

A KIND OF SURRENDER

by Jacob Juntunen

Jacob Juntunen, 2001
jjuntunen@yahoo.com

CHARACTERS

The Man

The Woman

SETTING

There is a fire escape. There are old books scattered all over the floor. There are a few blankets and pillows scattered about. Two white sheets are draped down in arches.

For Emily

This time it begins with a song.

The Man

(A slow, sad song about losing one's love begins. A film is projected on the sheets of couples holding hands in the park, making out on a subway or bus, old couples, young couples, couples playing, couples talking over food, over drinks, of a boy looking lovingly at a girl while she talks. And many, many more. The film should be as happy as the song is sad, as bright as the theatre is dark. The Man sits on a fire escape and drinks. Lights fade up in the darkness. The Man allows the song and the film to finish and waits for a minute until there is an expectation.)

Should I light a cigarette?
Would that be a pretty picture?
A flame in the darkness to illuminate my face?

The Man

I'm not drinking.
It's coke. Not for the nose—Coke-ah coal-ah.

This is not our fire escape.
This is not our street.
This is not our view
of trees or flowers or bunnies or whatever.

This is—
This is somewhere else.

(Kitsch pictures of cities.)

Not so recognizable
As elsewhere.

The Man

(The pictures of cities become more indistinct.)

I saw on a bathroom wall once,
Undistinguished by name or citation,
"Where you are is who you are when you're sleeping."
It's the Jayhawks: from *Sound of Lies*.

The Man

But I'm not sleeping. I'm on a fire escape.
 And I don't know where I am.
 So who am I?

(City pictures stop. Blue lights up a little. The Man becomes more animated.)

The Man

It's not always a song, you understand,
 But when it is it can be unbearable,
 Not just the hollow-stomached feeling of loneliness,
 But a heart-pounding what am I doing here am I dying loneliness,
 A hands covering your face hold on hold on hold on quivering dying surely I'm dying
 loneliness and there's never enough noise to drown out the "What did I do? What did I
 do?" so you put on music (the song begins again) to drown out the noise but you can't and
 then you remember once the music's playing that it all started with a song to begin with and
 now it's playing again and making the noise that it was supposed to drown out and you
 don't turn it off because everyone loves a car crash even if you're inside the car—

(The Woman enters, or maybe she's been there all along in another playing space.)

The Woman

This isn't just going to be one of those long monologue plays, is it?

The Man

This song, it's not always a song—

The Woman

Hello?

The Man

What?

(The song stops.)

The Woman

I think I should have some say in this.

The Man

Why?

(The Woman glares.)

The Man

You're right. Okay, okay.

(She looks at him reproachfully:
 "Keep it together." The Woman exits
 or maybe lights fade down on her and
 she remains onstage.)

The Man

It's not always a song,
 It can be a book she carried,
 It can be anything about relationships,
 Movies, TV shows, commercials for long-distance,
 It can be a turn of phrase only she would have understood,
 It can be the way the moon makes a shadow behind a streetlight,
 It can be not hearing her breathing.

It can creep up behind you,
 It can... It just can. That's all. It can.

(A film begins of a maze-like interior
 of an apartment, a hallway with many
 doors.)

The Man

So I get down from the fire escape,
 And I stand in the living room,
 Facing the darkness
 down the hallway,

And I am lost.
 How can I leave?
 What door can I open?

Why are there so many closed doors
 In such a small apartment?

(The Man hesitates as the film reaches
 the end of the hallway showing a
 large and formidable-looking closed
 door. The Man returns to the fire
 escape and the film disappears.)

The Man

She did not leave me.

I...
 I am sitting here
 On the fire escape
 Effectively used for symbolism
 By Tennessee Williams in *The Glass Menagerie*.

I am drinking coke-ah coal-ah.
 Tennessee Williams did not drink coke-ah coal-ah.

Can you meet twice?
 If you've already met,
 Can you meet again?

We met once.

(There is music with instant changes in the lighting and The Man: both are brighter. This scene is mime, vaudeville, slapstick and as big and silly as possible. This is them meeting. They can pass each other repeatedly, as if they used to see each other during their daily routine and only eventually talked, or they can meet in some location, maybe a bookstore, but the scene is large, silly, and with bouncy music. The scene ends with them grabbing each other, and passionately embracing, falling to the ground and rolling around with one another. Blackout. The music stops.)

The Man

So, wait. You're saying there's a distinction between dating and a relationship?

(A spotlight fades up on The Man leaning against the wall and The Woman with her head in his lap, looking up at him. He plays with her hair.)

The Woman

Isn't that obvious?

