VALENTINE

It hurts! When are you going to own up to what you did?!

ANDRE

How many times do I have to say I'm sorry?

VALENTINE

Oh, listen to the great psychologist who seduces his patients.

ANDRE

I do not seduce my patients.

VALENTINE

That's not what Tristan said. You bought five fiancées over here –

ANDRE

(incredulously)

“Five fiancées?”

VALENTINE

All of whom were your former patients. My God, what kind of pervert are you?

ANDRE

Pervert?!

(beat)

You set me up!

VALENTINE

How do you figure that?

ANDRE

You revel in it.

VALENTINE

What?

ANDRE

The “House of Darkness” shit! What you see is what you get.

VALENTINE

You're pathetic. Instead of taking responsibility for yourself - which is what you tell everybody else to do - you spout clichés, as if you were some kind of psychopomp.

ANDRE

What's that?

VALENTINE

You don't know what a psychopomp is? It's a blown-up son of a bitch who's empty inside.

ANDRE

I don't have to listen to this shit.

VALENTINE

That's your defense mechanism, asshole! First, you judge, and then you walk away.

ANDRE

Who's judging? Who's walking away?

VALENTINE

You.

ANDRE

Am I walking away?

VALENTINE

You're so dishonest.

ANDRE

"Dishonest?" Where does this come from?

VALENTINE

Listen to yourself.

ANDRE

Why don't you listen to *yourself*!

VALENTINE

All I wanted was someone I could look up to.

ANDRE

(calmly explains)

You put someone on a pedestal and then you knock them off.

VALENTINE

What am I talking for? I'm wasting words. I might as well be talking to the air.

ANDRE

(brutally violent)

YOU ARE! I'M AIR!

ANDRE crosses to the right hallway

VALENTINE

Stay here and work this shit out!

ANDRE

I've got to find my sister.

VALENTINE

Oh, your sister – the great psychiatrist. What a loser she is. “I’m dying! I’m dying!” I saw through her from the beginning.

ANDRE

Good for you.

VALENTINE

You leave now, that’s it.

ANDRE

(stops and turns around at the threshold of the hallway)

What do you want? To spew all this pathology out on me?

VALENTINE

Pathology? Is that what you think of me?

ANDRE

You’re drunk. That’s what happens when you get drunk.

VALENTINE

Then why have anything to do with me? Maybe you like sick people? You can pretend to be saving them when all you want is to feel superior at their expense.

ANDRE

You spot it, you got it.

VALENTINE

I can’t reach you. You’re not real.

ANDRE

I’m not real? When you’re bombed out of your mind?

VALENTINE

You see? Instead of trying to communicate with me you throw everything back at me. I can’t believe this. You drag me out here for Christmas and treat me like a dog.

ANDRE

I’m not perfect.

VALENTINE

“Perfect?” You stabbed me, you moron!

ANDRE

(beat)

You see how you suck me in?

VALENTINE

Suck you in? I'm your sixth fiancée that you want to wipe the floor with.

ANDRE

You're not making any sense.

VALENTINE

That's because you can't get the sense.

ANDRE

You see what I mean when I say you set me up?

VALENTINE

You set yourself up, asshole!

ANDRE exits.

VALENTINE

And stop trying to fix me! Fix your sister! Now there's a case that would make Freud's hair stand on end!

VALENTINE drinks. Pause. She stares ahead. TRISTAN enters from the left hallway, crosses soundlessly to VALENTINE, and stops behind her.

TRISTAN

Excuse me.

VALENTINE turns around and drops her bottle on the floor in shock.

VALENTINE

Oh, Jesus! Oh, shit!

TRISTAN

I didn't want to startle you.

VALENTINE

You're dead!

(beat)

What are you doing?!

TRISTAN

(shrugs)

Just walking around making a nuisance of myself.

VALENTINE

(beat)

Fuck!

(beat)

Is that all you can say?

TRISTAN

I was more alive when I was dead than when I was alive.

VALENTINE stares at him speechless.

Beat.

TRISTAN

Your bottle is leaking.

VALENTINE

Oh. Sorry.

VALENTINE fairly leaps at the bottle, picks it up, and wipes the top off. She quickly drinks most of it and wipes her lips with the back of her hand.

VALENTINE

You scared the shit out of me.

TRISTAN

I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible.

VALENTINE

You look like a zombie.

TRISTAN

I feel like one.

VALENTINE

How did you do that?

TRISTAN

Do what? Come back to life? I didn't come back to life. I left life and came back to death.

VALENTINE

Say what?

TRISTAN

I tried to explain it to Greta, but she ran away.

VALENTINE drinks the last of the
bottle.

VALENTINE

So what are you saying? There's life after death?

TRISTAN

Yes. And it's a lot better than this life.

VALENTINE

Well, that wouldn't take much.

ANDRE rushes in from the right hallway, stops,
and shouts at TRISTAN.

ANDRE

HEY! WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?!

VALENTINE

(looks at ANDRE with a tired expression, to
TRISTAN)

Welcome back to the House of Darkness.

VALENTINE exits through the left hallway.
ANDRE stares at TRISTAN, astonished.

ANDRE

Man! You were dead!

(crosses to TRISTAN in a kind of panic)

You scared the hell out of us! First, you turn blue, then you don't speak to us. We
were just about to bury you, bro.

