

PERILOUS NIGHT

A play in one breath

by Lee Blessing

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“. . . all the laws of Washington and all the bayonets
of the Army cannot force the Negro into our homes,
our schools, our churches and our places of amusement.”

--Strom Thurmond

(Campaign speech, 1948)

CHARACTERS

H.R.H. ELIZABETH III older woman, white

HARRIET younger woman, black

SAMUEL attendant, also young, white

CARVER middle-aging man, white

PLACE

The Royal Quarters of Elizabeth III

(i.e., a room in a private mental-health facility)

TIME

Eternity— which is to say, the present

ACT ONE

(Night. A private room in an institution with bare, white walls. A pair of 19th-Century parlor chairs. One or two other small bits of furniture, including a plain, institutional bed. By the light of a bridge lamp, ELIZABETH, in expensive-looking pajamas and robe, sits embroidering at a small, wooden, free-standing frame. Her needle is imaginary. There is embroidery in the frame, but her work—which is painstaking and elaborate—is mimed. Upstage is a door with a small window in it, through which the hall is visible. Stage left is a door to a private bathroom)

(Sudden sound of the door to the hall being unlocked. HARRIET enters, out of breath. She's in a nightgown but wears a hat and coat over it. She has an impulse to leave when she sees ELIZABETH but stops herself. ELIZABETH takes no notice of her)

HARRIET

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
(no response)

I'll leave.

(HARRIET doesn't move. Has ELIZABETH even noticed her?)

HARRIET (cont'd)

Is it all right if I stay? I'll be quiet. I'm really good at that. When I was a little girl I didn't speak for almost a year. I did start talking again, but no one knows why. Some years I talk, some years I don't. This is one of my talking years. Can you hear? Am I bothering you? I can be quiet if you want.

(going to the door, staring out the little window into the hallway)

HARRIET (cont'd)

Lately I've been wandering around the halls late at night, exploring different parts of the building—whole wings sometimes. Bright new lands, full of strange and interesting people. You seem interesting. At least what I know about you so far.

(Sounds of footsteps in the hall. HARRIET drops to the floor and presses herself against the bottom of the door. SAMUEL rushes by outside. ELIZABETH embroiders)

HARRIET (cont'd)

One night, I met a man—way, way out in one of the wings—far from where they have me. This man was much, much older than me—or even you.

(ELIZABETH stops her work for a moment, then goes back to her embroidery)

HARRIET (cont'd)

Little white hairs were sprouting on him. He was a black man, and frail—and almost totally bald too, except for these little, straggly hairs. They came out his ears and upper arms and cheeks and even his eyelids. Have you ever seen that? Someone so old their hairs just show up any old place? Am I talking too much? I don't mean to be. I can leave.

(no response)

I forget where he was. It was a wing off another wing. He was blind. That old man? The one with the hairy eyes? He thought I was his daughter Verna—called me by her name and everything. I even pretended I was Verna. Turned out she'd been dead for forty years, so I just hid him in on what she'd been doing since the funeral. I told him she—or I said "I"—said I'd mostly been at Disneyland, but that I made sure to improve myself and travel a lot too. And the travel was free of course, since I was dead. I saw the Taj Mahal, that big Buddha in Japan and the Great Rift Valley in Africa. He loved it so much. I was his only visitor. Everyone he knew was dead—he was so old, see. To make him feel better I started playing his wife and his great-grandson and his old boss and he *really* loved that, and we went on and on that way right through the night.

(after a beat)

HARRIET (cont'd)

At the end I went back to being Verna again, 'cause she was the one he loved most. I told him how much I thought about him when I was on the Great Wall of China or riding Space Mountain. Then I kissed him on the forehead and said goodnight. Then he laughed a wheezy kind of laugh and said, "There ain't no Verna. I ain't never had no daughter in my life". Then he laughed *real* hard, and then he died.

(after a beat, suddenly realizing)

Sometimes I think I just dreamed him. Or all these drugs they put me on, maybe I just— But no, I *do* know he was real, 'cause Samuel didn't want me to take his keys that time and said if Mr. Carver found me instead, he would've . . . And he would have, too. Mr. Carver is . . . Anyhow, Samuel took me back, and when I woke up my roommate Annabeth was right there in her bed, and everything was normal. I don't have to talk if you don't want me to.

(No response. ELIZABETH embroiders.

HARRIET goes to the window and looks out)

HARRIET (cont'd)

You know Samuel? He's my boyfriend. He works here.

(no response)

I make him let me into other parts of the building. He'll let me go like that all night sometimes, slipping down the hall, making new friends. I love exploring. There's a whole world outside my door. I just have to embrace it—feel it beat against my heart. You ever leave this room? Don't suppose Samuel lets you go wandering. You'd like my roommate Annabeth. She argues with me every day about the world. About how it works, I mean. For example, she thinks God put evil in the world.

(ELIZABETH stops embroidering again,
without looking up. HARRIET stays silent
until the work resumes)

HARRIET (cont'd)

Can you imagine anything as wicked as a God who would put evil in the world? Right from the start? So no one ever had a chance? Wouldn't that make God puny somehow, playing a dumb trick like that on us? I admit

HARRIET (cont'd)

there's evil in the world, but it's more like it creeps in from time to time, like rust or weeds. It wasn't there at the get-go. Annabeth, though—she keeps blabbing about some snake in a garden, and I say, "Do you *have* a snake skin? Do you have a single rib from this serpent of evil?" 'Course she doesn't. She doesn't even have a map of Eden.

(looking out the window again)

People don't begin evil. They just do bad things, and it kinda mounts up. Annabeth got into trouble tonight. That's why I went running off. She has no sense of history. I have to teach her history over and over, day after day. Worst student I've ever had. That's what I do, you know. I'm a teacher.

ELIZABETH

(without looking up)

A teacher?

HARRIET

Yes. I teach history. History's the study of whence we've come. It's how we look back from our current heights down the long, glittering staircase of human achievement. 'Course Annabeth says history's just some rocky path we pull our sledges over while we bear our children in pain and bury the endless dead.

ELIZABETH

(as before)

Like the hallway.

HARRIET

Yes! You'd be a good student; you understand metaphor. I'm so happy we're talking now.

ELIZABETH

We are not talking. We are merely thinking aloud.

HARRIET

But you're saying things to me.

ELIZABETH

We often say things when we are not having a conversation. This is our prerogative. Our thoughts may be voiced at any time.

(HARRIET suddenly shifts the free chair closer to ELIZABETH and sits)

HARRIET

My name is Harriet. What's your name?

(ELIZABETH looks up for the first time, astonished at this breach of etiquette. HARRIET returns the chair to its original position)

HARRIET (cont'd)

Sorry. Like I said, my name is—

ELIZABETH

Who are you?

HARRIET

Harriet. I just said.

ELIZABETH

How did you get in here?

HARRIET

I've been here awhile. I've been talking to you.

ELIZABETH

Really?

(returning to work)

We are surprised.

HARRIET

Why do you say, "We are surprised"? I'm not surprised.

ELIZABETH

(not looking up)

A monarch uses the plural to acknowledge that all the subjects of her realm reside in her. We speak for millions. When we draw breath, so do you.

HARRIET

You're a queen?

ELIZABETH

We are not certain how to proceed. Someone has been ushered into our presence, but where is the usher? Who can make the proper introduction?

HARRIET

I just introduced myself.

ELIZABETH

(without looking up, to herself)

One cannot introduce oneself. One is brought into a room just as one is brought into life. There must be an usher. Who is the usher?