The Man

No. I mean, what's the distinction, then?

The Woman

Dating is, what? It's nothing. It's hanging out, having sex, whatever.

The Man

Having sex is nothing?

The Woman

A relationship is solid, something to build on.

The Man

How do you get that without dating?

The Woman

I don't know. You don't, I guess.

The Man

So you date and then have a relationship. That seems reasonable.

The Woman

I guess.

What? The Man

Just wondering how long you need to be dating before it's a relationship. The Woman

How long *I* need to be dating, or how long *one* needs to be dating? The Man

Oh, grammar boy strikes again. The Woman

It's a completely different sentence; one's a question directed at me, one's hypothetical. The Man

Forget it. The Woman

Were you asking me something? The Man

Do you really think there's no distinction between dating and a relationship? The Woman

I see it now. I just didn't understand your definitions. The Man

And so? The Woman

What? The Man

You are so obtuse. The Woman

What? The Man

Forget it. The Woman

So dating is just about sex. The Man

Sex, attraction, whatever. The Woman

I don't think that's right. The Man

No? The Woman

The Man
No. Otherwise... I mean, what about... It's just...

The Woman
Such eloquence! That liberal arts education really paid off.

(The Man grunts.)

The Woman
Oh, and listen to that! Grunting! For a moment, I thought you capable of speech.

The Man
It's a pretty thought, but

The Man and The Woman
not so!

The Man
Yes, well. No, it's not just about sex. I mean, can't you be dating someone without having sex?

The Woman
Why would you?

The Man
I don't know. You're saving yourself for marriage or something.

The Woman
I'm not talking about literal intercourse. I mean attraction, excitement. That sort of thing.

The Man
Couldn't you date someone without that?

The Woman
Why bother?

The Man
I don't know. Because you love them?

The Woman
That's a relationship.

The Man
Why?

The Woman
Because then you've built something, you're committed to it.

The Man
So love is dating after the sex is gone?

The Woman
Don't just fuck with rhetoric.

The Man
What? I'm serious.

The Woman
Love is not dating after the sex is gone.

The Man
What then?

The Woman
I don't even know if you're capable

The Man
I've been in love.

The Woman
of speech. I don't know if you're capable of speech. You are, however, very defensive.
How can we talk about love if you can't even talk?

The Man
What are we doing?

The Woman
It would be nice if we were building something.

The Man
Ah. I see. Building something. I thought we were just talking.

The Woman
What is there to build with except words?

The Man
Wood? Brick?

The Woman
Such wit.

The Man
Come on. We're talking here, aren't we?

The Woman.
I guess. Except when you're grunting.

(The Man grunts.)

The Woman
Dates are not about love. Dates are about sex. Relationships are about love. About building something.

The Man
Are we building something here?

The Man

And you're back at the beginning. You get another coke-ah coal-ah and go back onto the fire escape. Repeat. You'll have to piss a lot at some point.

(A film of a maze-like apartment interior, an endless, dark hallway with many closed doors. The Man hesitates, then goes to the fire escape.)

The Man

But the bathroom is down the hall somewhere. At least I think it is. I'm not entirely sure. This is a very confusing place to be, this apartment, this city, whatever. It's a very small apartment, really, a very small apartment, but you get up and walk through it and it twists and turns and moves and betrays you. And there are all these closed doors in the hall, and I will not go down there. The bathroom is usually the first door on the right, but it moves around, or maybe I forget or something. I don't know. Sometimes it takes a while to find, and it's always a little dangerous opening those doors.

(The film ends at the large, ominous closed door. It fades away.)

The Man

The minutia is impossible
To tell.

You say, "Hey, it's minutia, don't worry about it."
Ah. But the little things... The details...

The way the chair sits on the fire escape,
The way I sit to eat dinner alone every night.
There is no witness to this sitting,
To these attempts at cooking,
To the endless reading,
(No TV cause I'm a good little liberal),
To the cleaning and the music.

This is unimportant, this is irrelevant,
This is not interesting or dramatic.

This is my life.
How many lives is this?
All of them?

But it can't be told.
The times of routine fly by
With no events to hit.
Events are memory's speed-bumps.
But this flight is my life,
And it's the unimportant, the irrelevant,
That which was neither interesting nor dramatic,
That I miss.

If you enjoy the minutia,

The nothing that can't be spoken
 That flies by every day before your head hits the pillow,
 If you enjoy the settling of the chair and your cup of tea,
 Your book and her breathing softly nearby with, what?
 Coffee, tea, gin and a book or a pen and paper or who cares?
 If you enjoy this...

Let me put it another way.