(stands before TRISTAN, amazed)

Merry Christmas, asshole. What the fuck!

ANDRE grabs TRISTAN impulsively, hugs him
briefly, then holds him at arm's length.

ANDRE

What was it like being dead?

TRISTAN

More beautiful than anything you can imagine.

ANDRE

(incredulous)

Beautiful?

(abruptly lets go of TRISTAN)

What did you come back for?

TRISTAN

I was sent back.

ANDRE

“Sent back?” For what?

TRISTAN

Greta and Joseph.

ANDRE

They need you. We all need you. When someone dies - there's this fantastic hole.

The light in the lamp flickers and goes out.

ANDRE

You should fix that lamp, man. Somebody will get electrocuted. Ha, ha.

TRISTAN

Have you seen Greta?

ANDRE

She was shivering in the corner like a rat.

TRISTAN

A rat?

ANDRE

She was shocked! What's wrong with you?! You fucking died! Then you came back to fucking life! Don't you realize how that affects us?

TRISTAN

I'm sorry.

ANDRE

(short pause, with Schadenfreude)

How did it feel to get struck like lightning?

TRISTAN

It pretty much sucked.

ANDRE

I told you not to answer that phone. See what I'm saying? And you thought if you answered it you'd die?

(bursts out laughing, staggers around)

You thought if you answered it, you'd die!

(laughs so hard he bends over)

And you answered it! And you *died*!

ANDRE drops to his knees and laughs until he almost cries.

TRISTAN

(broods)

It was the best thing that ever happened to me.

ANDRE

(bursts out laughing hysterically)

"The best thing that ever happened to me!"

ANDRE'S laugh eventually trails off into soundlessness as he slaps the floor with his hand. He stops laughing abruptly and jumps up.

ANDRE

Let's celebrate.

ANDRE crosses to TRISTAN and takes him by the shoulders.

ANDRE

You look like a fucking scarecrow, man.

TRISTAN

(beat, stares ahead)

I don't feel so good.

ANDRE

Why not?

TRISTAN

I'm depressed.

Depressed?

ANDRE

Because I'm here and not there.

TRISTAN

You're always depressed.

ANDRE
(releases TRISTAN abruptly, almost shoving him away)

Not when I died.

TRISTAN

"Not when I died!"

ANDRE
(bursts out laughing)

It knocked the shit out of you!

ANDRE'S body convulses with laughter. He drops to his knees and slaps the floor with his hand then stops laughing abruptly. He jumps up and points at TRISTAN.

You're the "Exquisite Corpse!"

ANDRE

It's not about corpses.

TRISTAN

What's it about – angels?

ANDRE

Stop trampling on them.

TRISTAN

What, I'm trampling on an angel called "Valentine?"

ANDRE

If only you knew.

TRISTAN

You know and I don't know?

ANDRE

TRISTAN
We're all part of God.

ANDRE
Is that who sent you back?

TRISTAN
(stares inwardly, beat)
A being of bight.

ANDRE
(with skeptical ridicule)
A being of light?

The light in the lamp comes back on.

ANDRE
That lamp is dangerous, amigo. You know what Yogi Berra said? "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." Speaking of forks, where'd Valentine go?

TRISTAN
I have no idea.

ANDRE
Hold the phone. I'll be right back. Get it? "Hold the phone?"

ANDRE crosses swiftly to the left hallway and exits. Beat. TRISTAN shakes his head with dismay.

TRISTAN
This is terrible.

Beat. GRETA appears from the right hallway, stops, and looks at TRISTAN. Beat.

GRETA
Don't you ever do that again!

TRISTAN
Greta...

GRETA
Did you hear me?

TRISTAN
Yes.

GRETA
Look at you. You're appalling.

TRISTAN
You're beautiful.

GRETA
I am not. I'm disgusting. I lied about my cancer.

TRISTAN
What?

GRETA
I lied about my cancer. Are you deaf?
(beat)
You were all involved with yourself – your grandiose projects, your sense of failure, your depression. You're one of the most successful human beings I know – at least, on paper.

TRISTAN
There's more to a human being than paper, Greta.

GRETA
I know, Tristan. I'm a psychiatrist.
(beat)
I thought if you thought I was dying, it would take you out of yourself. But it just drove you deeper into yourself. I threatened to divorce you, but it only made matters worse.

(beat)
When you died it was like God smashing me in the face.

TRISTAN
Waking you up, making you real.

GRETA
(beat)
I knew what I was doing was wrong, but I couldn't stop myself. I was trapped in my own game. That's scary, Tristan. Evidently, Freud knew what he was talking about when he said the ego is not master in its own house.

TRISTAN
Freud schmeud. Plato understood that a long time ago. Virtue comes by divine dispensation without taking thought.

GRETA

(stares ahead, beat)

Divine dispensation...

(beat)

I made a shambles – a mockery of our marriage.

TRISTAN

It was all to the good.

GRETA

(a haunted look)

The good?

(beat)

Why, when I get what I want, is it so unbearable for me?

(beat)

I'm a rotten to the core.

TRISTAN

Don't put yourself down, Greta. That's ego. Don't you always tell me that?

GRETA

(short pause, a haunted look)

I don't like myself anymore...

TRISTAN crosses to GRETA.

TRISTAN

I like you.

GRETA

Why?

TRISTAN

(smiles impishly)

For being you.

GRETA

(stares inwardly, beat)

I feel like I'm evil.