HARRIET

What about Samuel?

ELIZABETH

Samuel!

HARRIET

Yeah, Samuel.

ELIZABETH

At last, a point of contact. Samuel is a member of our emergency retinue. That he has brought you is satisfactory.

HARRIET

He didn't bring me, exactly—

ELIZABETH

You are under his sponsorship. It suffices.

(staring straight at her)

So, then. For what do you sue?

HARRIET

Pardon?

ELIZABETH

Your suit. What is your request of us?

HARRIET

Oh—! No request. I just want to visit a for a spell—

ELIZABETH

(finding the term distasteful)

A “spell”?

HARRIET

That’s what my Mama used to—

ELIZABETH

Silence!

(after a beat, congenially again)

Of course you have a request. In appearing before omnipotence, no other motivation is possible. You have a plea, a plight. Have you been deprived of one of your freedoms under the Crown, disadvantaged by royal decree—?

HARRIET

No—

(ELIZABETH returns to her work)

ELIZABETH

Good. We endeavor to be just. Have you a complaint against one of our subjects?

HARRIET

No— All I want is, you know, to . . . remain.

ELIZABETH

Remain?

HARRIET

Here. With you . . . for awhile.

ELIZABETH

You wish to be granted an audience for this ill-defined purpose, to last an indeterminate, possibly infinite, amount of time?

HARRIET

Would that be all right?

ELIZABETH

The door is directly behind you.

HARRIET

Pardon?

ELIZABETH

Leave us!

HARRIET

(falling to the floor)

I have a suit!

ELIZABETH

At last. Against whom?

HARRIET

Against Samuel.

ELIZABETH

Our retainer?

HARRIET

I . . . guess. Are you some kind of queen?

ELIZABETH

We are your queen. Elizabeth Regina, the third of that name. You may curtsy. Now.

(as HARRIET awkwardly does so)

Samuel is both loyal and deferent. He fears even to enter our royal quarters. A charge against him would be a serious matter. Still, we shall endeavor to be fair. What is your charge?

HARRIET

He's trying to kidnap me.

ELIZABETH

(laughing)

Samuel? Impossible.

HARRIET

Why?

ELIZABETH

Kidnapping requires denial of personal freedom. It is Samuel's job to deny your freedom. The suit is rejected.

(ELIZABETH returns to work. A beat)

HARRIET

Elizabeth? Excuse me, Elizabeth?

(no response)

Oh—I'm sorry. Your Highness?

(no response)

Your . . . Royal . . . Highness?

ELIZABETH

Yes?

HARRIET

Did you say you're Elizabeth the Third? 'Cause I teach history, and I'm pretty sure there were only two Elizabeths. Unless it's not England you're queen of.

ELIZABETH

Where else?

HARRIET

It's just that . . . you don't even sound that English, really.

ELIZABETH

We have never been to England. It is an abiding regret.

HARRIET

But if you're not English, how can you—?

ELIZABETH

George I was German, James I was a Scot and William of Orange was . . . of Orange. If you'd like a list of our Danish kings—

HARRIET

But how can you be Elizabeth III if there never was one?

ELIZABETH

Precisely.

HARRIET

Pardon?

ELIZABETH

Of course there never has been an Elizabeth III. Our reign is in the future. Two hundred fifty-seven years in the future, to be precise.

HARRIET

Oh.

ELIZABETH

It all makes sense now, doesn't it? Very simple when it's explained.

HARRIET

I guess . . .

ELIZABETH

I'm sure it's a great relief. Now we must require your immediate absence.

(She embroiders. HARRIET reluctantly moves to the door and looks out. Anxiety overcomes her again, and she can't leave)

HARRIET

I'm not safe out there.

ELIZABETH

That is nothing to us. We must be alone now. Off you go. Say hello to our other subjects.

HARRIET

We're not your subjects.

ELIZABETH

We beg your pardon?

HARRIET

You're Queen of England. This is America.

ELIZABETH

In our time there is no royal house but ours. The rest were all wiped out. Therefore, we rule both in England and America. And everywhere else, for that matter.

HARRIET

Wiped out? What happened?

ELIZABETH

If you think we're prepared to give you a chronicle of the next quarter millennium—

HARRIET

Oh, would you? I'd love that!

(quickly sitting cross-legged on the floor)

HARRIET (cont'd)

Please, start anywhere.

ELIZABETH

It's very late.

HARRIET

I don't sleep. How did you get to our time? From the future, I mean. You have a time machine?

ELIZABETH

You're very quaint. A time machine is an impossibility.

HARRIET

Then how'd you—?

ELIZABETH

We are in an advanced dream state, completely unachievable in your time. We are projected here. What you see before you is not, strictly speaking, our person.

HARRIET

So you're just—?

ELIZABETH

A projection, yes.

(as HARRIET pinches her arm)

Oww!! What on earth are you doing?! How dare you lay hands on—!?

HARRIET

I was just trying to—

ELIZABETH

You shall be punished. I shall call Samuel.

HARRIET

(suddenly very fearful)

Don't call Samuel! I won't touch you again, I promise! I'll sit way over here. I'm way over here. I'll just sit and listen, ok? Don't call Samuel.

ELIZABETH

I shall be black and blue.

HARRIET

I didn't know you were real. You said you weren't.

ELIZABETH

My projection is completely corporeal. It's beyond your understanding. I should never have let you in here.

HARRIET

I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH

The people of my time are far more civilized than you — and *infinitely* better mannered.

HARRIET

You're not saying "we".

ELIZABETH

What?

HARRIET

You're not saying "we" anymore. How come?

ELIZABETH

There are times we find it prudent to blend in.

(with a sigh, putting aside her work)

Very well. We take pity on you and pardon you, as is our duty as a superior

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

entity from the future. You beseech us to expand upon the subject of our coming among you. While we have told the story before, it has had a way of falling on deaf ears. Perhaps you will be a more receptive auditor of our tale.

HARRIET

How does a person dream themselves to another time?

ELIZABETH

They wish to. Deeply. And of course certain powerful drugs are involved.

HARRIET

What kind?

ELIZABETH

They haven't been invented yet. They are new even to our time. We are the first human ever to try them.

HARRIET

I don't believe it. They'd never let the Queen go first. They'd have sent some janitor, or orphan, or —

ELIZABETH

We commanded it so! We have absolute power in the future.

HARRIET

But how can I pinch you if you're not really —?

ELIZABETH

We are *projected*. Are you suggesting your sovereign would lie?

HARRIET

I'm only —

ELIZABETH

Go! Out of our sight!

HARRIET

What? No—

ELIZABETH

This audience is ended. You are banished to the outer chaos.

HARRIET

I'm sorry. I do believe you. I do—

ELIZABETH

Out!

HARRIET

I believe you about the dreams. You are dreaming. I can feel you, but you're not really—

ELIZABETH

Do not *touch!*

(A door slams somewhere down the hall.
HARRIET scurries to the base of the door.
SAMUEL's face appears in the window. He
stares at ELIZABETH, who's embroidering.
He disappears; HARRIET scurries back)

ELIZABETH

You accept that we are dreaming?

HARRIET

Yes.

ELIZABETH

You accept that we are under the influence of tremendously effective drugs?

HARRIET

Yes. Yes, I do.

ELIZABETH

And do you accept that the day will come when we—meaning we, not you—will awake refreshed, in a time far from this, in a world of peace and plenty, where there is no pain?

HARRIET

Yes, I truly believe that.