When someone says,
 "What did you do today?"
 And you can say,
 "Oh, you know. The same. It was nice."

That is happiness.
 That is what I miss.

You cannot tell routine.
 You cannot tell life.
 Only stories. Only events.

(The Woman enters carrying a book. She sits and begins to read it. The Man watches her. The Man gets off the fire escape; the lights change as he picks a book up off the floor and settles down to read it. The Man is near The Woman, but they are separate. They're just reading. They read for some time.)

The Man

Wow. Listen to this:

"My birthplace vanished, my citizenship earned,
 in league with stones of the earth, I
 enter, without retreat or help from history,
 the days of no day, my earth
 of no earth, I re-enter

the city in which I love you.
 And I never believed that the multitude
 of dreams and many words were in vain."

The Woman

Who's that?

The Man

Li-Young Lee. I can't imagine feeling like that. Feeling that displaced.

The Woman

Or that in love?

The Man

What do you mean?

The Woman

The narrator feels that displaced because his love isn't there. He enters, re-enters, "the city in which I love you", where the love of his companion is grounding, placing. You can't imagine being that displaced because you can't imagine a person meaning that much to you, being so central.

The Man

Oh, come on. That's not what I was talking about.

The Woman

But it's what you said.

The Man

No, what I said was, I can't imagine feeling that displaced.

The Woman

Are you saying that you *can* imagine feeling that in love?

The Man

I don't think I could be that hurt again. You should have gotten to me sooner.

The Woman

Like I said: you can't imagine being that in love. What is love if not exposing yourself to hurt by another person? A kind of surrender.

The Man

That's not the point. Can we talk about the poem?

The Woman

Aren't we?

The Man

"Days of no day, earth of no earth..." Can you imagine? Days without day—does he mean living in darkness?

The Woman

He means living without familiarity. No earth that you recognize. No day that you recognize as day. Completely lost.

The Man

That's good. I like that. I can't imagine... I feel so grounded, so weighed down, so—

The Woman

Trapped?

The Man

Why are you picking fights?

The Woman

You're the one saying these things, that you feel weighed down—

The Man
You were flirting with as many boys last night as I was with girls.

The Woman
Oh, please. Our friends, not strangers. No one took me seriously.

The Man
I did.

The Woman
Well, I have to get your attention somehow, don't I?

The Man
It wasn't *my* attention you were after.

The Woman
Of course it was; I'm not interested in those guys.

The Man
You've always got to be the center, the most—

The Woman
I'd like to be the center of your attention for once, yes.

The Man
Why do we have to do this? I just wanted to talk about this poem, we're having such a nice morning—

The Woman
Why do you have to act that way?

The Man
Genes, upbringing, a media conspiracy, how should I know? I'll try to stop.

The Woman
You won't stop.

The Man
Well, I'll try, okay?

The Woman
Sure.

The Man
What do you want me to do?

The Woman
Nothing.

The Man
Can we just talk about this poem?

The Woman
Sure. Let me see it.

(The Man hands her the book)

The Woman
Sometimes our friends think we don't like each other.

The Man
Really?

The Woman
They think we fight.

The Man
We talk.

The Woman
Well, the way we talk makes them think we don't like each other.

The Man
Talking's different with you.

The Woman
Different than with those other girls?

The Man
Nobody mocks me like you, baby.

The Woman
I'm not mocking you. It's like poetry. Lots of alternate meanings packed into very few words. Critiquing, fighting, joking, loving, all at once. I'm very complicated.

The Man
You're funny.

The Woman
Whichever. Do you love me?

The Man
Of course.

The Woman
That's a horrible answer. You didn't even think about it.

The Man
You'd be even more mad if I had to think about it. It's part of dating a complicated woman like you.

The Woman
You mock me, sir.

The Man
It's poetry, my love sonnets.

The Woman
Think about it this time: do you love me?

(thinks about it) Yes. The Man

What do you mean by that? The Woman

I've been trying to say— The Man

Try harder. The Woman

I can't explain it. The Man

You just feel it? The Woman

Yes, exactly. The Man

(getting up) Just like you just felt it last night with those other girls. The Woman

No! The Man

(beginning to leave) I don't know why I bother. The Woman

Why are you leaving? You're always leaving, and you never have to choose, you never have to define love, or decide what you want from this, or any of those— The Man

Do you ask me? Do you really want to know? The Woman

Why do you bother asking me? You know I don't know. The Man

I always give you too much credit. The Woman

That's not fair. It's as much your relationship as it is mine. The Man

Hah! You, who always gets his way, this is hardly my relation— The Woman

It is, you're here, we do this, you're the smart one, so why don't you ever have to decide what to do, or define love, or— The Man

Do you really want me to? The Woman

I... I don't know. The Man

Just ask. Just say the word. The Woman

I'm afraid. The Man

Of what? The Woman

I don't know. The Man

(A pause. The lights darken and The Woman moves to her balcony.)

