

ROBERT FROST TO HELL AND BACK

A Play in Three Acts

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>Scott Renshaw:</u>	A professor at an accredited university
<u>Andrew Carlisle:</u>	A college student from a rich family
<u>Nicole Westborough:</u>	The first <i>woman</i> in her family to enroll in post-secondary education
<u>Joanne Renshaw:</u>	Scott's wife
<u>Delilah Carlisle:</u>	Andrew's older sister who has distanced herself from her family legacy
<u>Roger Garrison:</u>	Delilah's devoted boyfriend

Scene

A university town. Very simple, with singular set pieces used to indicate location. There is no backdrop, no walls. The world is a blank space, and it is the people and the objects that they interact with that make it a *place*.

Time

Any time after 1973.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: A lecture hall. Indicated only by a large, green chalkboard.

AT RISE: Professor SCOTT RENSHAW gestures to the board behind him as he speaks. He wraps up the day's lecture, presenting to the audience as though his students are seated in the house.

SCOTT

Finally, some of you picked up on the theme of "community." Very good. That's what I want you to get out of this story. Hawthorne's Salem is nothing more than small-town America. You know the name of the man who sells you milk. He knows your sister. She's sleeping with the mailman, who's married to your kid's kindergarten teacher. Understood?

(SCOTT pauses, waiting for a reaction.)

Everyone knows your name, and you know theirs. Everyone is tied together by something, whether it's blood, religion, or whatever they do in the woods at night. So when one member, say, Young Goodman Brown, is left out of part of that community, it creates conflict and fear. Some of you picked up on that. Some of you did not. As long as you were able to support another theme, your grade won't suffer.

(SCOTT looks at his students, trying to make eye contact with each one.)

SCOTT (Cont.)

Please don't come to me to complain about your grade. If you have serious questions, you know where to find me. That's all I've got. Have a good weekend.

(As SCOTT prepares to leave, two students, ANDREW and NICOLE, enter, graded essays in hand. ANDREW brandishes his paper in front of NICOLE, blocking her from her obvious destination of SCOTT's desk.)

ANDREW

I can't read his handwriting. Tell me what this says.

NICOLE

Andrew, I don't have time. He's about to leave. I have to ask him a question.

ANDREW

It's one word.

(NICOLE, frustrated, looks at the paper.)

NICOLE

See me.

ANDREW

What?

NICOLE

It says "see me."

(NICOLE tries to brush ANDREW off and approach SCOTT, but, to her frustration, ANDREW gets to him first.)

ANDREW

(Pointing at the red marking on his essay.
To SCOTT.)

What does this mean?

SCOTT

(Exasperated)

What does it say?

ANDREW

"See me." I can read it. I need you to tell me what it means.

SCOTT

Let me see.

(ANDREW hands SCOTT the paper. It only takes him a few seconds of reading to remember what he meant.)

It's about your paper.

ANDREW

I thought it was about my personality.

SCOTT

Come on. There's no need / for

ANDREW

What about my paper?

SCOTT

(Sighs)

I'm not supposed to do this, but I am going to give you one shot at fixing / it-

ANDREW

What's wrong with it?

SCOTT

If you can get it done and turned into my office by
class / tomorrow-

ANDREW

What is wrong with it?

(SCOTT looks at his watch.)

SCOTT

Why don't you come by my office later today and we can
/ discuss-

ANDREW

I know this is good work. This is more-

(ANDREW notices that NICOLE is standing
behind him. She has been listening to his
conversation while she waits to speak with
SCOTT.)

Nicole. Hey. Why are you still here?

NICOLE

I have a question. I had a question before you did.

(ANDREW glares at NICOLE, who stands with
her arms crossed, for a few more seconds
before returning his attention to SCOTT.)

ANDREW

Why didn't you grade my paper? Is there an
"incomplete" on my record now?

SCOTT

It will only / be there-

ANDREW

Are you kidding me?

SCOTT

Look, you didn't complete the assignment. Just do it again tonight- do it right- and I'll give you a grade. I don't have a late policy in the syllabus, but I'll have to take off at least / ten percent-

ANDREW

I did the assignment.

SCOTT

You were supposed to discuss the theme.

ANDREW

And I did. I want to be graded on the work I put into this.

SCOTT

What you turned in was a cross between political fiction and psychological horror. I didn't ask you to rewrite the work. It wasn't a creative writing piece. It was analytical. I appreciate the creativity, but there's a time and / a place-

ANDREW

I analyzed the themes and applied them. If anything, that makes it more accessible to the reader.

SCOTT

The reader is me, Mr. Carson, / and-

ANDREW

Carlisle.

SCOTT

Carlisle. The reader is me, / and-

ANDREW

I.

SCOTT

Excuse me?

ANDREW

The reader is I. Not me. I am the reader. Who is the reader? I am. The reader is I.

(Pause. SCOTT looks at ANDREW. ANDREW looks at SCOTT.)

SCOTT

This isn't the first pass I've given you either.

ANDREW

What do you mean?

SCOTT

Everything you turn in is like this.

ANDREW

Is like what? This was original.

SCOTT

God, yes. It's all very original. And it's brilliant, but this is a composition class.

ANDREW

I know that.

SCOTT

The point isn't to be original. You're smart. I know you understand what I'm asking for.

ANDREW

I want to get something out of this class.

SCOTT

You will. You'll get credit, and then you can take something else, and then you can graduate.

ANDREW

You know what I mean.

SCOTT

Of course I know what you mean, but I can't change the rules for one student.

ANDREW

Why not?

SCOTT

I'm not going to dignify that / with an-

ANDREW

It's a serious question.

SCOTT

Come on. Just rewrite the paper the way I asked for it or don't show up to class tomorrow. End of story.

ANDREW

If I wanted to learn how to write from a template, I could save a billion dollars and do it from home.

SCOTT

You could, so why don't you try that, Carlisle?

ANDREW

That may be exactly what I do.