ELIZABETH

Very well, you may stay.

HARRIET

Oh, *thank* you—!

(almost touching her, censoring herself)

So, why did you come back to . . . our time?

ELIZABETH

For one, simple reason. We have no history.

HARRIET

No history?

ELIZABETH

None. No knowledge whatsoever of what has gone before.

HARRIET

I don't understand. You have to know where you came from.

ELIZABETH

We presume some endless pageant of civilization has preceded us, but all connection to the past has been erased—*poof!*

HARRIET

By who?

ELIZABETH

By us, of course.

HARRIET

But . . . How? Why?

ELIZABETH

Between your time and ours, two great trends dominate. The first is natural disaster. Over-industrialization begets climate change, and natural disaster becomes a way of life. Storms abound, oceans rise. Cities drown, others desiccate. Temperatures soar, whole seas dry up. Pestilence claims millions. Governments fall—literally, some of them, into yawning gulfs gnawed away by rising waters. Droughts and floods intensify, famine abounds. Countries dry up and blow away. Bodies rot in plain sight. Still, it's not enough. Cullings of excess population take place over the course of a century.

HARRIET

(horrified)

That's . . . That's . . . How many people—?

ELIZABETH

Die? Oh, everyone. Not *everyone*. Nearly everyone. Ninety-nine percent.

HARRIET

Of the whole *world*? That's . . . horrible!

ELIZABETH

It was predicted often enough. Even in your time.

HARRIET

How do you know this? You said you didn't know history.

ELIZABETH

This little we have acquired in our methodical journey back to you. Your time is as far as our memory now reaches.

HARRIET

What was the second trend? You said there were two. Natural disaster and—

ELIZABETH

Oh—efficiency. Humans become far more efficient, particularly at making difficult choices. There is a great rise in logic. People master the ability to think solely in black and white. Take the issue of information. The rate of new information has sped up drastically, even in your lifetime. It's doubling—what?—every twenty years now?

HARRIET

So?

ELIZABETH

Soon it's every five years, then two, then every year, every half a year, every month, etc., etc. . . . Who can preserve so much information, let alone absorb it? Fortunately, human powers of logic found a solution: The Great Dump-Off.

HARRIET

The Great . . . ?

ELIZABETH

A massive purging of all obsolete history, along with other forms of no-longer-necessary knowledge. Only four things were kept—science, technology, medicine and warfare.

HARRIET

That's not possible.

ELIZABETH

Science and technology were retained to engage the rigors of nature's upheaval; medicine and warfare to eliminate one's fellow man. The rest was useless. What good are religion, art, social philosophy, if all one does is kill people?

HARRIET

My God!

ELIZABETH

Don't worry, the wars of annihilation don't begin for a century. They're over when I ascend the throne. Fewer natural resources require fewer mouths. Black and white, my dear—black and white.

HARRIET

How are they—?

ELIZABETH

Killed? Macabre question. Once the pattern of catastrophe is fully perceived, the ruling elite consolidate control over what's left of the world's assets. They destroy in a single day all the cities they do not plan to use. They fire off the standard array of missiles: some nuclear, but mostly biological and chemical—as well as various new show-offy rays, aerosol toxins, etc.

HARRIET

I can't believe it.

ELIZABETH

Radioactivity does yeoman work. Later, to mop up stragglers, watercourses are poisoned throughout much of the world. The entire operation is hailed as a triumph of logic: the survival of a favored few versus . . . no survival at all. There is a brief period of self-congratulation, but eventually it's replaced by a deep and unshakeable sense of shame, since those who survive were the authors of the planet's destruction in the first place. If only someone had killed them, eh? The ones who ruled the world, chasing a profit at any price.

HARRIET

Sounds like the end of the world.

ELIZABETH

A prudent retrenchment, nothing more. And naturally there is the Great Benefit.

HARRIET

Benefit?

ELIZABETH

Having led the world into such a disastrous era of cataclysm, men—for the first time in history, we presume—choose to relinquish all control of the world to women. In our time, no man holds any position of responsibility, except of course the *castrati*.

HARRIET

The—?

ELIZABETH

Castrati. Snip, snip—good as new? If they cut off their balls, they're given responsibility. If not . . .

HARRIET

That's inhuman!

ELIZABETH

It's completely voluntary. Most men can't wait to do it. Their sense of failure is so overwhelming, you see. It's a chance to make amends.

HARRIET

But cutting off . . . Don't you have chemicals or—?

ELIZABETH

Excision is the method of choice. Rewards are far greater for the "permanents", as we call them.

(with a smile)

And that, my dear, is the future history of the world. As you can imagine, things are far calmer in our time. *So* much more gets done.

HARRIET

(as ELIZABETH goes back to her work)

How do you know about all the old kings and queens of England? If you've only gone back this far, I mean.

ELIZABETH

Very perceptive. Our Ministry of Memory Relief was just about to destroy those accounts. But since they touched on the origins of our reign, it was

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

decided to retrieve them from the informational "bonfire". Everything else is gone: price of bread, fashions of the time, whatever quaint names you give your children. Of course we may unwittingly be giving our children the very same names.

HARRIET

You have children?

ELIZABETH

Just one. The Crown Prince.

HARRIET

What's his name?

ELIZABETH

This was carefully considered. As a male, he was at a disadvantage, so it had to be impressive, regal. His name is Chumnutz.

HARRIET

Chumnutz?

ELIZABETH

Lovely, isn't it? And such a beautiful child. A young man now! Nearly twenty. Chumnutz, Prince of Wales. And Asia. Once he's had his testicles removed, he'll be ready to succeed us. It makes a mother proud.

(with a bracing sigh)

We are now expected to feign interest in your family. Have you children?

HARRIET

Those drugs you use.

ELIZABETH

Yes?

HARRIET

May I have some?

ELIZABETH

Of course not.

HARRIET

Please?

ELIZABETH

You are not of royal blood. The drugs would kill you.

HARRIET

I'll take that chance. I've got to get out of here—

ELIZABETH

Impossible.

HARRIET

Why?!

ELIZABETH

The drugs are not here. They were administered in the future. When their effect wears off, we shall simply reawaken in our proper time.

(Sound of footsteps. HARRIET scoots instantly into the bathroom and closes the door. SAMUEL's face again appears in the window. He stares at ELIZABETH. She looks up, smiles and gives a small, royal wave. He looks away, fearful. He notices the bathroom door is now closed, hesitates, then disappears. After a few moments, HARRIET creeps back out)

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Why do you want our drugs? Where do you wish to go?

HARRIET

The past.

ELIZABETH

Hopeless. You are quite effectively marooned in the present.

HARRIET

The past was beautiful.

ELIZABETH

Really? I look forward to seeing it.

HARRIET

You should. It was exquisite! Like paradise—indescribable. Of course, things have fallen off since then.

ELIZABETH

Fallen off?

HARRIET

See, that's why I want to go! I want to get back there, back where everything was peaceful, and nobody chased anybody down, and nobody—

ELIZABETH

A peaceful world. We had thought ours was the first.

HARRIET

Oh, no. The world was always peaceful—right up until my life. The world was wondrous—constantly unfolding like a gorgeous flower. In Europe it was a rose, in Asia it was a lotus and in Africa—oh, in Africa it was an orchid. The loveliest orchid ever. Gleaming white. Glowing in the deepest dark. Along a mystical stream, from which all the waters of healing sprang to purify the entire world.

ELIZABETH

What an extraordinary arrangement.