What was I scared of? The Man
Was I scared of how we could talk?
Of what the words might be building?
A city of black and white sans serif font?

What did she want from me?
From the other boys she flirted with?
The ones she slept with?

And why did I feel like without her
I would just disappear?

Like the camera would just follow her and leave me out of the picture?

(A film of The Woman flirting over drinks directly into the camera, seeming as if The Woman is flirting with the viewer.)

I wanted the camera to follow me. The Man
I wanted to be the main character.
But none of us are.

We all like to think we are,
That if we just walked away,
If we sold everything we owned,
Bought that one-way ticket and left,

That everything would just freeze.

(The film of The Woman freezes.)

The Man

The city behind us,
Our friends lives...

We wouldn't want anything to change
Until we came back for our triumphant return.

(The film goes away.)

The Man

But I'm here in...
Where ever this is.
This city.

And somewhere she goes on.
Everyone we knew goes on.
They all go on.
Where ever they are.

I think about them.
I spend most of my time thinking about them,
Wanting to call them,
To write them.

But I can't find the phone.
It's around here somewhere.

I've planned what I would say,
Though, a hundred times.
A hundred times.

I've had time to think
Here on the fire escape,
Pacing or not pacing,
Pissing or whatever
Part of the cycle I'm in.
In whatever city this is.
It could be anywhere,
I think, but it's not home.

The Woman

I have read,
And I believe in,
"Imaginary homelands."

This is not a place
Defined by geography.

This is the collected works of that author,
Or the opening credits to that movie,
That one guitar solo after that lyric,
You know, that one you wish you'd written,
Or it's the phone ringing in just such a way,
A way that let's you know it's...

Well, you know who it is.

And maybe it is
Most of all these people,
The way they can talk deeper to us
Than anybody else.

Or the way they don't need to talk
At all to speak deeper than the people talking.

A look across the table,
Or even no look.

A simultaneous burst of laughter
When you both get in the car
To go home.

These are the borders
of that imaginary homeland.

These are the borders we choose.
The borders we commit to,
The ones we build.

These are not the ones determined
By childhood or coincidence.

These are borders to which we are loyal,
That we will defend from inside
The city walls.

And it's a city for which
He had no name.
He's not there now.

I sometimes sit on my balcony
And wonder where he is.
I suspect he must be lost.
If you don't know the city
From which you were coming,
How can you know where you've arrived?
A map does you no good without the
"You are here" to start with.

I know where we were,
So I know where I am,
And it's okay to be here.

But maybe sometimes
There's a song or something
And I'll miss him.

I'll think about where we were
And wonder if I'll ever get back.

Wonder if we'll ever meet there again.

But time only goes one direction, doesn't it?
And the doors close behind you.

Mostly I'm okay.
It's just that sometimes I sit out here.

I wonder why he never knew
The city we were in?

Hey, honey!

The Man

(The lights grow brighter. The
Woman steps down from her
balcony.)

You're home.

The Woman

Yeah, and you would not believe the food at... What?

The Man

You're just later than I expected.

The Woman

I called.

The Man

I know.

The Woman

But the food at this place is amazing.

The Man

You should take me sometime.

The Woman

Yeah, I will. You wanna hear about it?

The Man

Not really.

The Woman

(She starts to leave.)

Wait, come on. Where are you going?

The Man

I just wanted to see you tonight.

The Woman

The Man
Do we have to do this scene today?

The Woman
You're the one who didn't come home.

The Man
I don't see why you're upset.

The Woman
Who says I'm upset?

The Man
I'm just being honest with you. You want to have an honest relationship, don't you?

The Woman
I don't know.

The Man
You don't want me to be dishonest, do you?

The Woman
I like the honesty. I don't know about the relationship.

The Man
Because I went out to dinner with someone? Because I called and asked if it was okay first?

The Woman
Because you should have wanted to come home.

The Man
You should have told me to come home if that's what you wanted.

The Woman
I shouldn't have to tell you.

The Man
Oh, I should just know.

The Woman
You should just want to.

The Man
I should just want to.

The Woman
Yes.

The Man
You should just be enough for me.

The Woman
Yes.

The Man
I shouldn't want to go out to dinner with anybody.

The Woman
Right.

The Man
What about you?

The Woman
What about me?

The Man
You never go out to dinner with anybody or anything like that.

The Woman
That's different.