TRISTAN

Good and evil, light and dark, beauty and ugliness. That's the way it is.

GRETA

I know, Tristan. I'm as educated as you are.

TRISTAN looks at GRETA with a forlorn expression.

Hug?
TRISTAN

Of course.
GRETA

They hug. Short pause. GRETA disengages but holds TRISTAN by the shoulders.

GRETA
Your breath is foul. You need to brush your teeth.

TRISTAN broods.

GRETA
Would you like me to fix you a smoothie?

TRISTAN becomes woozy and staggers.

GRETA
(steadies him)
Are you alright? You look absolutely ghastly.

TRISTAN notices the *Exquisite Corpse* on the floor. He points to it.

TRISTAN
Look - our "Exquisite Corpse."

GRETA
Leave it alone. It's malign.

TRISTAN crosses to the *Exquisite Corpse*, bends over to pick it up, but can't stand back up. GRETA crosses to TRISTAN, helps him up, and steadies him.

GRETA
You belong in the hospital.

TRISTAN
(about to read the *Exquisite Corpse*)
Listen.

GRETA

Oh, don't read that horrible thing.

TRISTAN

(reads)

"The scarecrow cries in the lightning."

(beat)

I wrote that and it happened to me. You see? Our "Exquisite Corpse" was prophetic.

GRETA

That's hideous, Tristan.

TRISTAN

"Whiteness is the bride of disaster." That was Andre's line. He treats his angel like a devil.

GRETA

He doesn't know any better.

TRISTAN

"When you die I'll remember your beauty." Valentine...

GRETA

(beat, looks at TRISTAN with a haunted look)

You died. And you almost killed me.

TRISTAN

"What is both here and hereafter?" You wrote that.

GRETA

I have no idea what it means.

TRISTA

Life is death, and death is life.

GRETA

Don't say that, Tristan.

TRISTAN

Isn't it true?

Beat.

Blackout.

Scene Two

Dawn. Dark on stage. The point of light appears in the loft over the spiral staircase; the fugue continues. The downstairs is gradually illuminated as the loft stays dark. The table and debris are gone. TRISTAN sits on the couch, at center. He has been cleaned up a bit but still looks like something not of this world. He stares ahead, exhausted and depressed. ANDRE stands near the staircase, looking up suspiciously at the loft. As the downstairs is fully lit, the music fades away.

ANDRE

Alright, let's go through this again.

TRISTAN

You'll never get it.

ANDRE

Be patient. I want to get it. If what you're saying is true, then the human race will jump for joy.

TRISTAN

You're not jumping for joy.

ANDRE

You said you left your body through your head. What part of your head?

TRISTAN

The top.

ANDRE

What part of the top?

TRISTAN

(sighs)

Andre, I'm exhausted. I need to lie down.

ANDRE

Alright, so you left your body through your head. Then what happened?

TRISTAN

I already told you.

ANDRE

I need a more detailed picture.

TRISTAN

I floated up in the air. I saw Greta kneeling on the floor shaking me. I couldn't understand why she was so upset. I tried to tell her I was alright, but she didn't hear me. It was weird. I was aware of everyone, but no one was aware of me.

ANDRE

Are you saying human beings aren't real until they become disembodied spirits?

TRISTAN

Not at all.

ANDRE

And who was there to affirm *your* reality? Oh, I forgot – the being of light.

TRISTAN

What are you so afraid of, Andre? Dying is a wonderful experience.

ANDRE

This is what concerns me. Your view of human life is so debased.

TRISTAN

Debased? No, listen. I want to live now more than ever – now that I know what life is really about.

ANDRE

What's that?

TRISTAN

To love and to learn.

ANDRE

And you needed to get struck by lightning to figure that out?

TRISTAN

Oh, you knew that? When you stabbed Valentine?

ANDRE

Wait a second. One thing at a time. Let's go back.

TRISTAN

What do you want from me?

ANDRE

The truth.

TRISTAN

(shakes his head)

I don't think so.

ANDRE

I admit I'm skeptical but I have an open mind. And I have an excellent interview technique guaranteed to ferret out the truth in the end.

TRISTAN

Truth does not come by technique but by being open to the truth.

ANDRE

Hey, I'm open. I love this. Trust me. So you're out of your body; you see us, you hear us. What did we say?

TRISTAN

Valentine told you to give me mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and you refused.

ANDRE

Then what did she say?

TRISTAN

"Jesus, are you cold."

ANDRE

(beat)

Do you think I'm cold?

TRISTAN

You're just afraid.

ANDRE

Of what?

TRISTAN

Death. But there's nothing to be afraid of.

ANDRE

According to you.

TRISTAN

I died. And I came back to life!

ANDRE

Stop jumping around and interrupting my train of thought.

TRISTAN

You're jumping around - asking me if I think you're cold.

ANDRE

Alright, we're both jumping around. What did I say after Valentine said I was cold?

TRISTAN

(sighs)

"I am who I am. You don't like it, fuck you."

ANDRE

I said that?

TRISTAN

Don't you remember?

ANDRE

Maybe you just heard us and only imagined you saw us.

TRISTAN

I heard you better than you heard yourself. And I *saw* you. Everything was extraordinarily vivid when I was out of my body. There was no pain. I was in perfect peace.

ANDRE

Perfect peace? That's a shock reaction, man! You were struck by lightning!