HARRIET

Did you know Africa was the only disease-free continent in the world? For millions and millions of years.

ELIZABETH

Really?

HARRIET

I don't lie. Africa was the healthiest place on Earth. People came from all over the world to lie in the healing sun and drink from the life-preserving rivers. The whole of North Africa was a limitless garden—with *no snakes*.

ELIZABETH

How interesting. It's a desert in our time; though what isn't?

HARRIET

The year I was born, they rediscovered the stream—the one with the orchid. And they dammed it up.

ELIZABETH

Whatever for?

HARRIET

I think people were too happy. They started to feel a whole new kind of terror inside, and they just had to do something. So they did, right before I was born.

ELIZABETH

Apparently you have been the victim of poor timing. Timing is everything in life. Take our case. The moment we arrived and explained our purpose, rough hands were clapped upon us. We were brought here, interrupting our intended investigations.

(confidentially)

We suspect it's the work of England's current royal house. Jealousy is not excluded as a motive.

HARRIET

People started in Africa, did you know that?

ELIZABETH

This comes as new and wonderful information.

HARRIET

They spread out all over the world from there. They walked. They walked for many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many years. And after all that time they were still black.

ELIZABETH

They were from Africa; what else would they be?

HARRIET

But then one day they said to themselves, "there should be more variety in the world". And they made themselves all the different colors that people are now: yellow and brown and red and white.

ELIZABETH

How?

HARRIET

They just did. They wanted to. Like you coming back in time. It's something you have to want to do.

ELIZABETH

Indeed.

HARRIET

Anyhow, some got shorter and some got hairier, and they changed their features some. Little things for the sake of change. Just like, you know, so they could have more kinds of food at the picnic. Nobody striped or polka-dotted. Just . . . pretty differences. Tasteful. Classic.

ELIZABETH

And people lived in peace? Different as they'd become?

HARRIET

Oh, yes. They created religions. Do you have religions?

ELIZABETH

Only one. We our self are the godhead. It's so much simpler.

HARRIET

They had many religions. But all of them had only one commandment: do no harm. And everyone followed the commandment, and no one did any harm. For many, many, many, many—

ELIZABETH

The use of repetition for emphasis is quite bracing.

HARRIET

Anyway, no matter how different human beings were from each other, they were always united by their commandment. They knew they would do no harm, and no harm would come to them. What are you making?

ELIZABETH

This? We are embroidering our royal device.

HARRIET

Device?

ELIZABETH

One of the symbols of our reign. A simple, random image perhaps, to one not from our era. But it's deeply ingrained in our subjects' collective imagination. It never fails to fill them with adoration and fear. That, we suppose, is why it's called a device.

HARRIET

May I look at it?

ELIZABETH

Certainly.

HARRIET

(doing so, looking surprised)

It's so . . . simple. Just a pair of . . .

ELIZABETH

Balls, yes. A human scrotum. Stylized, of course. Hairless, since that is the fashion of our time. How do you like it?

HARRIET

It's a very nice . . . scrotum.

ELIZABETH

Suspended in air. Floating impossibly on a golden field, with three tiny drops of blood beneath. Most difficult to find this shade of red.

HARRIET

What's the blood for?

ELIZABETH

Natural by-product of castration.

HARRIET

I like the . . . stitching.

ELIZABETH

We are an excellent embroiderer. You're perceptive. But we are perceptive as well. We note that you are dressed to go out.

HARRIET

Oh . . . yes.

ELIZABETH

Guests of this establishment are not customarily allowed to leave alone. That policy hasn't changed, has it?

HARRIET

No.

ELIZABETH

Deepening the mystery is the fact that you do not appear to be trying to leave. You seem more than willing to camp in our royal chamber throughout the night.

HARRIET

I don't have the right keys. I tried to get out with these, but I couldn't. Now I'm afraid that—

(Sound of a door slamming far down the hall.
HARRIET runs into the bathroom, closing the
door. ELIZABETH speaks to her in a loud voice)

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

You're operating in a closed system, my dear. If someone wishes to find you,
rest assured you shall be found.

(No response from the bathroom. Sound of
someone running in the hall, getting closer)

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

We may not be able to protect you. Our royal influence extends only so far.

(SAMUEL hits the door. He stares angrily
inside. ELIZABETH smiles at him. He
stares at her bathroom door. Sound of a
key working slowly in the lock. It's clear
that SAMUEL doesn't want to enter)

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

A visitor. We are receiving a visitor.

(as he opens the door cautiously a crack)

An emissary.

(as the door creeps open a little more)

Emissary from a land we can't possibly conceive.

(as the door opens wider still)

A powerful land. The Land of Keys.

SAMUEL

(still not entirely inside)

Quiet. I'm trying to listen.

ELIZABETH

We were merely endeavoring to—

SAMUEL

Shhhh!

(He suddenly slips into the room and glues his back to the wall, far from ELIZABETH. He keeps an eye on her at all times)

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Who's in the bathroom?

ELIZABETH

No one.

SAMUEL

You never shut that door unless you're in there.

ELIZABETH

You have stepped completely into our chamber.

SAMUEL

It's your *room*. Your room in a mental health facility. You're in an institution, a little one-room world. This is not your royal chamber. Why are you people so damn crazy?! Is she in there? Is she?

ELIZABETH

Whom can you possibly mean?

SAMUEL

Do not say "whom"! You're not the Queen of England. You are way, way not the Queen of England.

ELIZABETH

We are disappointed in your bedside manner.

SAMUEL

Yeah well, you're not grading me.

(a beat)

Is she in your bathroom? I'm gonna look.

ELIZABETH

Be our guest.

SAMUEL

She's in there. She has to be; I looked everywhere else.

(shouting at the bathroom door)

Harriet! Come on out!

ELIZABETH

You're having a busy evening.

SAMUEL

(to the bathroom door)

Harriet! I need Carver's keys. He needs 'em back!

ELIZABETH

Land of Keys . . .

SAMUEL

(to the door)

Please, honey. Please, don't do this. You'll get me in so much trouble.

ELIZABETH

(as he starts to turn the knob)

Carver went in there.

SAMUEL

(instantly releasing the knob)

That was a long time ago. You're better now, right?

ELIZABETH

Carver lost possession of his senses in that very room. Then he lost something else.

SAMUEL

Do you have a knife in here?

ELIZABETH

(brandishing her imaginary needle)

I have a needle.

SAMUEL

Yeah, right. If I tossed this room, would I find a blade?

ELIZABETH

These rooms aren't cells. One does not "toss" them.

SAMUEL

If it wasn't for your family, I swear—

ELIZABETH

Our family lives hundreds of years in the—

SAMUEL

Stop it! Stop that future shit! Your folks are all over this place. They give more money than God.

(to the door)

Harriet, I need those keys! We're on a schedule. We have *rounds*.

ELIZABETH

Shall we assist you?

SAMUEL

No!

ELIZABETH

Perhaps you should coax. Perhaps you should wheedle.

SAMUEL

(to the door)

Harriet, listen. I love you. We wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't for how much I . . . But you've got to help. This whole place is one big clock. Everything happens on time, or the wrong people get a heads-up, you know? We've only got so much time. We've got to stick with the plan. We had your coat on; we were all ready to . . .

(after a beat)

You're so pretty in that coat. It makes you look like you stepped right out of a magazine. Like you're a dream—like you're what beauty . . . dreams about, I don't know. Come out and let me see. Please, Harriet. For me?