The Man
How?

The Woman
Just drop it.

The Man
How? How's that different?

The Woman
You need to stop.

The Man
I can't even go out to dinner? Why do you get to act like you're Miss Pure and Chaste?

The Woman
What's that supposed to mean?

The Man
You need definitions?

The Woman
You are such an asshole.

The Man
Me?

The Woman
I just want you to come home!

The Man
You didn't tell me that!

The Woman
You should know!

The Woman

Just say you should have come home.

The Man

I shouldn't have said those things. I'm sorry.

The Woman

Just say how awful dinner was and that you wished it was me the whole time.

The Man

Come on. We can't lose this. It's too good.

The Woman

This is all about you, honey. I'm not going anywhere.

The Man

I don't understand why sometimes it's like this and sometimes it's so good.

The Woman

It's all about you. What you want.

The Man

Like that conversation we had about churches.

The Woman

What about it?

The Man

That was a good one.

The Woman

I know. I was there. Not like at dinner.

The Man

The way we spun and wove,
Circled and dove,
Like birds around spires.

The Woman

It's great talking with you.

The Man

It wasn't about churches,
Or experience,
It was about us.

I mean really about us,
Not just about what we thought
Or even what we felt.

It—the process, the talking—
That was us. Is us.

The talking is nice. The Woman

We laughed. The Man

It was funny. The Woman

I don't want to lose that. The Man

You just have to want to come home. The Woman

I want to want to. The Man

Baby. Please. The Woman

I really want to. The Man

I just want to know you'd come home if I asked. The Woman

I know... The Man

It's not much. It's hardly anything. The Woman

I know... I... The Man

Oh, honey. This is all you. The Woman

I know... The Man

Just say the words to me. The Woman

I really am trying. The Man

I know. The Woman

I'm trying so hard. The Man

He was a very insightful mirror
When I talked to him.

And, if I get the same credit as a slug,
I must have enjoyed it too.
I never forced the issue.

I hate people sometimes.
The things we do to each other.

And don't forget:
There's no better pick-up line than:
"My boyfriend is so bad to me, not like you..."

Maybe if he'd given me more
I wouldn't have done all that.
Maybe not.

Maybe it kept me safe.
Maybe because he never chose,
I never had to choose either.
I could say I wanted commitment,
But never had to face what that would mean.
And the martyr really is such a lovely role.

Such an intriguing mix of
Insight and obliviousness.
Maybe I loved him because I was never bored.

(The Man awakes with a start of
terror and the lights come up
quickly.)

No! The Man

What is it? Shh... It's okay, what is it? The Woman

I— I had a nightmare. The Man

It's okay. You're okay. The Woman

The Man
I dreamt about this boy. He was just playing baseball, you know, and people were there,
families, dogs, sunny. And he was good, and he was young, and there was so much ahead
of him. Everything! And he walked into the woods, climbed a tree, tied a rope to the limb,
made a noose and jumped off the branch.

Oh, honey. The Woman

The Man

But the worst, the worst was the face. It didn't end there, he didn't want to die, he kept clutching at the rope, trying to pull himself back up—

The Woman

Oh, honey. Shhh...

The Man

But how can you pull yourself back up?

The Woman

Shhh...

The Man

And it was so sunny...

The Woman

You're okay.

The Man

His face was so afraid.

The Woman

Shhh...

The Man

Just gasping and pulling at the rope...

The Woman

You're okay. Come here. (She takes him closer to her and rocks him again) You're okay. Shhh... Just rest. Just close your eyes and rest. You're okay. I'll take care of you. I won't let anything hurt you. Shhh...

(The Man falls back asleep, and soft, wistful music starts. The Woman rocks The Man, then slowly lowers him to the ground. She gets up and removes his shoes and socks. She places them neatly near by him. She takes off his shirt, and he wakes up enough to help, but not completely. She folds it and puts it near the shoes and socks. Then she removes his pants, leaving only boxer shorts. She folds the pants and puts them next to the rest of his clothes. She finds a pillow and puts it under his head. She finds a blanket, puts it over him, and tucks him in. She rubs his back. He's a little restless, so she strokes his hair.)

The Woman

Shh... Shh... I'm here.

(The song plays, and she remains. As it ends, she gets up and exits, looking back to make sure The Man is okay just before she leaves the stage. The lights change and become more dim. The Man wakes up, looks around. Nothing. No one. She is not there. He gets dressed in silence. He doesn't speak until he's completely dressed.)

The Man

I miss her.
Have I said that yet?
I mean, explicitly?
But you knew, right?
Do you think she knows?
It's such an interesting combination
Of saying too much and too little
At the exact wrong moments.