(ANDREW points to his paper.)

There is art here. There's real potential. And it was all me.

(He pauses. He receives no tangible reaction from SCOTT.)

ANDREW (Cont.)

Forget it. I wouldn't expect someone like you to understand.

(ANDREW begins to walk out, noticing NICOLE again as he passes her.)

I'll meet you back at yours. I need to talk.

(ANDREW exits without receiving an answer. NICOLE watches him leave, then promptly steps up to SCOTT to ask her question.)

NICOLE

Should I come back later? I can see you're trying to head / out.

SCOTT

Don't worry about it. What can I do for you, Miss Westborough?

NICOLE

Thank you. I know we're not supposed to ask you about grades, but I just need to know if there's something that I'm doing wrong here.

SCOTT

I don't think so. Let me take a look at your paper.

(She hands it to him. As he looks it over:)

Does anyone call you Nicky? I had a friend named Nicole growing up. She went by Nicky.

NICOLE

I prefer Nicole.

SCOTT

(Smiling)

Alright, Nicole. I don't see what the problem is here. B+ is an exceptional grade in this class.

NICOLE

(Frustrated)

But it can be better. What does it need? I could use more / citations or-

SCOTT

Nicole, are you competitive?

NICOLE

Sometimes, I guess.

SCOTT

Then let me tell you a secret.

NICOLE

Okay.

SCOTT

You consistently outperform your peers. You've had the highest grade in the class the entire semester.

NICOLE

Oh. Thank you. I appreciate that, but I want to be a better writer for myself.

SCOTT

What's your major, Nicole?

NICOLE

English.

SCOTT

Really? I would have placed you in the arts.

NICOLE

Artists don't need to go to school.

SCOTT

No, but they often do. They tend to end up more like your friend Mister Carlisle.

NICOLE

Completely neurotic and self-obsessed?

SCOTT

(Laughs)

I was going for "frustrated." But that too. (Beat)
What do you plan to do when you graduate?

NICOLE

Teach at a university.

SCOTT

It's not a forgiving job.

NICOLE

I don't want to teach composition. No / offense-

SCOTT

None taken.

NICOLE

I'm more interested in literature. I'd love to teach the classics.

SCOTT

Wouldn't we all? Sadly, those positions are few and far between, and there are too many academic romantics fighting each other to get at them. (Beat) But I wish you luck.

NICOLE

Thank you. (Beat) My paper...

SCOTT

Oh, yes. Why don't you stop by my office one of these days and we'll discuss it. I'll read over it again and make some notes / for you.

NICOLE

I don't want to waste / your time-

SCOTT

I'm happy to do it. You know my office hours?

NICOLE

Yes. Thank you so much, Professor Renshaw.

(NICOLE begins to exit, but she hesitates at the door.)

I'm sorry about Andrew.

SCOTT

Carlisle?

NICOLE

Yeah.

SCOTT

Are you his keeper?

NICOLE

No, but...

SCOTT

But?

NICOLE

Someone has to apologize for him, and god knows he won't.

SCOTT

Thank you, Miss Westborough. Have a good night.

NICOLE

You too, Professor.

(NICOLE exits.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 2

SETTING: The common space of a small apartment. Indicated by a table set for two people with dishes and wine glasses. A bottle of red Zinfandel. There is a covered dish in the center of the table.

AT RISE: JOANNE RENSHAW sits at the table, talking on the phone. She is dressed less-casually than one might expect, with high-heels and lipstick.

JOANNE

(Into the phone)

Isn't that expensive?

(Pause.)

Oh? Well, I'd have to pay it out of pocket. There's no way I'd be able to hide that from Scott.

(Pause.)

I don't even know if I'm doing it yet. I'm just weighing my options.

(Pause.)

I can't say I haven't thought about it. It would certainly seal the deal. But, if I'm being honest, I've been thinking about walking out.

(Pause.)

I know, but this isn't what I was thinking. He won't even move us out of this stupid apartment.

(Pause.)

God no. I have to decide what I'm doing first. If I get rid of it, what am I supposed to tell him?

(Pause.)

What? Oh, right.

(JOANNE laughs. There is a sound of a key fitting into a lock.)

I've got to let you go, honey. We'll talk soon, okay? Bye now.

(SCOTT enters.)

SCOTT

You made dinner?

JOANNE

There isn't anything else for me to do.

(SCOTT slips off his shoes and hangs his bag on the back of his chair before sitting down.)

SCOTT

Thank you. (Beat) Are you wearing lipstick?

JOANNE

Do you like it?

SCOTT

It's nice. Did you go out today?

JOANNE

No.

SCOTT

Ah.

JOANNE

How was work?

SCOTT

Not terrible.

JOANNE

That's new. What happened?

SCOTT

Nothing too exciting. I wrapped up my lecture on *Young Goodman Brown*. Talked to a few of my more interesting students.

JOANNE

Oh. I thought maybe you'd gotten a promotion or something.

SCOTT

No. Not today.

(They dish out dinner and begin eating. A pause in the conversation.)

I had a good argument.

JOANNE

A good one?

SCOTT

It got me thinking for a while. Answer this for me: do you think it's more important to get an education if it stifles creativity but ensures success, or is it

SCOTT (Cont.)
more important to follow a passion and hope for
success?

JOANNE
An education.

SCOTT
That was fast.

JOANNE
(Shrugs)
It's obvious.

SCOTT
I don't think so. I've been juggling it for a while.

JOANNE
And that's why you didn't get a promotion today.

SCOTT
Excuse me?

(JOANNE shrugs. A pause.)

JOANNE
Who were you arguing with?

SCOTT
Carlisle.

JOANNE
Oh. (Beat) Remind me / who Carlisle is-

SCOTT
(Sighs)
A student. The one who writes the fantastical papers.

JOANNE

That's right. He wrote the one about the devil cult.

SCOTT

No. That's *Young Goodman Brown*. The story I've been lecturing on.