(Soft SOUND of the bathroom door being unlocked. It opens and HARRIET enters. She gives SAMUEL the keys. He sighs audibly. ELIZABETH works calmly)

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Thank you. Thank you. We can still make this work if we—

HARRIET

How's Annabeth?

SAMUEL

She's fine.

HARRIET

Did she wake up?

SAMUEL

'Course she did.

HARRIET

Did you see her? Did you?

SAMUEL

How could I?! I was running after you!

HARRIET

So you don't know. She could be dead for all you—

SAMUEL

She's not dead. Carver wouldn't— He'll bring her along. He won't leave her. She'll wake up in a whole new world.

HARRIET

But if she's hurt—

SAMUEL

She's not! She's— Stop talking about Annabeth! We have things to do tonight. There's a *schedule*. Carver called his guys. They're gonna pick us up, but we have to be ready. They won't wait.

HARRIET

Carver's so mad . . .

SAMUEL

He'll calm down—he always does. Are you going to be part of this or not?

HARRIET

All right.

SAMUEL

All right what?

HARRIET

I'll go.

SAMUEL

You promise?

HARRIET

Yes.

SAMUEL

Great. Great.

(touching her gently)

We're gonna be fine, you hear me? Gonna be great.

(as she hesitates)

Come on.

HARRIET

Okay.

SAMUEL

Good. Soon we'll be where no one can touch us ever again. But first I have to do rounds. One last time. Kiss me.

(HARRIET lets him kiss her. It's a careful moment for each of them—more about duration than passion. ELIZABETH, still working, begins humming "Rule Britannia". SAMUEL breaks the kiss, giving ELIZABETH an irritated look)

SAMUEL (cont'd)

You okay now?

HARRIET

Yes.

SAMUEL

You're going to behave?

(She nods. He lets her go. HARRIET hesitates—then bolts for the door. He grabs her just as she opens it. The door swings wide)

HARRIET

Let me go—!

SAMUEL

No! *Damn it--!!*

HARRIET

Carver hurt Annabeth! He's going to hurt *me!!*

SAMUEL

He's trying to *help* you!!

HARRIET

Annabeth—!!

(As they struggle, ELIZABETH wanders out into the hall. She beams graciously while giving formal “royal waves” left and right to her imaginary subjects. She starts to wander back in when SAMUEL slams the door in her face while trying to control HARRIET)

SAMUEL

Stop this! *Stop it—!*

(finally getting control of her)

Don't make me leave you here. Carver's a great man. He was my sponsor in AA; he got me this job. Said I had potential. Said something great was gonna happen to me someday, and all I had to do was listen to him. He'll help you, too.

HARRIET

Annabeth—!

SAMUEL

She's gonna be ok!

HARRIET

You'd never hurt me, right? Like him and Annabeth? You'd never—?

SAMUEL

I love you! But you've got to trust me. You've got to stick with the plan. Right now I've got to finish my rounds. Soon as I'm done, we're all going— you, me, Carver and Annabeth.

HARRIET

She's all right?

SAMUEL

Carver wouldn't hurt her. Not real bad. Things will change the minute we're out of here. We're gonna disappear—all of us—to a place like Eden. Just have faith, okay?

(after a beat)

Now, I can't take you back to your room—

HARRIET

Why not?

SAMUEL

Carter said.

HARRIET

But Annabeth—

SAMUEL

He's taking care of her!

HARRIET

I need my bag.

SAMUEL

What? Oh, *shit!* I'll go get it. We'll put you in the conference room.

HARRIET

Let me stay here.

SAMUEL

With her? No way. The stuff she's done—

HARRIET

She's a queen. She won't hurt me. Please?

SAMUEL

Christ—!

(SAMUEL's walkie-talkie crackles to life.
We hear CARVER'S VOICE)

CARVER'S VOICE

Kid! Where are you?

SAMUEL

C-Wing. In the hall.

CARVER'S VOICE

You found her?

SAMUEL

Yeah.

CARVER'S VOICE

Where was she?

SAMUEL

In the conference room.

CARVER'S VOICE

Thank Christ. Lock her in there and bring me my fuckin' keys. Then you can finish your rounds. Move it!

SAMUEL

Right away.

(switching off the walkie-talkie)

All I want to do is love you.

(He opens the door. ELIZABETH, waiting patiently in the hall, enters with grace and good cheer, humming the final bars of "God Save The Queen")

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Harriet's staying here. You going to behave?

ELIZABETH

Are we being addressed?

SAMUEL

You're damn right you're—

(cutting himself short)

I'm sorry. I mean, your Majesty. Will you promise to behave if I leave her here?

ELIZABETH

We make no guarantees. However, as always we shall endeavor to uphold the right.

(He kisses HARRIET then hurries out, locking the door. ELIZABETH turns and speaks “publicly”)

ELIZABETH (cont’d)

We are exhilarated by the whirlwind of activity surrounding our recent tour of the hallway. Never have we enjoyed such a flood of love and devotion from our subjects. It does the royal heart good in these perilous times.

HARRIET

There’s no one out there.

ELIZABETH

There’s no one for you.

(returning to her embroidery)

So good to return to our private occupations.

(with a sudden look at HARRIET)

You may approach. We feel reinvigorated and take the extraordinary step of granting you a second audience.

HARRIET

Oh . . . Thank you.

ELIZABETH

We make a further break with tradition and grant you the right to use the chair you so impertinently moved earlier.

HARRIET

Thank you.

ELIZABETH

(as HARRIET sits in the other chair)

No, no. You may move it now. Closer.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
 (as HARRIET moves it a foot)

Closer.

(as HARRIET repeats the step)

Closer.

(as HARRIET hesitates, pointing to the
 spot right next to her own chair)

Here! Place it here! What has happened to nuance?

HARRIET

Thank you for letting me stay.

ELIZABETH

Once you're betrothed to a member of our retinue, you automatically become a part of our court.

HARRIET

Oh, well . . . I'm honored.

ELIZABETH

Still we feel obliged to caution you—you are about to marry an extremely weak man. Samuel has been with us only briefly, but his character flaws already shine forth with a daunting brilliance.

HARRIET

Oh, he's really not that—

ELIZABETH

Samuel is Carver's lackey, and Carver is a barbarous piratical operating on the margins of civilization. There's no hope for the lad who throws in with him.

HARRIET

We need Carver's help. We're in trouble if we stay here.

ELIZABETH

Trouble? Of what sort?

HARRIET

I'm going to have a baby.

(ELIZABETH stops working)

ELIZABETH

Pardon?

HARRIET

I'm going to have a baby. With Samuel, I mean.

ELIZABETH

Without permission?

HARRIET

Oh, the doctors would never—

ELIZABETH

No, no—*our* permission. Samuel presumes to propagate without royal approval?

HARRIET

Is that bad?

ELIZABETH

Unthinkable. He shall feel our wrath.

HARRIET

But . . . we're leaving tonight.

ELIZABETH

Leaving?

HARRIET

The doctors will take the baby away if we stay.

ELIZABETH

The evils of this time are manifold.

HARRIET

It didn't use to be this way—just since I was born. People used to be like angels, right up to the minute I was born. Mr. Lincoln was a wonderful angel. He freed the slaves.

ELIZABETH

And who was this Mr. Lincoln?

HARRIET

President of the United States for four years, three weeks and five days. 'Course the last day he was dying, so that hardly counted.

ELIZABETH

And how did Mr. Lincoln die?

HARRIET

He saw a terrible play and shot himself.