Of course I miss her
Taking care of me.
Who wouldn't?

But that isn't what I miss most.
I told you already,
It's the mundane,
All those short Sunday afternoons
Reading the paper,
Taking a walk,
Maybe going out to breakfast.

And exchanged for what?
For freedom? Is that what I said?
That I didn't want to close doors,
To limit my options?

Is that what we think freedom means?
It's ridiculous. It's a blindness.

What about the door you close behind you
Walking out, bags packed?

(The film of the endless, dark hallway begins.)

The Man

I don't dream about death anymore
I dream about closed doors,
I dream about endless hallways,
I dream about being trapped here alone forever.

I lie in bed and wake up missing her
 And I can't tell if I'm still dreaming
 Or if she's really gone.

It takes me a few moments of twisting sheets
 To know that there are too many closed doors
 For such a small apartment.

I get up and stare down the hall.

(The film comes to the large, ominous
 closed door. The gigantic image
 remains.)

The Man

Listen:

In one of these books here somewhere
 There's a story about Alfred Jarry,
 A French playwright from the late 1800s.
 He wrote absurd little pieces about idiotic eggplant-shaped people.
 He was fairly eggplant-shaped himself.

He dressed in outrageous clothes and
 Carried a six-shooter in Paris where one didn't really do that.
 One day he was walking down a street firing his gun randomly
 When a woman came running out of her yard saying,
 "Sir, please be careful! You almost killed my child!"
 Jarry bowed low and waved his pistol at her,
 "Madam," he said, "I would surely give you another."

I suspect he was a very lonely man.

But he's the father of Absurdism,
 He founded a School Of Theatre,
 He's a Very Important Author.

He also once said,
 "Ce n'est pas amusant d'être libre tout seul."
 "It's no fun to be free all alone."

I wonder who he left so he could be free?
 What city did he exile himself from?
 What city did I leave for...
 For this.

Of course I would do things differently.
 I wouldn't sit out here so much
 If I didn't have regrets.

"There ain't nothing like regret,
 To remind you you're alive."
 Sheryl Crow. It's not sophisticated
 Or impressive to enjoy, let alone quote,
 Sheryl Crow. But take truth where you can

Find it. Or take words you wish you'd written
 Where ever you find them, and don't worry
 About who said them, or what the author meant, or any of that.
 Take them and make them your own.

The mind is a funny place.
 The way it will race down a path like that,
 About citation, for God's sake,
 Instead of missing her.

The defenses are thick and deep.

(The film image of the door opens
 and light obscures what is past the
 door, so we only see a brightly
 illuminated doorframe.)

The Man

I found the bathroom this morning.
 I came in off the fire escape
 And I couldn't stay here anymore.
 I opened doors until I found it.

I took a piss.
 I took a shower.

And while I was shaving,
 I noticed something. My face.
 I looked at my face.

It is not a boy's face.
 I suppose boys don't shave much,
 But I started shaving at fourteen,
 So I don't make that leap.

I don't know that I'd ever noticed
 That I'm not a boy anymore
 Until today.

I wonder how long it's been this way?

In spite of my self,
 In spite of my arguments and nightmares,
 In spite of my actions and adolescent fantasies,
 I've become a man.

How did this happen?

More importantly,
 I asked my face half covered in foam,
 What can I do about it now?

I stared.

I was amazed.
 A change was ripping through me.
 I could either accept that I'd aged,
 Or deny it. But denying it wouldn't change it.

That was the problem.
 Until I saw myself in the mirror,
 I could deny it. Deny death.

I wanted to sit.
 But the only place was the toilet
 And if I sat there I wouldn't be able to see
 My face.

I was going to die.

Oh, not now. I know. But sometime.
 I always thought I'd be able to argue my way out of it.
 That if I just didn't believe in it, it wouldn't happen.

This changed everything.

Oddly, I wasn't afraid,
 And I've always been afraid of death,
 As long as I can remember.

The inevitability took the fear from it,
 A weight and a tension were gone;
 It wasn't something to fight against.

I slowly finished shaving
 In glorious surrender.

(The lights and film of the
 illuminated doorway fade slowly
 down to black.)

But didn't you feel cut off from it all?
 The Man

I liked it.
 The Woman

(The lights fade up, bright, sunny day
 lights.)

How could you like that?
 The Man

It gave you time to just sit and reflect.
 The Woman

The Man

Hmph. Not much sitting involved. Stand, kneel, stand, kneel, sit, stand, sit, kneel, stand—

The Woman

It gave it a rhythm.

The Man

It was annoying.