JOANNE

Oh, right.

SCOTT

He wrote the essay about blood-letting. I showed it to you last month.

JOANNE

Oh. I remember now.

(Pause.)

SCOTT

How was your day?

JOANNE

Fine.

SCOTT

Did anything interesting happen?

JOANNE

Nothing that I can think of. I talked to Bette for a while.

(Pause.)

What happened with the kid?

SCOTT

What?

JOANNE

Your argument. What was it about?

SCOTT

It doesn't matter.

JOANNE

I want to know.

SCOTT

Why do you care?

JOANNE

I don't like it when you start talking about "passion." You always start questioning where you're going, and we end up going backward.

SCOTT

Backward? From where?

JOANNE

Exactly. We're not that far ahead to begin with.

SCOTT

Ahead of whom, exactly? I didn't think we were in a race.

JOANNE

Bette is renovating her master bath right now.

SCOTT

Okay?

JOANNE

My point is that she has a master bath. Her house has more than one toilet in it. I'm sick of this apartment.

SCOTT

I apologize, your majesty.

JOANNE

Don't talk to me like I'm one of your students.

SCOTT

I don't talk to my students that way.

JOANNE

Oh, okay, so just / your wife then?

SCOTT

My students respect me.

JOANNE

You come home every day and complain about the way they disrespect / everything you-

SCOTT

They disrespect the class. Not me.

JOANNE

Then teach a different class. Or, god forbid, try for something better.

SCOTT

Better?

JOANNE

Why aren't you the dean yet? Edmundson is ready to retire.

SCOTT

Maybe that's better for you, Joanne. Maybe that's better for you.

JOANNE

Oh, and what do you want?

SCOTT

You know what I / want.

JOANNE

God, yes. I know what you want. And I can't live like that, / Scott.

SCOTT

I never asked you to. (Beat. re: the apartment) Do you think this is my dream? We're both suffering here.

JOANNE

Some of us more than others.

SCOTT

Joanne, I... No. I don't want to get into this right now. You know how I feel about our arrangement.

JOANNE

Marriage.

SCOTT

Sure.

(SCOTT stands and picks up the bottle of wine.)

Do we have more of this?

JOANNE

No.

SCOTT

Okay. I'm going to bed.

JOANNE

Goodnight.

SCOTT

Goodnight.

(SCOTT exits with the bottle of wine.
JOANNE finishes her dinner.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 3

SETTING: NICOLE's apartment, paid for by her parents. Indicated by a twin bed, neatly made.

AT RISE: NICOLE sits cross-legged on her bed, watching ANDREW pace.

NICOLE

It's not his fault.

ANDREW

I need someone to take out my frustration on.

NICOLE

You're a writer, aren't you? Write about it.

ANDREW

Don't mock me.

NICOLE

I'm not.

ANDREW

Ah, yes. Let me just write about my feelings until they all go away.

NICOLE

Don't be a dink.

ANDREW

I'm upset.

NICOLE

Clearly. Over one paper.

ANDREW

It's not just one paper.

NICOLE

Then why don't you start writing papers that will get you the grade you want?

ANDREW

It's not about the / grade.

NICOLE

Then what is it about, Andrew?

ANDREW

It's about... It's his attitude. He doesn't understand how frustrating it is for me to write about someone else's work. I have all of these ideas in my head, but I'm supposed to keep regurgitating what someone else already said? Why? Just to prove I understand it? I can prove that so much better by building on it.

NICOLE

What makes you think he doesn't understand that?

ANDREW

He doesn't.

NICOLE

Have you ever talked to him?

ANDREW

You watched me.

NICOLE

No, I watched you talk at him. You were fighting everything he said. You don't listen. If you give him a chance, you might be surprised.

ANDREW

I doubt that very much.

(Pause.)

I've made up my mind.

NICOLE

To do what?

ANDREW

I'm dropping out.

NICOLE

Andrew.

ANDREW

What? I'm serious. I'm not happy here.

NICOLE

Whatever your problems with Professor / Renshaw-

ANDREW

It's not about Renshaw. He's insignificant. It's about / my-

NICOLE

What about your degree? Your financial security?

ANDREW

What about it?

NICOLE

Is it insignificant? Have you considered for a moment that your parents won't support your dropping out?

ANDREW

(Beat)

I have not.

NICOLE

Maybe you should.

(ANDREW thinks for a moment.)

ANDREW

There. I considered it. I don't care.

NICOLE

Don't be / ridiculous-

ANDREW

My sister doesn't need their financial support. She's doing fine.

NICOLE

Is she?

ANDREW

She's an artist.

NICOLE

You didn't answer me. When's the last time you talked to her about her financial situation? Ever? Have you ever thought about money in your life, Andrew? And I'm not trying to insult you because I haven't either. We weren't bred for self-starting. Really, how bad is it to have a little humility and rewrite one paper?

ANDREW

Did you read my paper?

NICOLE

You watched me.

ANDREW

And what did you think?

NICOLE

It's very good. You could get it published.

ANDREW

And yet...

NICOLE

It wasn't the assignment.

ANDREW

You're taking his / side-

NICOLE

I'm not saying get rid of it. Keep it. Publish it.
Just write something new for class.

ANDREW

That's pandering.

NICOLE

So?

ANDREW

I don't want to write just to get a grade. I want to
get something out of it.

NICOLE

Sometimes the results justify the means.

ANDREW

Ends.

NICOLE

What?

ANDREW

The ends justify the means.

NICOLE

You know what I meant.

ANDREW

Yeah.

NICOLE

There's only a few more weeks of the class. Just "pander" a little bit to get out the door. You get the grade, and you graduate. Then you can publish whatever you want.

ANDREW

That's not the point.

NICOLE

I get your point. Really, I do. But sometimes you have to jump through hoops to get to where you want to be.

ANDREW

Why do I even bother asking you?