TRISTAN sighs.

ANDRE

Exactly where were we when you floated out of your body?

TRISTAN

(sighs)

Valentine was standing by Greta. Greta was kneeling next to my body distraught. You were sitting at the table – completely disengaged.

ANDRE

That's a value judgment, not a fact. What color was your face?

TRISTAN

What do you mean what color was my face?

ANDRE

It's a self-explanatory question.

TRISTAN

You're being ridiculous. You just don't want to believe that what I'm telling you is true.

ANDRE

I want to believe it.

TRISTAN

Then believe it.

ANDRE

For your information your face was blue. At least, the face on your body was blue. I don't know what color your spiritual face was. Perhaps, your spirit doesn't have a face.

TRISTAN

Forget it.

ANDRE

Please, Tristan, you're my friend. You died apparently, you say you left your body and floated up to the ceiling. Then you claim you were sucked into a dark tunnel with a light at the end of it. Help me out here.

TRISTAN

How?

ANDRE

With details.

TRISTAN

What good will details do if you don't accept the possibility that what I'm telling you is true?

ANDRE

(stares ahead, beat)

My mind is as open as it can get under the circumstances. You weren't out that long. It could be that you were in a lightning-induced coma and just imagined the whole thing.

TRISTAN

Andre... Greta's a doctor. And, at least, in this case, she can vouch for me. I stopped breathing. My heart stopped. What is death? What is life? You think you're just a

TRISTAN (cont'd)

body and that life ceases when the body ceases to function. My body ceased to function, but I'm telling you I was out of my body and more alive than when I was in it.

ANDRE

(short pause, stares at TRISTAN dumbly)

Let's go back. I was sitting at the table. Greta and Valentine were over by you. I said what? Oh, yeah, now I remember. Valentine just pissed me the fuck off. I'm sitting there bleeding with Christmas dinner on my crotch, and she's giving me orders.

TRISTAN

"I thought you could save me."

ANDRE

What?

TRISTAN

That's what Valentine said after you told her to fuck herself.

ANDRE

(beat)

I'm confused. Then what happened?

TRISTAN

Greta was shaking me frantically and yelling "Tristan, Tristan!"

ANDRE

I was still sitting?

TRISTAN

Not after Valentine called you a "fucking despicable asshole."

ANDRE

She called me that?

TRISTAN

What's the point of this examination if you yourself don't know what happened?!

ANDRE

Don't shout. Man. You'll wake the dead. Ha, ha. Humor me. Just hang in there with me, bro. She called me a fucking despicable asshole, which is what I am, I guess.

TRISTAN

No guesses about it. You stabbed her in the hand.

ANDRE

Will you quit harping on that! She got me back. We're always doing things like that.

TRISTAN

Stabbing each other?

ANDRE

Tristan, please. Just answer my questions, and the agony will go away. I promise. After Valentine called me a fucking despicable asshole –

TRISTAN

You walked over and kicked me in the back.

ANDRE

I did not kick you in the back.

TRISTAN

That's what it looked like to me.

ANDRE

Well, evidently your perceptions weren't perfect when you were out your body. I nudged you – to get a response. Tell me what happened after that.

TRISTAN

Valentine climbed up the stairs, and you screamed at Greta.

ANDRE

Screamed?

TRISTAN

“Shut the fuck up!”

ANDRE

Don't shout at me!

TRISTAN

You shouted at her!

ANDRE

So? She's my sister.

TRISTAN

She's my wife!

ANDRE

That's your problem, my friend.

TRISTAN
That problem is *joy*.

ANDRE
What?!

TRISTAN
Joy. All human problems have joy inside them.

ANDRE
It's just tough getting to the joy part.

TRISTAN
That's what the problems are *for*.

ANDRE
What? Getting to the joy inside them?

TRISTAN
Getting to the joy *beyond* them.

ANDRE
But you said the joy was *inside* them.

TRISTAN
(sighs)
Whatever.

ANDRE
Alright. What happened after I nudged you in the back?

TRISTAN
What?

ANDRE
What happened after I nudged you in the back?

TRISTAN
You felt the pulse in my neck. Valentine screamed when she saw Joseph.

ANDRE
I could have told her that would happen.

TRISTAN
(looks at the floor and shakes his head)

TRISTAN (cont'd)

This is useless, Andre.

ANDRE

Are we enemies? Tristan, talk to me.

TRISTAN

What's the point? You just want to scoff.

ANDRE

What are you talking about?

TRISTAN

You don't even know, do you? How threatened you are by all of this? It's sheer punishment talking to you.

ANDRE

Thanks a lot.

TRISTAN

I understand how crazy all this sounds. It sounds crazy to me, too. But it happened.

ANDRE

I don't doubt that it happened to you. But who are you? A disembodied soul travelling around the scene of your demise or a suffering mortal trapped inside the excruciating pain of a body struck by lightning and having a compensatory dream?

TRISTAN

This is ridiculous. How could I be dreaming when I was dead? Plus, I dreamed *reality!* I saw and heard exactly what was going on.

ANDRE

There could have been some residual activity in your brain stem.

TRISTAN

You're grasping at straws.

ANDRE

I'm grasping at straws? You say you're floating around in space without a body?!

TRISTAN

Why is that fantastic? Only because of your assumption that only the physical body is real.

ANDRE

No, the psyche is real. I'm a psychologist, for Christ's sake.