ELIZABETH

A fate all too common, even in our time. And freeing these "slaves"... Who were they, by the way?

HARRIET

Oh, black people. People like me. People from Africa. You see, Europeans explored all over, and they found raw materials and grew crops and traded everywhere, but they soon had a huge manpower shortage. So they went to Africa, and they asked the people there to be their slaves. The Europeans promised they could travel all over the world if they would just say yes. And the Africans did say yes, because they were the most agreeable people on Earth. But also—and I think this was so important—because they saw that without slavery the world economic model could not make sudden and enormous gains. So, for hundreds of years Africans were slaves all over the New World, and everybody worked together to create a loving and prosperous society.

ELIZABETH

We are puzzled. If slavery was so pleasant and useful, why did Mr. Lincoln discard it?

HARRIET

'Cause it was time for something even better. See, when the slaves were freed, they each got some land of their own, and a mule so they could plow, and they got rich and married all the white people's sons and daughters and had beautiful little children the color of sandy-brown beaches who all went to college and got elected to Congress, where they made kinder and kinder laws until no one could remember why they made laws at all, since there was no longer any crime.

ELIZABETH

Sounds lovely indeed. History is proving a most agreeable subject.

HARRIET

Oh, it is! 'Til I was born. Then everything changed. People suddenly started acting the exact opposite of how they'd been. Crimes were committed all over the place. It was as though there'd never been a treaty at all.

ELIZABETH

Treaty?

HARRIET

The Treaty of Civilized Man—where everybody agreed not to be savages anymore.

ELIZABETH

We know nothing of this.

HARRIET

It's thousands of years old. No one knows who wrote it, but it went all over the world, and everybody signed it. There was a copy in every home.

ELIZABETH

And then you were born.

HARRIET

Selfishness was born right alongside me. Lust, brutality, deceit . . . We were all laid out on my mother's breast. We sucked milk side by side. It's a wonder I didn't die of fright.

ELIZABETH

These crimes you speak of, have you witnessed them?

HARRIET

Oh, yes. My own father, for one. He was a preacher. He was always talking about not trusting white people. His sermons were so loud and angry. Once when I was six, I asked him—why are you so mad at white folks? He just said, “You’ll see. When you grow up, you’re gonna see.” That made me not want to grow up at all.

(after a beat)

Right around then, I made a mistake. One afternoon I ran over to the church from our house and . . . I knew I wasn’t supposed to go in his office. He had a strict rule. But I wanted to go to the store, and when I ran in to ask him . . . he was with a white girl. She grabbed her clothes and ran out. He was so mad . . . He grabbed me and shook me—and he hit me so hard. I was on the floor. He said, “That girl was not here. You never saw her.” And he grabbed me with both hands and picked me up and held me in the air and said, “And she was *not—white!*” And I was crying, but I said, “She was”. And then he slapped me . . . over and over. And he kept saying, “She wasn’t here, and she wasn’t white. She wasn’t here, and she wasn’t . . .” until I finally passed out. And that was the first time I didn’t speak for a whole year.

ELIZABETH

This story saddens us.

HARRIET

I got sent to live with relatives in a different town. Guess a preacher couldn’t have a crazy girl for a daughter. They tried their best for me. They had money. I saw a lots of doctors, but . . . it never helped. I’d just stop talking again for a year or two. Eventually I ended up in a place like this. Then another one, and . . . now I’m here.

ELIZABETH

Were you ever reunited with your father?

HARRIET

No.

ELIZABETH

What about your mother?

HARRIET

She died having me.

(after a beat)

I can't help it that the world changed when I was born. It just did. I try to keep away from it as much as I can and read about it instead. I use my special power.

ELIZABETH

Special power?

HARRIET

I can heal books.

ELIZABETH

Really?

HARRIET

Oh, yes. In my lifetime all the books were changed by the evil that came into the world with me. So there was nowhere to learn about the true past of humankind. I was so angry once, I closed my eyes and put my hands on the cover of a book and pressed *so hard*—and when I opened it again . . . Oh, my God—there it was: all the bright, beautiful, true history of the world. Right before my eyes.

ELIZABETH

How fortunate.

HARRIET

And that's how I learned history. Just pressing down hard on all the books before I read them. I read about all the ages of glory, and love and harmony, right up to the tragic exception of my life.

ELIZABETH

Remarkable.

HARRIET

I still read like that: hands on the book, eyes closed tight. A couple months ago, I even read how I can put the world back to the way it originally was.

ELIZABETH

And how will you do that?

HARRIET

My baby. When my baby's born, everything's going back the way it was. You see, because it's a miracle. After what happened to me, I didn't think I could ever touch a human being, white or black. But this baby won't be white or black. It'll be a whole new kind of thing.

(smiling)

Samuel and I did the test three times. When this baby is born, the world will rediscover its history. The sacred rivers will flow again, the flowers will grow, people will remember their commandment—and in each household the treaty will be rediscovered where it sat in plain sight, invisible, throughout my life. Isn't that nice?

ELIZABETH

Most inspiring. However, we do not recall any record of such a remarkable child in our studies of this era.

HARRIET

Of course there's a record. You haven't looked hard enough.

ELIZABETH

We are normally quite exhaustive. Be that as it may, we are delighted and look forward to your blessed event, even though Samuel has clearly plowed his field before receiving any right to tillage.

HARRIET

I'm sorry you can't punish him before we have to go.

ELIZABETH

Never fear. The royal will is not easily deterred.

HARRIET

Anyway, you should be careful of Mr. Carver. He went sort of crazy with Annabeth tonight.

ELIZABETH

In what way?

HARRIET

See, he got her pregnant—

ELIZABETH

Is there no end to this irresponsible procreation?

HARRIET

It's not irresponsible. It's all part of Carver's plan. Samuel and me are in love. We would've had our baby no matter what. But Carver—

ELIZABETH

What is the nature of this "plan"?

HARRIET

Carver wants mixed babies—that's what it is. Annabeth and I are the only two black girls here. You think that's why they put us together, even though she's bad at history?

ELIZABETH

We are appalled. Babies created right and left, with no effort whatever to obtain royal permission?

HARRIET

You don't have to worry about Annabeth's baby. She miscarried this morning. She was terrified to tell Carver, 'cause tonight's when his plan all comes together.

ELIZABETH

This is becoming a jumble—

HARRIET

Anyhow, Carver just tore into Annabeth when he found out. He yelled and screamed at her. Then he grabbed a pillow and started smothering her. Took a long time for Samuel to pull him off. When he did, she was unconscious. I was so scared. I grabbed Carver's keys and ran out.

ELIZABETH

Was Annabeth . . . ?

HARRIET

Yes?

ELIZABETH

Willing to become pregnant?

HARRIET

Not so much at first. But Carver kept telling her he could take her to a place like paradise.

ELIZABETH

A common enough inducement.

HARRIET

No—it's a real place. It's where we're going tonight.

ELIZABETH

So . . . she didn't fight him?

HARRIET

I'm not sure; he always locked me in the bathroom.

(after a beat)

I shouldn't be saying all this. I had to tell somebody, though. Can't keep it in anymore—not in a talking year. Annabeth says all she wants is to be dead anyway. Says that's the only time God's nice.

ELIZABETH

An optimist.

HARRIET

Sometimes, after Carver left, I'd put her head on my lap and let her cry. He was lots better to her after she got pregnant, but now . . .

ELIZABETH

This paradise, as you call it—where is it?

HARRIET

You should forget about that. I shouldn't have told you. I don't know if they'll bring Annabeth now. I'm so worried about her.