NICOLE

What do you want from me, Andrew? If you want, I can just keep telling you that you're right. You won't get anything out of that either.

ANDREW

I don't want you to tell me I'm right.

NICOLE

Then what?

ANDREW

I don't know.

NICOLE

You want my opinion? I'll give it to you for free. You're throwing away your future.

ANDREW

I'm not.

NICOLE

What are you going to do in the real world without a degree?

ANDREW

I'll travel. I'll write. I don't need a piece of paper to tell me what I'm worth.

NICOLE

No, but you need one to tell other people what you're worth.

ANDREW

(Beat.)

You really believe that.

NICOLE

I've seen it, Andrew. Look at my mother.

ANDREW

I like your mother.

NICOLE

Lots of people like my mother. But do you respect her?

ANDREW

Of course I do.

NICOLE

If she ran for office, would you vote for her?

ANDREW

(Beat.)

She wouldn't run for office.

NICOLE

If she did.

ANDREW

No.

NICOLE

Why not? You haven't even heard her ideas.

ANDREW

Nicole, / this is-

NICOLE

Why wouldn't you even consider voting for her?

ANDREW

Because she's...

NICOLE

She's what?

ANDREW

She's not a politician.

NICOLE

If that's how you want to put it. My mother knows her role, and she plays it beautifully. She can go to a cocktail party and schmooze with my father's intelligent friends, and they all like her, but when she's in the room, they don't talk about politics, climate change, literature. And she knows that. And she's okay with it.

ANDREW

Where are you going with this?

NICOLE

She didn't want to jump through the hoops either, but even she knew that she needed a degree to reach her place in society. So she married into one.

ANDREW

I don't need a place in / society-

NICOLE

You are such a privileged asshole.

ANDREW

Your family has more money than / mine-

NICOLE

I'm not talking about money.

ANDREW

Then what?

NICOLE

Your family pushes you forward. What a luxury, Andrew. At our age, my mother was married. Everytime I visit home, she asks if I'm sure I want to stay in school. I am fighting to stay here, to prove that I can do something with my brain rather than my sex. The path in front of you has been cleared, and you want to throw it all to the wind. Frankly, I'm insulted.

ANDREW

It has nothing to do with you.

NICOLE

It's like eating a sandwich in front of a starving person.

ANDREW

(Beat)

I don't need what they're selling. I want to learn. I want to learn everything. Just not the way they want to teach it. Everything I need, I have.

NICOLE

Everyone needs guidance.

ANDREW

I'm tired of blindly doing what I'm told.

NICOLE

I'm not saying don't / question-

ANDREW

No. That's what Renshaw is saying.

NICOLE

You should give him more credit. He's your professor.

ANDREW

And what does that mean? It's just a title.

NICOLE

An earned / title-

ANDREW

He didn't earn jack.

NICOLE

He has a degree.

ANDREW

Good for him. He has a receipt for monkey school.

NICOLE

What do you plan to do then?

ANDREW

Whatever I want.

NICOLE

Smart.

ANDREW

What?

NICOLE

Why do you come here if you're just going to argue with me?

ANDREW

I'm not arguing.

NICOLE

You are.

ANDREW

I always come to you.

NICOLE

And you never listen to what I have to say.

ANDREW

I do.

NICOLE

You're just going to do whatever you want anyway.

ANDREW

Yes. But I still want to know what you think.

NICOLE

Doesn't that say something?

ANDREW

What?

NICOLE

Doesn't that say something about you?

ANDREW

No. What?

NICOLE

You aren't as impulsive as you want to believe.

ANDREW

That's / not-

NICOLE

If you want someone to tell you that dropping out is a good idea, find someone who doesn't care enough about you to be honest.

ANDREW

Maybe that's what I need to do.

NICOLE

You won't be successful if you keep acting like that.

ANDREW

Like what?

NICOLE

Like you don't care what anyone thinks.

ANDREW

I don't / care-

NICOLE

Oh, you don't? Then why don't you rewrite the essay?

ANDREW

What is that supposed to mean?

NICOLE

You don't care about the paper. You don't want to rewrite it because you're obsessed with your image.

ANDREW

That's not true.

NICOLE

Really.

ANDREW

Yes.

NICOLE

Then rewrite it.

ANDREW

No.

NICOLE

Why?

(ANDREW makes a noise of frustration then wheels sharply around on NICOLE.)

ANDREW

What do you think success is?

NICOLE

Excuse me?

ANDREW

Clearly, you have an idea of what "successful" is. So, why can't I be successful like this?

(NICOLE thinks before answering.)

NICOLE

It's about stability. The security of knowing you can support yourself and then some. And being surrounded by peers you can admire.

ANDREW

Does that make your mother successful?

NICOLE

Yes. Just not in the way I want to be.

ANDREW

That's not how I see it.

NICOLE

Why?

ANDREW

Because...

NICOLE

You don't have a better idea about it.

ANDREW

Because why should my success be based on the successes of others?

NICOLE

Amazing. Inspirational.

ANDREW

Shut up. I want to be happy, not stable.

NICOLE

I can name fifteen people who are happy but not successful. Sometimes it's a tradeoff.

ANDREW

Go.

NICOLE

What?

ANDREW

Name fifteen people.

NICOLE

Seriously?

ANDREW

Go.

NICOLE

I don't know. That guy that stands by the gas station and sells bracelets. He seems happy.

ANDREW

You don't think he's successful?

NICOLE

He sells plastic beads for a / living.

ANDREW

But he's happy.

NICOLE

I don't know if he's happy. I wouldn't be.

ANDREW

That's you. He's always smiling, right?

NICOLE

I guess.

ANDREW

Who does he have to keep up appearances for? He has no reason to smile other than being happy.

NICOLE

Uh huh.

ANDREW

So who says he's not successful?

NICOLE

Everyone.

ANDREW

Everyone else. Has anyone ever asked him?

NICOLE

Next time I walk past, I'll do that.

(ANDREW laughs at NICOLE's joke. The argument is over.)