TRISTAN

But it ceases at the death of the body.

ANDRE

We don't know.

TRISTAN

"We don't know." Who is "we?" The authorities? They don't know. If they knew they'd stop being authorities. *I* know. I died. I left my body. And I was glad to be rid of it.

ANDRE

You're so arrogant – talking like a psychopomp.

TRISTAN

A psychopomp?

ANDRE

You know what that is? Psychic inflation due to a life of insignificance. What have you done with your life? Written a few books that no one reads and tortured your wife and your son with your depression?

TRISTAN

You've had five fiancées in the last five years – all your former patients. And you still have a license to practice? Who do you think you're fooling besides yourself?

ANDRE

Let's not get personal, man.

TRISTAN

(shakes his head in disbelief)

"Let's not get personal."

ANDRE

What's wrong with you? If you had such a great spiritual experience, I couldn't offend you.

TRISTAN

You're not offending me, you're exasperating me.

ANDRE

Why do you think I'm asking you all these questions?

TRISTAN

Andre, how can you evaluate experiences you've never had and don't even remotely believe in?

ANDRE

Listen, my friend. Experience forms a continuum between the real and the unreal. Why do you think my patients need help – because they're in touch with reality? No, because they need help transcending their *experiences* in order to face *reality*.

TRISTAN

I'm not your patient, thank God.

ANDRE

Trust me. I have some reason for asking these questions. I'm sorry for being sarcastic. It's a knee-jerk reaction. I'm a jerk. I shoot from the hip. But I make my living that way.

TRISTAN

You can't know anything about this until it happens to you. Until then, you think it's just my imagination.

ANDRE

In the end, it might be your imagination. Science requires corroboration.

TRISTAN

Science! What arrogance!

ANDRE

Arrogance? Listen to yourself.

TRISTAN

(shakes his head)

God help me –

ANDRE

That's right. You're always the fucking martyr – crucified by human stupidity!

Short pause. TRISTAN stares ahead.

ANDRE

Alright, so Valentine screamed when she saw Joseph. Is that when you were sucked into the dark tunnel?

TRISTAN

It was more like a spiral than a tunnel.

ANDRE

First it's a tunnel, now it's a spiral?

TRISTAN

What's the point, Andre? I feel like I'm going to have a seizure.

ANDRE

I'm just trying to get at the truth.

TRISTAN

You're trying to keep the truth at the greatest possible distance from yourself.

ANDRE

Why would I do that?

TRISTAN

It frightens you.

ANDRE

You know what frightens me? Metaphysical nuts like you! I'm just trying to pin down the sequence of events!

TRISTAN

Events you don't even believe in!

ANDRE

It's fantastic! You left your body! You floated up to the ceiling! I'm just asking – is that when you were sucked into the dark tunnel – excuse me, the dark spiral?

TRISTAN sighs and shakes his head.

ANDRE

You seem to be grieving because of my presence.

TRISTAN

It's the lack of understanding.

ANDRE

Nobody understands you?

TRISTAN

Andre, listen. There's nothing to be afraid of. Dying is the most beautiful experience you can have. In the presence of this being of light I felt total peace and love.

ANDRE

(scoffs)

“Total peace and love.”

TRISTAN

He asked me if I had anything to show him.

ANDRE

“Him?” It was a “he?”

TRISTAN shakes his head in disbelief and sighs.

ANDRE

You said he “asked” you – in what language – Russian, Italian, Yiddish?

TRISTAN

No language. It was thought.

ANDRE

Thought? Like mental telepathy?

TRISTAN

Believe it or not, Andre, I’m trying to help you.

ANDRE

You’re trying to help me?

TRISTAN

This is good news, isn’t it?

ANDRE

Good news has to be true news.

TRISTAN

It happened to me!

ANDRE

So do dreams, confusion, and insanity happen to you!

TRISTAN

(beat)

Andre, you don’t understand. With all your answers you’re shutting out the light.

The light in the lamp flickers. They look at it.

TRISTAN

You see? Synchronicity.

ANDRE

Fuck synchronicity!

TRISTAN sighs.

ANDRE

Alright, you're in the presence of this being of light. You said he asked you what you had to show him. What happened?

TRISTAN

My whole life flashed before me. I saw how my actions affected others. I felt what they felt, especially those I had wronged. I realized that everybody feels the same deep down.

ANDRE

“The sympathy of all things?”

TRISTAN

Why are you ridiculing me?

ANDRE

Just tell me what happened.

TRISTAN

I'm telling you what happened, but you don't believe any of it. I didn't see my life from my point of view but objectively – the way it really was.

ANDRE

“The way it really was?” That's a feat beyond humanity!

TRISTAN

Precisely.

ANDRE

How did you accomplish that?

TRISTAN

Through God.

ANDRE

How do you know it was God?

TRISTAN

Because I didn't feel judged or condemned but only accepted and loved. I realized I was part of a much greater whole.

ANDRE

You discovered that the universe doesn't revolve around you? Man, what a learning experience.

TRISTAN

Why do you find it necessary to ridicule my experience?

ANDRE

Pure spite, man. I can't tolerate the fiction of a greater spiritual world.

TRISTAN

It's not a fiction, Andre, it's real. You just haven't experienced it yet.

ANDRE

(beat)

Let me ask you something. How come your so-called near-death experience is so full of clichés – the dark tunnel, the being of light, your whole life flashes before you?