The Woman

Not as annoying as having all the "menfolk" get up and parade around the congregation clapping hands and singing to all the women in the center.

The Man

Okay, that was a little odd.

The Woman

And sexist.

The Man

You're going to tell me there's nothing sexist about a Catholic mass?

The Woman

No, but at least there's some tradition behind it. Some ritual, not your plywood Protestant church with synthesizers and amplifiers.

The Man

Oh, I liked the plywood so much better.

The Woman

What?! How could you? The Catholic church was inspiring, it—

The Man

It was disgusting. I could barely look at the crucifix. And distancing. I don't understand why you'd like the distance.

The Woman

Because it gave you time to look inward, to think about what you'd done and how you felt about it.

The Man

I was just bored.

The Woman

No shock there.

The Man

What do you mean?

The Woman

Forget it. You really preferred the hold up your hands, hallelujah stuff?

The Man

It was more alive. With kids running around, banging on tambourines—

The Woman

That was so annoying.

The Man

It was great. They were included. The kids at the mass just looked like those little garden statues of kids. All dressed up and stoned. So to speak.

The Woman

Well, it is true that mass probably isn't the best thing for kids. But we're not kids.

The Man

I just prefer the "make a joyful noise" approach.

The Woman

But the music at mass was so moving! And the priest singing in Latin?

The Man

Maybe if it'd been Bach or something, but I just wasn't impressed.

The Woman

You liked the synthesizer, guitar, tambourine stuff?

The Man

Yeah, a lot. Didn't you? It was practically gospel.

The Woman

"Practically" being the key word. And that tacky overhead projector...

The Man

Did you know the words?

The Woman

No, but I didn't for mass either, and they had the taste to pass out hymnals, not use an overhead!

The Man

It wasn't a wealthy church. I liked that.

The Woman

There was no ceremony. No tradition.

The Man

I liked that, too. If there's a God, He's not going to get pinned down by some orthodoxy.

The Woman

He?

The Man

He, She, It, Whatever.

The Woman

Yeah, true, but church isn't for God, is it? Or do you think it's like burning the fat of the oxen's thigh?

The Man

No, but I think you should at least try to point yourself towards what's true.

The Woman

And what's true is what's inside yourself. And that's what mass points you towards.

The Man

It just didn't for me. It just pointed me towards the door. The hymns and the clapping was much more towards what I believe in, and made me think a lot more.

The Woman

Well, I guess if we start going to church we'll have to go separately.

(Pause)

The Man

Do you feel like going?

The Woman

Yeah, I think I do. Come with me. Give it another try.

The Man

I don't know. It was terrifying during the sermon. Every time he said something, I just said to myself, "Please, please God, don't let him talk about homosexuality."

The Woman

And I kept thinking how nice a woman's voice would sound singing mass. But it was nice. It seemed like there were lots of like-minded people there, didn't you think?

The Man

I don't know. Maybe..

The Woman

Come on. There were people who seemed like they were on the same path as us. That's more than just speaking the same language.

The Man

I don't know.

The Woman

We could try a different Protestant church if you want. Anglican, maybe.

The Man

Sure. I guess.

The Woman

Well, you can pick next Sunday.

The Man

Yeah, we'll see.

The Woman
Do you not want to go back to church at all?

The Man
Maybe. Can we just see how it goes?

The Woman
Sure.

(Little pause)

The Woman
Wouldn't it be interesting to believe something so strongly, with such conviction, that you'd die for it?

The Man
Oh, I think you do.

The Woman
What do you think I believe in?

The Man
(thinks first) I think you believe in choice.

The Woman
What kind of choice?

The Man
Choice in the abstract. I don't think it has to be exactly something concrete. You ask someone religious what kind of God they believe in and they'll have words and concrete examples of things they'll defend, but underneath it's really just an abstraction. And I think "choice" is your abstraction.

The Woman
I could chose a church, for instance.

The Man
Sure, but more than that. You wouldn't die for that

The Woman
So what are the concrete examples I'd defend?

The Man
Free speech. I think that's a big one. I think you'd be one of those people to defend the Klan's right to march even though you hate them.

The Woman
True.

The Man
Education. Anything that gives people choice, and you'd fight against things that take away people's ability to choose.

The Woman
Wouldn't everybody?

The Man
No. Of course not. There are lots of people who'd support a law saying the Klan can't march. That's definitely taking away people's free speech, but lots of intelligent people support those laws.

The Woman
What about you?

The Man
Do I support those laws?

The Woman
No, I know the answer to that. What would you fight for?

The Man
Oh, I don't know. The same things, I guess.