ANDREW

You're such a bitch.

NICOLE

Oh good. No one will want me for a wife.

(Pause.)

ANDREW

Do you think he's alone?

NICOLE

The bracelet man?

ANDREW

Yeah.

NICOLE

What do you mean?

ANDREW

Do you think he has anyone supporting him?

NICOLE

Probably not. I don't know. (Beat) You want to know what I think? You should talk to Professor Renshaw.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 4

SCENE: A room in an apartment.
Indicated only by a small table, different than the one used before, and a chair with a bag hanging over the back.

AT RISE: DELILAH CARLISLE sits at the Table, sketching. ROGER GARRISON bounds joyfully into the room and taps her on the shoulder. When she looks up, he kisses her.

DELILAH

(Smiling.)

What's this about?

ROGER

I love you so much.

(He kisses her again.)

DELILAH

(Suspicious)

What did you do?

ROGER

Nothing. I just love my very beautiful, very talented girlfriend.

DELILAH

(Joking)

Beautiful and talented? Did you commit a felony? Should I pack a bag to flee the country?

ROGER

No need.

DELILAH

You're not usually like this.

ROGER

Well, today, I am.

DELILAH

Why today?

ROGER

Is it a problem?

DELILAH

No. It's just not normal.

ROGER

If you don't like / it-

DELILAH

I do. Please, continue to dote on me as long as you want.

ROGER

Good.

DELILAH

But you would tell me if there was a reason?

ROGER

I just love you, Delilah. Plain and simple.

DELILAH

I feel like I should be worried.

ROGER

Can't I just be happy to see you?

DELILAH

I suppose you can be. You're usually not.

ROGER

Well, I am now.

DELILAH

Did something happen today?

ROGER

A lot of things happened.

DELILAH

Like what?

ROGER

I woke up this morning.

DELILAH

(Shock)

Really?

ROGER

And I looked out the window, and there was a cardinal right outside. I said you should draw it today.

DELILAH

I remember.

ROGER

Did you?

DELILAH

No.

ROGER

That's okay.

DELILAH

What else?

ROGER

I went into work. But at lunch, I walked through the park and counted the dandelions.

DELILAH

That's a lot of work.

ROGER

I had a lot on my mind.

DELILAH

How many were there?

ROGER

More than I could count.

DELILAH

What did you do afterward? You couldn't have gone back to the theatre. It's still early.

ROGER

I didn't. I came home to you.

DELILAH

There's no rehearsal tonight then?

(ROGER shakes his head.)

You didn't spend three hours counting flowers, did you?

ROGER

I made one stop before coming home.

DELILAH

Where?

ROGER

The store.

DELILAH

If I'd known you were stopping, I would have asked you
to pick up some / milk-

ROGER

Not the grocery store.

DELILAH

What store?

ROGER

(Ignoring her)

Delilah / Carlisle-

(DELILAH frowns.)

DELILAH

Roger, what did you do?

ROGER

/ Delilah-

DELILAH

What store did you go to?

ROGER

Del, it's / not-

DELILAH

If you went to the store, why can't you tell me which
one?

ROGER

Please let me finish.

DELILAH

Roger, I / want-

ROGER

Delilah Carlisle, I don't want to spend a minute of my life without you.

(ROGER produces a ring from his pocket.)

I want to marry you.

(DELILAH is silent. ROGER is silent, anticipatory. DELILAH turns away.)

DELILAH

Damn it, Roger.

ROGER

We don't need to make any plans right now. I just want you to look me in the eye and tell me you want that too.

(She doesn't look him in the eye. He frowns.)

ROGER

You don't want / to-

DELILAH

Of course I do. Or some version of it.

ROGER

What does that mean?

DELILAH

I don't know if this is the right time.

ROGER

I feel like it is.

DELILAH

It hasn't been long enough yet.

ROGER

For what?

DELILAH

Seriously?

ROGER

Oh.

DELILAH

Yeah.

ROGER

Del, it's been a year.

DELILAH

One year. That's not enough for me.

ROGER

How long are you going to hold onto it?

DELILAH

Wow.

ROGER

I don't / mean-

DELILAH

I know you don't.

ROGER

You know how sorry I am.

DELILAH

I know. But I need to set the pace right now.

ROGER

A year, Del.

DELILAH

And I'm not ready to forget yet.

ROGER

You used to talk about getting married all the time.

DELILAH

Did I?

ROGER

Did something change?

DELILAH

Why don't you ask Shelby to marry you?

ROGER

Really?

DELILAH

I'm sorry. I'm not there yet. I'm not ready.

ROGER

(Gently)

Well when will you be ready?

DELILAH

I don't know. This is too fast for me.

ROGER

We've been together six years now.

DELILAH

Five. We don't count that one.

ROGER

Okay. Five. That's still a lot.

DELILAH

Another isn't going to hurt us.

ROGER

It might.

DELILAH

Oh, forgive me. I forgot you can only last four years before you need to sleep with someone else.

ROGER

I thought we'd gotten past this.

DELILAH

That isn't for you to decide.

ROGER

Del, you wouldn't talk to me. I didn't know what was going on with you.

DELILAH

That makes it okay, then.

ROGER

No. I didn't know what to do. You were so distant.

DELILAH

That's when you hold my hand and suffer with me for a while.

ROGER

I did suffer. I didn't know how to help you.

DELILAH

Ah, yes. Fucking your producer must have seemed like a perfect solution then.

ROGER

Del, / seriously-

DELILAH

What? Am I not allowed to say it? Am I supposed to pretend it didn't happen?

ROGER

That's not what we're talking about right now.

DELILAH

Right. You want to get married.

ROGER

I thought maybe we were ready for the next step in this relationship.

DELILAH

Who says the next step is getting married? Maybe it's proving that you still want to be with me at my lowest.

ROGER

How am I supposed to fix this if you won't give me the chance to change?