TRISTAN

It's like you don't want to understand.

ANDRE

Maybe I have my own understanding?

TRISTAN

It's a cynical defense.

ANDRE

I don't see through you, my friend, I see around you - all the nonsense you carry around in the big, black bag called your character.

TRISTAN

You've got one yourself.

ANDRE

Yeah, only occasionally I open it, unlike you.

TRISTAN

Are you sure?

ANDRE

Alright, alright. Now tell me what happened after your so-called life-review.

TRISTAN

He said he wasn't ready for me - that I had to go back.

ANDRE

Why?

TRISTAN

For Greta and Joseph.

ANDRE

That's a laugh, man. What have you ever done for them?

TRISTAN

Why are you so angry at me?

ANDRE

(with undisguised, full-blown hostility)

I'm sick of this shit! You're in dreamland! Floating around in space, meeting a being of light! Who gives a fuck? It's what you do!

TRISTAN

(looks down at the floor)

I know – my evil little life...

(looks up at ANDRE) –

But that's the great thing, you see. God brings good out of evil.

ANDRE

You're so full of shit, I can't believe it.

TRISTAN

I'm sorry all this frightens you.

ANDRE

You don't frighten me, you pretentious, little dick-head!

(in his face)

My sister was insane to marry you. INSANE! You destroyed her life! She gave you everything! And you gave her nothing! You took and took until she was exhausted and had to pretend she was dying TO GET YOU TO LOOK AT HER! No wonder you were struck by lightning! Wake up, man! You haven't got a clue. You think you're so fucking spiritual. You know what spirituality is? It's what happens to you when you find it necessary to pull your head out of your ass!

TRISTAN

(stares ahead, beat)

That's true. There's a world beyond the head.

ANDRE

(suddenly grabs TRISTAN by the shoulders and pulls him up off the couch)

ANDRE (cont'd)

You fucking scarecrow! Go back out in the field where you belong!

ANDRE throws TRISTAN toward the staircase, kicking him in the ass. TRISTAN stumbles forward, grabs the railing of the staircase, and falls to his knees.

ANDRE

I'm not afraid of you! You're nothing!

ANDRE stalks off toward the right hallway and exits. TRISTAN starts shivering violently, as if he were having a seizure.

Blackout.

Scene Three

Afternoon. Dark on stage. The point of light appears in the loft above the spiral staircase; the fugue continues. The downstairs is gradually illuminated as the loft remains dark.

VALENTINE and GRETA sit on the couch, right and left respectively. VALENTINE holds a white cup of coffee on her lap and listens to the music. GRETA, her arms on the back and side of the couch, studies VALENTINE. The music fades away.

GRETA

You must hate me now.

VALENTINE

Why?

GRETA

Putting you through all the charades of my stupidity.

VALENTINE

Well, that's only human.

VALENTINE'S hand shakes as she sips her coffee.

GRETA

Sometimes I think I'm dying again. Then I remember it was only game.

VALENTINE

Where would we be without our games? Raw, naked savages.

(beat)

I just hope I don't go into DTs.

GRETA

Have you been in DTs before?

VALENTINE

Once, when I was auditioning for *Hamlet*, the part of Ophelia. I was doing her mad scene, and I really did go mad. The director had to call the EMS.

GRETA

(beat)

So you really are an alcoholic?

VALENTINE

Please. It's too early to discuss that now. Besides, it's Christmas.

GRETA

What better time to face yourself?

VALENTINE

I'm too young to face myself.

GRETA

Can you really escape from yourself?

VALENTINE

I've been doing it all my life.

GRETA

And where did it get you?

VALENTINE

Please, Greta, stop digging into me.

GRETA

I'm only trying to help.

VALENTINE

Your help is like hitting someone over the head with a hammer when they have a headache.

GRETA chuckles. VALENTINE tries to drink her coffee, but her hand shakes so badly she has to return the cup to her lap.

VALENTINE

If only my hands would stop shaking.

GRETA

If you didn't drink you wouldn't have that problem.

VALENTINE

Gee, I never thought of that.

GRETA

Do you want some Tylenol?

VALENTINE

(turns to GRETA)

VALENTINE (cont'd)

You're persecuting me, not helping me.

GRETA

That's not true.

VALENTINE

You pretend to have changed, but deep down you're the same old malign Greta.

GRETA

I'm sorry you feel that way. But is it so easy to change?

VALENTINE

No. It's impossible. Fuck it.

VALENTINE holds the cup with both hands to keep it from shaking as she brings it to her lips and sips her coffee.

GRETA

Does that mean you're going to drink again?

VALENTINE

Who cares?

GRETA

I do.

VALENTINE

You have a remarkably strange way of showing it. You're the most exasperating person. And you're a psychiatrist of all things. Do you do it on purpose or what?

GRETA laughs inaudibly.

VALENTINE

What am I even doing here? Don't tell me, let me guess. I stopped by the woods on a snowy evening and vanished into them. You may not appreciate the allusion, but that's par for the course.

GRETA

Curse?

VALENTINE

The curse of my life.

Is it really all about you?
GRETA

Why you witch!
VALENTINE
(turns to GRETA with sudden vehemence)

What did I do?
GRETA
(shrugs)

Do you expect me to believe that?
VALENTINE

What?
GRETA

That you're trying to help me?
VALENTINE

What do you think I'm trying to do?
GRETA

Murder me!
VALENTINE
(turns away from GRETA, beat)

God! I'm trying so hard!
(beat)

Fuck you!