ELIZABETH

We hear this news with a heavy heart. We shall pray for our unfortunate subject.

HARRIET

Thanks. I'm sure she'll appreciate that.

(as ELIZABETH falls into a prayerful posture)

Oh. You're doing it now.

(HARRIET watches her pray silently, then grows fidgety)

HARRIET (cont'd)

Why don't you have a real needle?

ELIZABETH

Shh!!

HARRIET

Sorry.

(A moment passes. Finally ELIZABETH looks up, relieved)

ELIZABETH

Good news. Annabeth will soon know peace.

HARRIET

How do you know?

ELIZABETH

God told me.

HARRIET

Oh— That's . . . that's good news.

ELIZABETH

Indeed it is. You're welcome. So. You asked a question?

HARRIET

I did? Sorry, I forget what it was.

ELIZABETH

(moving to pray again)

No problem. We shall ask God.

HARRIET

I remember! You've got an imaginary needle. How can you work without a real one?

ELIZABETH

This was not always the case. When we were first placed into this bleak vale of privation we had an assortment of embroidery tools. They glinted in the sun. But, after a certain incident involving Mr. Carver, they were taken away. We now make do with what we have.

HARRIET

You don't have anything.

ELIZABETH

Which increases the challenge.

HARRIET

What kind of incident? With Mr. Carver, I mean?

ELIZABETH

He adopted an attitude. He felt we were receiving special treatment from a group of deluded citizens who claim to know us.

HARRIET

Your family, you mean?

ELIZABETH

Our family has yet to be born. These people are clearly fanatics. Celebrity camp followers, a self-appointed entourage. They are very generous, however.

HARRIET

What do they call themselves?

ELIZABETH

Oh . . . mother, father, cousin—that sort of thing. They visit occasionally, bearing various offerings. This robe, for example, was recently furnished to us by a delightful little insane child claiming to be our niece.

HARRIET

And Mr. Carver?

ELIZABETH

He was disturbed by our comforts. Said our embroidery tools were a risk to our self and others. Absurd. When he couldn't get anyone to act, he attempted to confiscate them personally. We expect by now Mr. Carver has fully recovered. Still, he accomplished his purpose: we were required to surrender all sharp objects. Even our tiny scissors.

HARRIET

I hope Mr. Carver will be happier in paradise. I know if Samuel's going, I have to go. Nothing matters as long as I have my baby and the world gets saved.

(at the sound of a key, rising)

Here he comes!

(The door opens. No one's there. HARRIET stares at it, surprised. ELIZABETH barely looks up)

ELIZABETH

We are receiving, Mr. Carver. You may come in.

(After a beat, CARVER carefully pokes his head in. He takes in HARRIET, then never lets his attention stray from ELIZABETH)

CARVER

(to HARRIET, but still looking at ELIZABETH)

You're not in the conference room. Where's Samuel?

HARRIET

On his rounds.

ELIZABETH

No need to linger in the doorway. We are, as you see, unarmed.

(CARVER enters cautiously. He pulls out his walkie-talkie and speaks into it)

CARVER

Kid.

(Sound of crackling, then SAMUEL'S VOICE on the walkie-talkie)

SAMUEL'S VOICE

Yeah?

CARVER

You about through?

SAMUEL'S VOICE

One more wing to go.

CARVER

Guess where I am.

SAMUEL'S VOICE

Where?

CARVER

Visiting the Queen of England.

(no response)

I'm here in England, Kid. Why'd you lie to me?

(no response)

Samuel?

(with a look at HARRIET)

You better hurry up. It's a big night.

(putting his walkie-talkie back on his belt)

Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

(continuing to work)

Mr. Carver.

CARVER

How's the embroidery?

ELIZABETH

Diverting as ever.

HARRIET

How's Annabeth? Is she all right?

CARVER

Let me worry about her.

HARRIET

But she's okay, right?

CARVER

She's fine. Shut *up!*

CARVER (cont'd)
(pointing toward HARRIET's chair)

Move that.

(as HARRIET moves her chair away
from ELIZABETH's)

Sit.

(as HARRIET sits, staring at ELIZABETH)

Nice robe.

ELIZABETH

We are complimented.

CARVER

Is it new?

ELIZABETH

Received yesterday. Gift from an admirer.

CARVER

They can afford a few gifts, can't they? Your "admirers". There wouldn't be any needles sewn in the lining, would there?

ELIZABETH

It was carefully examined. Still, you're free to inspect.

CARVER

Never mind.

(CARVER moves toward the bathroom
door. He peers in cautiously)

CARVER (cont'd)

Not good when you have needles. Is it, your Highness?

ELIZABETH

("embroidering" throughout the scene)

A matter of perspective.

CARVER

Or scissors. That's especially not good.

(to HARRIET)

Want to see what she did to me with scissors? Little pair of scissors?

ELIZABETH

No need to show off, Mr. Carver.

(CARVER undoes his belt, unzips his pants and pulls his underwear out away from his body with one hand. The other he puts down the front of his pants and manipulates himself so that HARRIET can see down there)

CARVER (cont'd)

Look.

(a beat)

Look!

(Slowly, fearfully, HARRIET looks. She gasps)

HARRIET

What is that—? Is that a—?

CARVER

Like that? You like how that scar looks?

HARRIET

I don't like how any of that looks.

CARVER

(zipping up, nodding at the bathroom)

Happened right in there. While I was unconscious.

ELIZABETH

You are responsible for your own state of consciousness, Mr. Carver.

CARVER

(zipping up)

Not while I'm being attacked!

ELIZABETH

(to HARRIET)

He was trying to convince us to relinquish our embroidery tools by holding our head under water—for quite a long time.

CARVER

Not long enough.

ELIZABETH

Intimidation's his chief form of therapy. He was enjoying our session until he slipped in some water on the floor.

CARVER

You fuckin' witch.

ELIZABETH

As he lay unconscious, it occurred to us that the very embroidery tools he sought to confiscate were the means to an immediate and quite proportional act of justice.

CARVER

You're not human.

ELIZABETH

It's true we are projected from the—

CARVER

Shut the fuck up!

ELIZABETH

(to HARRIET)

Alas, with a larger scissors the castration would have been complete by the time we were interrupted.

CARVER

I've still got one. It's all I need. Proved that with Annabeth.

ELIZABETH

We hear you've recently suffered a setback there.

CARVER

What've you been telling her?!

HARRIET

Nothing! Just Annabeth's . . . Where is she?

CARVER

Where she belongs!

ELIZABETH

Your general disposition seems even worse than before. We are grateful you've avoided us. The better part of valor, we assume.

CARVER

(leaning close to ELIZABETH)

There's crazy, and there's just—fucking—nuts.

(Crackle of the walkie-talkie. CARVER
straightens up and answers it)

SAMUEL'S VOICE

Mr. Carver?

CARVER

Where are you?

SAMUEL'S VOICE

In D-Wing. I finished my rounds, but Mr. Ryan's up. He got out of his restraints.

CARVER

Christ!

SAMUEL'S VOICE

Are we leaving from there? 'Cause Harriet left her bag in her room.

CARVER

Damn it! Go get Annabeth and the bag. I'll restrain Mr. Ryan. I'll restrain the shit out of him.

SAMUEL'S VOICE

Where should I meet you?

CARVER

(looking out a window)

Right here in jolly old England. We can see 'em drive up from here.

(after a beat)

Well?!!

SAMUEL'S VOICE

Yeah. Okay. I'm going.