DELILAH

Because you shouldn't need to change. You should have just been good. We were good.

(There is no response to this. They sit in tense silence until ROGER returns to his original point.)

ROGER

I'm not saying get married right now. I'm saying get engaged. We don't have to get married for years if we don't want to.

DELILAH

What's wrong with us now?

ROGER

Nothing. That's why I thought it was time.

DELILAH

Things are finally feeling normal again.

ROGER

Exactly.

DELILAH

Are you afraid that if you don't chain me down I'll leave again?

ROGER

That's how you see it.

DELILAH

That's what it feels like.

ROGER

Is there a reason I'd need to "chain you down?"

DELILAH

What's that supposed to mean?

ROGER

No one is forcing you to stay. You can go if that's what you want.

DELILAH

That's not what I meant. I love you.

(After a long thought, ROGER gingerly takes her hand.)

ROGER

I was under the impression that this was our next step. I've known for so long that this is what I want.

ROGER (Cont.)

We- you and I planned out a wedding together. I thought that was as real to you as it was to me.

DELILAH

Of course it's real to me. But...

ROGER

But?

DELILAH

But that was before everything. Everything started over when I let you back in.

ROGER

It doesn't make it less real.

DELILAH

(She squeezes his hand)

This is real.

ROGER

A ring isn't going to change this.

DELILAH

It isn't going to make it any more real either.

ROGER

I want to wear a ring. I want people to see us.

DELILAH

(Slowly)

I feel like you want people to see that there aren't consequences for your actions.

ROGER

(Snapping suddenly)

Why are you being so cynical? Is it honestly so terrible to believe that I want to marry you just to marry you?

DELILAH

(Matching his intensity)

But that isn't what you want. You want to wear a ring so that everyone can see how you beat the system. How you crawled out of the hole you dug yourself and still came out on top.

ROGER

You'd wear a ring too, preferably.

DELILAH

Do you write your name in your underwear too?

ROGER

I don't know why you're resisting / this so much.

DELILAH

Resisting? I didn't realize I was under arrest, Roger.

ROGER

Don't twist my words / around.

DELILAH

I'm not. / You said it first.

ROGER

Calm down. You're being hysterical.

DELILAH

Oh, sure, the moment a woman doesn't do exactly what you want, you blame it on / her uterus.

ROGER

What the hell, Delilah?

DELILAH

Go fuck yourself.

(Pause)

How much did the ring cost?

ROGER

What?

DELILAH

How much?

ROGER

You worry about money too much.

DELILAH

Somebody has to worry about it in our situation.

ROGER

Our situation?

DELILAH

Our financial / situation.

ROGER

It always comes back to money.

DELILAH

What?

ROGER

Not everything is about money, Delilah, yet, somehow, you manage to make it seem that way.

DELILAH

We are barely getting by on what you make. God forbid I ever have to support / us.

ROGER

We'd find a way.

DELILAH

You say that now, but when we're pawning that ring to make our next / house payment-

ROGER

You know who you sound like right now? Your dad. This is the same argument you had with him when we first started seeing each other.

DELILAH

Don't start / dragging-

ROGER

Stop. Just stop. When you moved away with me, you told me that none of that would matter anymore. You said you wouldn't miss the pool and the boats and the housekeepers. Remember that? You said you wanted something completely different. But you know what? You don't. You want the facade. The appearance of a struggling, artistic life without any of the struggle. You're afraid to live without the comfort of your trust fund.

DELILAH

How dare you?

ROGER

Tell me it's not true.

DELILAH

It's not.

(Pause)

ROGER

Sometimes I feel like your trophy. Like you only stay with me to make your parents mad.

(Pause)

DELILAH

I don't like being financially dependent on you, Roger.

ROGER

It embarrasses you.

DELILAH

Yes. But not in the way you mean. I feel like less of a woman when I have to depend on my man for everything.

ROGER

It's not everything. It's just money.

DELILAH

It's the bed I sleep in and the heat in my house. The house itself. It's the food on my table, the clothes on my back. It's the pencils I make my living with. It's everything, Rog.

ROGER

And I depend on you to cook that food and buy the clothes on my back and figure out how to pay the bills that pay for the apartment and the heat. I'm just as dependent on you, Del.

DELILAH

What happens if the union strikes? Or no one needs a prop designer for a month?

ROGER

We ask your parents for a loan.

DELILAH

So you've thought about this.

ROGER

Of course.

DELILAH

Well, we can't ask them anyway.

ROGER

We've never asked them for anything. You're they're only daughter. They'd help us.

DELILAH

They wouldn't. And I won't give them the chance to be so smug.

(Pause)

ROGER

Well, in that case, I'll work on sets. Or / lights-

DELILAH

Yes. Thank god you have options, Roger. And what about me? All I can do is pray that some idiot is going to like the colors I chose and give me a couple hundred so that we can pay the electric bill. Sometimes I wonder why you even came back. Think of where you might be if you didn't have to support me.

ROGER

I want you to follow your passion. I adore your passion. (Beat) Getting engaged doesn't take any of that away. It doesn't take anything away. It only adds another layer to what we already have.

DELILAH

What am I supposed to tell my parents?

ROGER

What did you tell them when you left home?

DELILAH

"I hope you enjoy sucking society's cock for the rest of your lives."

ROGER

Oh. (Beat) Just tell them the truth. They'll be happy for you.

DELILAH

They don't know I took you back.

(Pause)

ROGER

I didn't realize you told them / about-

DELILAH

Of course I did. I had to tell my mother at least. But I never told them that we're still together.

ROGER

Can you tell them / now?

DELILAH

They would only be more ashamed of me. I don't know how to approach / it without-

ROGER

They have to understand forgiveness.

DELILAH

The weight of what you did, / Roger-

ROGER

I understand that, / but-

DELILAH

Plus, they live halfway across the country, and your father lives on the other side. What happens for Thanksgiving? What happens when they die, Roger? And I'm stuck here.