VALENTINE pitches her coffee cup on the floor and jumps up.

Satisfied?!
VALENTINE

I didn't make you do that.
GRETA

You know what?
VALENTINE
(beat)

What?
GRETA

VALENTINE

You think I'm going to walk over there and take a drink, don't you? Well, I'm not going to do that. You know why? Because I *don't fucking feel like it!* Instead, I think I'll sit right down here and have a nice, sweet conversation with an evil witch.

VALENTINE sits on the couch abruptly and stares ahead with furious intensity. GRETA broods. Beat. VALENTINE brings her hands to her face.

GRETA

It's alright, sweetie. I may not be a nice person, but you don't have to drink over it.

VALENTINE

(brings her hands down swiftly)

I'm not going to drink! Can we DROP THE FUCKING SUBJECT!

GRETA

Alright.

VALENTINE

Digging, digging, digging! What do you want from me?!

GRETA

(beat)

I don't know.

(looks away)

Maybe a friend –

VALENTINE

(incredulously)

A friend?! It's like you're plucking the wings off a fly.

GRETA

You're not a fly! You're a beautiful young woman! And despite what you might think, I'm not an evil witch!

VALENTINE

(beat)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

GRETA

I'm not accusing you. I'm trying to be your friend. Does that seem so incredible?

VALENTINE

(beat)

I'm sorry for throwing my coffee on your carpet.

GRETA

I don't care about the carpet. I care about you.

VALENTINE

Why?

GRETA

Why shouldn't I? You're alive, I'm alive.

VALENTINE

(short pause, broods)

I don't think this is life.

GRETA

Why isn't this life? You're deranged from drinking. I see it all the time. When you stop drinking you go into withdrawal. Whoops! Better fortify yourself for that. What did you expect? Cheers? Understanding? Nobody understands an alcoholic.

VALENTINE

Will you stop calling me an alcoholic!

GRETA

Isn't that what you are? You talk about my charade. "I'm dying! I'm dying!" What about you? "I'm not an alcoholic! I'm not an alcoholic!"

VALENTINE

(beat)

What right have you to talk to me that way?

GRETA

Valentine, it's okay. I'm not blaming you. I'm just telling you. That's the way it is. You don't have to pretend that it isn't.

(beat)

Would you like another cup of coffee?

VALENTINE

No, I don't want another *cup of coffee!*

(beat)

Yes, please. I'll get the cup.

VALENTINE bounds off the couch, crosses to the coffee cup, and picks it up.

GRETA

(stands and crosses to the serving tray)

You don't have to use that cup. You're not a dog.

Well, in that case –

VALENTINE

VALENTINE tosses the cup on the floor.
GRETA pours a cup of coffee. Beat.
VALENTINE picks up the cup, crosses to the serving tray, and sets it down.

GRETA

Do you take cream or sugar?

VALENTINE

Black.

GRETA

That's the way my grandfather took it.

VALENTINE

What does that have to do with anything?

GRETA

Don't you remember me telling you about him? The petrified aristocrat?

VALENTINE

Why was he petrified?

GRETA

The same reason you are.

VALENTINE

Why is that?

GRETA

You're afraid of life.

VALENTINE

Who isn't?

GRETA
(hands VALENTINE the cup)

Here.

VALENTINE

Thank you.

GRETA
 In the end, he broke through.

VALENTINE
 Broke through what?

GRETA
 Himself.

VALENTINE
 I don't understand.

GRETA
 Are you sure you won't have a Tylenol?

VALENTINE
 I'm fine.

GRETA
 You're not fine.

VALENTINE
 Alright! I'm coming unglued! Happy?

VALENTINE crosses to the couch. GRETA follows. They sit. VALENTINE goes to drink her coffee, but her hand shakes so badly she has to bring cup back down on her lap.

VALENTINE
 This is pathetic.

GRETA
 It's not pathetic; it's reality.

VALENTINE
 (leans towards GRETA, with vehement intensity)
Reality sucks through a straw!

GRETA laughs.

VALENTINE
 It's always sucked! It will always suck! So I guess I'll just have to suck it up, won't I?!

VALENTINE goes to drink her coffee
but spills some on her dress.

VALENTINE
(quasi-hysterically)
Goddamnit! I spilled coffee on my nice, white dress!

VALENTINE crosses to the serving tray and
sets the cup down. She dips her fingers in the
water pitcher and tries to wipe the stain off her
dress. She becomes frustrated and squeezes the
dress with hysterical vehemence, groaning
through gritted teeth, like a child having a
tantrum. GRETA laughs. VALENTINE looks at
her.

VALENTINE
Why is this funny?

GRETA
You're so cute.

VALENTINE
Cute? You think I'm cute?!

GRETA
STOP TORTURING YOURSELF!

VALENTINE
(taken aback)
Alright.

GRETA
Can't you sit still for two seconds without having a catastrophe? Who suffers? You
suffer! Everybody else is living their life. Where is your life?

VALENTINE
Oh, Jesus, you're at me again. Where's *your* life, Greta? You've done do nothing but
scold me ever since I walked in this house!