The Woman
No. I don't think choice is your passion. No. No, I don't think so. Not exactly. You're not against those things, but I don't think choice is your passion.

The Man
What would I fight for?

The Woman
You'd fight for your home.

The Man
I'm not that patriotic.

The Woman
I don't mean your country; I don't mean anything to do with geography. I've been thinking about this, but it's not really formed yet. I don't know how to put it. It's more an idea of home, or...

The Man
Like an imaginary homeland or something?

The Woman
Yeah, but I don't want to say it's a state of mind. Because it's not just that. It takes outside stimulus to get there, I think. It's partly boundaries we set in thought. But it's not just sharing an ideology with another person or a book or something. I haven't quite found a way to put it into words.

The Man
Like that recognition you get sometimes when you're reading along and come to a sentence that's familiar deep inside, that you just *know* is true?

The Woman
That's the feeling, but it's more than just a recognition of having the same thought. It's like you're out in the woods, walking along a path at night, fumbling along with a weak

lantern, certain you're alone, when suddenly you see another light next to you. And you realize there's another person on the same path, and not only is it someone on the same path, it's someone who considers the path his or her own. It's more than not being alone; you're with someone who speaks the same language. No, that's not enough. It's like you're with someone who when you say, "Rock" thinks of that same rock three miles back. So it's not just that they understand the word "rock", it's that they understand it the same way you do; they've experienced it the same way. They walked by the same rock three miles back and it's what they think of too.

The Man

And that's what I'd fight for?

The Woman

You'd fight for the path you're on. For people on the same path.

The Man

Come on. I can't even pick a church.

The Woman

You'll pick next Sunday. We'll find people on the same path. You're a wonderful man.

The Man

No... I'm not a man.

(Long pause.)

The Man

(smiling) Rock.

The Woman

(smiling) Yeah, I know.

(Blackout. The lights fade up but remain dim.)

The Man

I'm beginning to suspect where I was.

(The Woman makes a grunt of displeasure which The Man tries to ignore.)

The Man

Maybe I'm even starting to have a name for the city in which we lived. But I still wonder where I am tonight.

(A flame in the darkness illuminating The Man's face as he lights a cigarette on the fire escape.)

The Woman

Oh, that is a pretty picture. But it's not real. When are you going to talk about something real?

(The Woman shakes her head in disgust and exits. The Man gets up and comes inside to pace.)

The Man

I could talk
More about choice now.

It may not be what I would fight for,
But I've given it a lot of thought here.
I've had good reason.

Choice is all wrapped up in death.
In the same way a field of blue flowers
Looks more blue with white flowers for contrast,
Life looks to be all about choices
Because of the death.

What would you die for?
Because you will die for something.
Oh, probably not in the martyr way,
But, listen:

We all die,
And what we've done in life is
What we've died for.

(Blackout. Pause. Lights slowly back up.)

The Man

Boom.
You're dead.
Maybe that suddenly.
Maybe that unexpectedly.

What have you done?
What have you left behind?
Is it worth dying for?
Because you will die for it.
This is not a possibility,
This is a certainty.
Maybe the only certainty in the world.
What you've done is what you feel
Is worth dying for.

(Blackout. Pause. Lights slowly back up.)

The Man

Choice
Is like a hallway.

When you're young

The hallway stretches out in front of you
With an infinite amount of doors.

As you age and walk along,
The doors behind you close.
It's as inevitable as death.

Ah, and there it is.
The connection.

You want to deny death?
Then you have to deny you
Are moving down the hall.

But how?

You can deny aging,
But that's difficult as the wrinkles appear.
So you deny choice.
Deny that doors are closed.
Deny that *you* have closed doors.

To deny choice is to deny commitment.
You say, "I could still do anything.
The possibilities are endless."
But they aren't.

You can see that you're older
Or you can deny it,
But you are.

You can see that you're dying,
Or you can deny it,
But you are.

You can remain completely uncommitted,
To people, to ideas, to anything,
You can deny that you closed doors,
But you did.

She did not leave me.

I...
I left her.
I didn't know what I was leaving.
I know the name of the city in which we lived.

I want to go home.

(A slow, sad song about losing one's love begins and the lights fade down to almost nothing. A film is projected on the sheets of couples holding hands in the park, making out on a

subway or bus, old couples, young couples, couples playing, couples talking over food, over drinks, of a boy looking lovingly at a girl while she talks. Some of the pictures are of The Man and The Woman this time. Maybe all of them. The film should be as happy as the song is sad, as bright as the theatre is dark. The Man sits on a fire escape and drinks. The Man allows the song to finish and waits for a minute until there is an expectation. Blackout.)

END OF PLAY