ROGER

Calm down. You're never going to be stuck. And when we inevitably have kids, / we-

DELILAH

Wait.

ROGER

What?

DELILAH

Don't say that yet.

ROGER

What?

(Pause)

Kids?

(DELILAH says nothing.)

Del, we've wanted kids forever. I'm not saying let's start right now. I'm saying someday, I want to be a dad. You want to be a mom. I know you do. You've told me you do.

DELILAH

What if they turn out more like me than you?

ROGER

Then there will be that much more beauty in the /
world-

DELILAH

What if they're sad and angry, and they never sleep,
and they hate me, and I don't know how to handle it?

ROGER

We handle it together.

DELILAH

You did such a great job with me.

ROGER

I didn't have any help.

DELILAH

And would I? If we had kids, I'd be the one home with
them. You still have to work. I still have to work.
They'd be neglected.

ROGER

They'll be independent.

(Pause)

I know that you love me, Delilah. And, god, I hope
that you know I love you. (Beat) But right now it
feels like you don't want to get engaged because you
might want to walk out on me again.

DELILAH

I didn't just / walk out-

ROGER

You never gave me the chance to try and fix anything.

(ROGER sits. He stands up again. He does not look at DELILAH. She remains still, eyes fixed on the ground.)

DELILAH

You think too far ahead.

ROGER

(Defeated)

I wasn't thinking ahead at all. I love you now. I love you enough to marry you right now.

(A long pause)

I'm going for a walk.

(ROGER exits. DELILAH does not move.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 5

SCENE: Nighttime. Outside. Indicated by a single street lamp that casts a small pool of light for the actors to play in.

AT RISE: ANDREW and ROGER enter from opposite sides of the stage. Both have their heads down. As they pass one another, their shoulders meet accidentally. They do not see each other's faces.

ANDREW

(Instinctively)

Sorry.

(ROGER walks on. ANDREW stops, sets his face, and turns back. ROGER is already gone, but ANDREW calls him back.)

Hey. You know how to walk down a fucking street?

(Recognition passes across ANDREW's face.)

Roger?

ROGER

(Returning to the light)

Oh, hey. What's up?

ANDREW

Not a lot.

ROGER

It's late.

ANDREW

Yep.

ROGER

Uh-huh. What are you doing out here?

ANDREW

Coming back from a friend's. Where's 'Lilah?

ROGER

Home.

ANDREW

Are you two okay?

ROGER

We're fine, Andrew. What do you care?

ANDREW

(Defensively)

Listen, I like you, but if you hurt my sister like that / again-

ROGER

We're fine.

(Pause)

Nothing serious, you know?

ANDREW

I get it. What's up?

ROGER

She... There's something that I really want to do, and she doesn't want to do it.

ANDREW

(Confused)

Oh. What is it?

(ROGER doesn't answer. ANDREW comes to the conclusion that it has something to do with sex.)

Oh. Like a- That sort of thing.

ROGER

N- yeah. Sure.

ANDREW

I don't really- It's my sister. I don't think I / should-

ROGER

Yeah. Please don't. (Beat) Good to see you again.

(ROGER begins to leave.)

ANDREW

Hang on a minute. Can I get some advice?

ROGER

Sure.

ANDREW

I feel like I'm living my life for everyone else.

ROGER

Oh, you mean real advice?

ANDREW

I did something- I'm considering doing something that might change everything for me. Does that make sense?

ROGER

Sure?

ANDREW

And I don't like the things you did to 'Lilah.
Obviously, / but-

ROGER

Neither do / I-

ANDREW

I need to know why you did it.

ROGER

That's a weird question.

ANDREW

Yeah.

ROGER

I don't know why. I was thinking with my / penis-

ANDREW

Okay, I understand that. And you obviously didn't
consider how it would affect her. Or anyone else. You
just did it. (Beat.) That really makes you sound
awful.

ROGER

Thanks.

ANDREW

But how do you do that?

ROGER

Andrew, I'm not proud of that.

ANDREW

You shouldn't be. But there's something that drove you to that level of... Of carnality. And whatever it is, I want it.

ROGER

I should go. It's getting late.

ANDREW

Wait. Forget I said anything about 'Lilah. How do I stop caring?

ROGER

I never stopped caring. I just stopped listening to the part of me that cared.

(Pause.)

I had blinders on. Everything that was real was in front of me. Anything I couldn't see didn't matter.

ANDREW

Do you think that could be a good thing too?

ROGER

It felt good when what was in front of me was good. When it was bad, that was my whole world. Take that how you will.

ANDREW

I might drop out of school.

ROGER

Oh.

ANDREW

Yeah.

ROGER

Your parents won't like that at / all-

ANDREW

I know.

(Pause.)

ROGER

Maybe you're right about blinders in this case. Focus on the future. On yourself.

ANDREW

I guess, yeah.

ROGER

(Shrugs)

Whatever you want to do. I should get going. It's late.

ANDREW

I'll see you later. Say hi to 'Lilah. Good luck with her.

ROGER

Thanks.

(ROGER exits in the direction he had been traveling before, leaving ANDREW alone in the pool of light.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 6

SETTING: Nighttime. Inside an office at the university. Indicated by a metal desk. There is a chair on either side of the desk.

AT RISE: SCOTT sits at his desk, an open notebook in front of him. He stares at the blank page, pen primed, but cannot find the inspiration he needs to write. NICOLE's paper sits to his left. NICOLE enters hesitantly, a bag slung over her shoulder.

NICOLE

Professor Renshaw?

SCOTT

Oh, Nicole. Come in. Take a seat.

(SCOTT closes his notebook and tucks it away.)

NICOLE

I'm sorry. Were you busy? I can come back / another-

SCOTT

No, now is perfect. I was just seeing if I could get some creative juices flowing again.

(NICOLE sits, hanging her bag on the back of the chair.)

NICOLE

Writing?

SCOTT

Attempted writing.