GRETA
I know. I'm sorry. I have no right to say anything to you. I just can't keep my mouth
shut. I always mistake pointing out the errors of others for knowing my own.
(stands)

Please... Forgive me.

Are you serious?

VALENTINE

Hug?

GRETA
(holds out her arms)

I think I'm going to throw up.

VALENTINE
(the feeling of nausea overtakes her)

VALENTINE drops to her knees and has the dry heaves. GRETA crosses to VALENTINE.

Are you alright?

GRETA

VALENTINE gags again.

Maybe you should have a drink?

GRETA

I don't want a drink!

VALENTINE

I'm going to give you one anyway. You can't be sick like this. Next thing you know you'll be going into DTs.

GRETA

I'm not going into DTs!

VALENTINE

You will if you don't have the hair of the dog, my dear.

GRETA crosses to the serving tray and pours whiskey into a large shot glass. VALENTINE coughs and wipes her lips. GRETA crosses to VALENTINE.

Here.

GRETA

VALENTINE takes the drink, tosses it down, and shivers.

GRETA

That hit the spot, didn't it? Would you like another one?

VALENTINE

Why not/

GRETA crosses back to the serving tray. VALENTINE stands up, a little unsteady on her feet. GRETA returns with another drink and hands it to VALENTINE. VALENTINE tosses it down.

VALENTINE

Thank you. I guess I jumped the gun.

GRETA

What about an Irish coffee?

VALENTINE

Yeah, that'll work.

GRETA

I thought so.

GRETA crosses to the serving tray with the empty glass and fixes an Irish coffee.

VALENTINE

(broods, then sighs)

I hate to say this, but I'm beginning to feel like a human being again.

GRETA

Too bad you have to drink to feel like one.

GRETA crosses to VALENTINE and hands her the Irish coffee.

GRETA

I'm not blaming you. It's an illness. As a psychiatrist, I'm very much acquainted with the phenomenon.

(points to the couch)

Sit.

They cross to the couch and sit. GRETA puts her arms on the back and side of the couch and looks curiously at VALENTINE.

GRETA

Don't look so forlorn.

(beat)

A penny for your thoughts.

VALENTINE

(beat)

Andre...

GRETA

What about him?

VALENTINE

I hate him.

GRETA

You also love him.

VALENTINE

How do you figure that?

GRETA

If you really saw through him, you'd be indifferent and it would be over. It wouldn't be a problem to you. But love can be a problem. It's all mixed up with the bullshit of being human.

VALENTINE

(looks at GRETA)

Maybe you are wise.

GRETA

I have no idea what I'm saying. Words just pour out of me. That's why I'm such an excellent psychiatrist. It's like playing "Exquisite Corpse" – truth comes out of the air.

VALENTINE

Oh, no, not that again. Andre and I stabbed each other. Tristan was struck by lightning, and you were unmasked.

GRETA

I was, wasn't I? But it was all to the good. You stood up to Andre, Tristan met a being of light.

VALENTINE

(beat)

What about you?

GRETA

I met my inner scarecrow, you might say.

VALENTINE

(beat)

At least, we're not at each other's throats.

VALENTINE sips her coffee.

GRETA

Does that mean you're hopeful now?

VALENTINE

(stares ahead)

I just hope I don't do myself in.

GRETA

Oh, you can't help that. None of us can. That's the only way we learn.

VALENTINE

Life is so painful.

GRETA

Exactly. It's supposed to be. Life is a school in which we learn our crazy lessons.

(beat)

My grandfather was an alcoholic, you know. One time he stayed up all night drinking and terrifying us with his delirium. In the morning he calmed down and wrote a poem. The last line was –

Pause. GRETA stares ahead.

VALENTINE

What?

GRETA

“God is greater than God.”

(beat)

He never drank again. So you see, it's possible.

VALENTINE

What?

GRETA

Recovery.

VALENTINE
(beat, stares ahead)

It's such a cliché.

GRETA

Don't let that stop you.

VALENTINE sips her Irish coffee. GRETA looks at her.

GRETA

Can I tell you a secret?

VALENTINE

Sure.

GRETA

As disgusting as they are, I've always secretly admired alcoholics.

VALENTINE

Why?

GRETA
(stares ahead, beat)

They seem to need something more than this world.

VALENTINE
(beat)

Don't you?

GRETA
(beat)

I don't know

VALENTINE
(sips coffee)

I'm glad we finally had the sense to take Tristan to the hospital.

(beat)

Do you think he really met a being of light?

GRETA

He met something. When he sat up, I was terrified. He looked into the distance as if he didn't even know me and spoke in a voice not his own. "What is is not. What is not is."

GRETA shivers.

VALENTINE

(stares ahead, beat)

Who knows? Maybe we have everything backwards.

GRETA

That wouldn't surprise me. Maybe God *is* greater than God.

VALENTINE

I knew that the moment I saw Joseph.

GRETA

Then why did you scream?

VALENTINE

Why did you scream when Tristan came back to life?

GRETA

(beat)

Well, shit. That's bizarre.

(beat)

This year Christmas was deep.

VALENTINE

It's deep every year. We just don't know it.

GRETA

We can't bear it.

VALENTINE

Unless we have to.

They look at each other and have a quick, quiet laugh at themselves. The ending of the fugue plays. The light downstairs fades and congeals to the point of light in the loft above the spiral staircase. When the fugue ends the light goes out.

End

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” (Job)