NICOLE

Have you ever published?

SCOTT

A few short stories in college, but I haven't picked it up for a long time.

NICOLE

You should. You're a good story-teller.

SCOTT

Thank you. (Beat) I took another look at your paper.

NICOLE

What did you think?

SCOTT

(Shaking his head)

It's really very good, Nicole. Even on a second read, I don't know if there's much more I can tell you. Do you have specific questions?

(NICOLE reaches across the desk and takes her paper.)

NICOLE

What about this marking here? Would it have been better to cut the quotation after "tonight?" Or cut off the whole beginning and start at "prithee?"

SCOTT

Both work equally well.

NICOLE

I know. You just marked it, and I don't know why.

SCOTT

I think you could have achieved the same effect without using a quotation at all.

NICOLE

I thought it tied everything together so neatly.

SCOTT

It did. But I think you could have gone without it.

NICOLE

Oh, well thank you. (Beat) Do I always do that?

SCOTT

Do what?

NICOLE

Use too many quotations?

SCOTT

I think you should trust your writing more.

NICOLE

Easier said than done.

SCOTT

Believe me, I know.

(Pause.)

How are your other classes?

NICOLE

My grades?

SCOTT

How do you like them? Are they as easy for you as this one?

NICOLE

I'm not very good at math. Or Latin. The grammar is so different, and I keep reverting to what would make sense in / English, and-

SCOTT

Do you stay late to talk to those Professors about improving yourself?

(Pause.)

NICOLE

No.

SCOTT

It might benefit you to direct more of your anxieties toward the classes that need their attention. Yes?

NICOLE

I suppose.

SCOTT

Sometimes, Nicole, it's okay to take an easier path to the same ends. You can pass this class- ace this class- with your eyes closed. Devote effort somewhere you're not as adept.

NICOLE

Okay.

SCOTT

And of course I'll be happy to talk to you about your writing whenever you want, but let's leave your grade out of it. We can just talk like two contemporaries.

NICOLE

Thank you, Professor.

SCOTT

A question for you: did you like the story?

NICOLE

Young Goodman Brown?

SCOTT

Yes.

NICOLE

Very much. This was my second time reading it.

SCOTT

I'm glad. I wish that I could bring more fiction into class. (Beat) Let me get a student opinion: in the ideal composition course, what material would you analyze?

NICOLE

I'd also like more fiction. Non-fiction has its merits, but I like figurative language so much. Purple prose is my guilty pleasure.

SCOTT

(Laughing)

I can tell by your writing.

NICOLE

Is it that bad?

SCOTT

It's a bit much, but I enjoy it. I wouldn't change a thing.

NICOLE

You're sure?

SCOTT

I'll cut you off once you get to four adjectives per noun.

NICOLE

(Laughing)

I can't be stopped.

SCOTT

So you're thinking more Hemmingway? Shakespeare?

NICOLE

Not Shakespeare. There's nothing of his to analyze that hasn't already been picked apart.

SCOTT

That's true. And there are already whole classes devoted to him.

NICOLE

I wish there was something completely original. Something that hasn't been touched yet.

SCOTT

People are writing new works every / day-

NICOLE

Not the way they used to. Excuse me. I didn't mean to interrupt / you-

SCOTT

Oh, no, that's alright. I agree with you.

(Pause.)

NICOLE

I've been thinking about what you said earlier about teaching. And, of course, I've been talking to Andrew / a lot-

SCOTT

Be careful with him. He might know what's best for himself, but I wouldn't take his advice.

NICOLE

I know. He's a mess. But he's had me rethinking what I want to do after graduation.

SCOTT

And what are you thinking?

NICOLE

Maybe I should take a few years off.

SCOTT

When I said that it's okay to take the easy way out, I / didn't-

NICOLE

I know what you meant. But I think it might be good for me to stop trucking forward for a while.

(Pause.)

SCOTT

Would that make you happy?

NICOLE

Not at all. (Beat) I'm afraid that if I keep going at this pace, I'll trip up and fail.

SCOTT

Everyone is afraid of / failing-

NICOLE

It's like there are two opposing forces in my head, and I don't know which one is stronger. (Beat.) I'm sorry. I shouldn't be / talking about this-

SCOTT

It's okay. What are the two forces?

NICOLE

(After a moment's hesitation)

One wants security, and the other wants to prove a point. But to prove that point, I risk security. (Beat.) I'm sorry. That's very / vague-

SCOTT

I think I understand. There's an easy route, and there's a more satisfying route. But the satisfying route holds more risks.

NICOLE

Exactly.

SCOTT

That is a difficult decision. Very Robert Frost.

NICOLE

I've never liked that poem.

SCOTT

Oh?

NICOLE

He only gets to make the choice once. And that one choice "made all the difference."

SCOTT

Do you think there's a third road? One that goes down the middle of the first two.

NICOLE

(Thoughtfully)

It's possible.

SCOTT

I wish I could help you more, / Nicole-

NICOLE

Oh, no. That isn't your job. I shouldn't be wasting your time with my stupid dilemmas.

SCOTT

I wish I had more stupid dilemmas. I do believe I've reached a point in my life where two roads will never diverge.

NICOLE

Maybe you can't wait for the road to diverge. Maybe you need to diverge from it.

(Pause.)

SCOTT

Would you like to read something I've written?

NICOLE

(Beat)

I'd be interested.

SCOTT

I'll have to write it first.

(NICOLE laughs.)

NICOLE

It's getting late. I have a lot to think about. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me, Professor. I appreciate it.

(NICOLE stands and begins to leave.)

SCOTT

Of course.

(SCOTT notices NICOLE's bag still hanging on the back of her chair. He stands and picks it up.)

Nicole. Your bookbag.

(NICOLE turns back, smiling at her forgetfulness. As he hands her the bag, SCOTT leans in and kisses her on the lips. Both stand still for a moment before NICOLE shoulders her bag and leaves.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT I)