CARVER

Okay.

(putting away his walkie-talkie, starting out)

I'll be back in a minute.

ELIZABETH

Do you wish to take your leave?

CARVER

What?

ELIZABETH

You have not yet received our royal permission to depart. You must beg our forgiveness for this breach of etiquette.

CARVER

This ain't your fuckin' *court!!*

(with a look at HARRIET)

CARVER (cont'd)

Christ, I don't remember what a sane person looks like. Cleaning up the piss and blood and shit and emotional *drainage* of you people . . . Walking around at four in the morning, staring at the ones who don't sleep no matter what we pump into 'em. Watching 'em stare back at me—

(to ELIZABETH)

Like you, with those big, wide eyes, batting your lids once a minute. Who? Me? What did I do? You don't fool me. You'd tear the world apart if you ever got your hands on it.

HARRIET

She's not like that. She's—

CARVER

Shut *up!* One mess after another. Staff's crazier than the patients. And this is one of the *good* places. I gotta restrain Ryan.

(pulling a serious-looking knife)

Good thing I got the proper tools.

(holding it tight against ELIZABETH's cheek)

Or maybe I should start with you.

ELIZABETH

We are impressed by this lethal weapon. Still, as a projection from the—

CARVER

Shut up! You don't believe that. You play all this shit for a cushy life and the chance to cut up whatever men you can corner.

ELIZABETH

We assure you—

CARVER

Quiet! You never think of anyone but yourself. You've got no sense of a higher goal. I fought for this country. I ever tell you that?

ELIZABETH

We recall *braggadocio* to that effect.

CARVER

Used this knife to kill brown people all over the Middle East.

ELIZABETH

Your higher goal?

CARVER

Hell, no. They don't need us for that. They kill each other better'n we ever could. You know there's no white people over there? No white ones, no black ones—everybody's brown. *Everybody*. The one kind of war they do *not* have going on is a race war. Religious wars up the damn wazoo, but no race war. And I started talking about that to my sergeant, sitting up nights, getting high. I said in America, the only thing we fight about is race. It's got us by the throat. We oughta just get rid of it. My sergeant agreed, said what we should do is force people to have mixed babies, and someday we all come out the same. It's the key piece, he said. The higher goal.

ELIZABETH

He sounds like a man of the future.

CARVER

He's a visionary, like me. He joined a secret group, soon as he got back home: people who think like us. I didn't have the guts to join back then. You can only mix the races fast enough if you do it by force. Gotta break the law. So they're underground, see? Using all means necessary. They're light years off the grid. Tonight I'm finally gonna join. We all are.

ELIZABETH

How adventurous.

CARVER

I got in touch with my old sergeant—

ELIZABETH

How? If he's off the grid—

CARVER

We have our ways! Told him about Annabeth and the other two. He said him and his friends would “sweep down” —I remember his words exactly— sweep down and take me and the dark woman having my child and carry us somewhere deep underground, unknown and untouched by the world. We’re just the point of the spear, but someday our descendants will live in eternal peace. I’ll get Annabeth pregnant again. This is my moment; this is my time.

ELIZABETH

Allow us to wish you *bon voyage*, assuming you are truly going.

CARVER

You calling me a liar!?

HARRIET

(her hand on her belly)

We *will* change history, Samuel and me. I feel it!

CARVER

Damn straight we will. You think Christ cares how people look?

HARRIET

He doesn’t!

CARVER

Christ looked like shit, walking around in sandals, a crappy robe. He doesn’t give a fuck how people look; just wants ‘em to work hard and have brown babies.

HARRIET

That’s right!

CARVER

(to ELIZABETH, brandishing his knife)

You keep thinking about this.

(He suddenly exits, locking the door behind him)

HARRIET

You think Annabeth's really okay?

ELIZABETH

Shall we pray to God once more? It's really just talking to our self.

HARRIET

Not right now.

(a beat)

I try to tell her it's going to be better. She never believes me. I don't see how you can get through life if you don't know there was a golden age, and that evil's just for now. My daughter's going to blow away evil with her first breath.

ELIZABETH

You are having a girl?

HARRIET

I can feel it. She'll be the color of old newspapers. The kind they find in a house they're tearing down. Only her headlines will be: "Man Is Good". "Thank God We're Alive". "Come To The Party – You're All Invited".

ELIZABETH

Papers from before you were born?

HARRIET

The true ones. And it's not true you have no record of her. She's there. You haven't looked hard enough, that's all.

ELIZABETH

We are curious about this secret group mentioned by Mr. Carver. We have not heard of it before.

HARRIET

Samuel called it the Brotherhood of something. He won't talk about it.

(after a beat)

I seduced Samuel.

ELIZABETH

A bold revelation. Is it true?

HARRIET

Samuel's way too timid. But I needed a baby to come out. Everyone thinks the world will get back to rights automatically, but it won't. Each minute we don't fix it we're closer to a world we can't ever fix again.

ELIZABETH

Oh, we fear mankind is long past that point.

HARRIET

Samuel says you're not from the future at all. Says you're from a few miles from here. That you lived in a big house with a lot of money and when you were a teenager you had a black baby.

ELIZABETH

(stopping work)

This is a myth.

HARRIET

And your family made you get rid of it. And they made the father go in the army somehow, where he died in some kind of training accident?

ELIZABETH

Complete fantasy.

HARRIET

Samuel said they made you get rid of it 'cause it was black — which I don't believe, but he says it's true. I'm thinking you must be from the future, 'cause his whole story about the baby doesn't make any sense at all.

ELIZABETH

(starting to work again)

You show great insight.

HARRIET

Samuel says crazy things. Said you declined for years and years and went crazy out of guilt—you know, over that baby--and finally you ended up here. On the bright side though, he says your family gave this place tons of money and brought you nice things and never let anyone bother you at all.

ELIZABETH

(quietly, but showing strain)

You seem to have spoken of me a great deal.

HARRIET

You didn't say "we" again. We only talked about you 'cause he told me what you did to Carver.

ELIZABETH

Samuel can be . . . unreliable.

HARRIET

Oh, I know. 'Cause some of what he said would have happened before I was born, and people weren't like that back then. People wanted to have babies. They loved everything that lived.

ELIZABETH

Yes.

(Sound of a key in the door. SAMUEL rushes in with HARRIET's bag)

SAMUEL

She's dead!

HARRIET

What?

SAMUEL

Annabeth. She hung herself!

HARRIET

Oh, my--!! How? How could she—?

SAMUEL

I don't know! The belt from her robe was around her neck, attached to a doorknob. She was sitting there, in front of her closet.

ELIZABETH

Were her hands free?

SAMUEL

What? Yeah. Why?

HARRIET

Was there a note?

SAMUEL

Yeah—in her lap. Said, "Going somewhere better".

ELIZABETH

A true optimist.

(He hands HARRIET her bag)

SAMUEL

We gotta go now. When they find her—

ELIZABETH

Have you informed Mr. Carver?

SAMUEL

What? Yeah. He's going to take a look, then he's coming here.

ELIZABETH

We suspect his mood will have darkened.

HARRIET

Poor Annabeth.

HARRIET (cont'd)

(to SAMUEL)

Why do we have to go with Carver? Why can't we run off right now, the two of us?

SAMUEL

We can't. They'd find us in a minute.

HARRIET

You'd think of something—

SAMUEL

No, I wouldn't. I need Carver. He's my boss. I'm loyal to him.

HARRIET

Why?

ELIZABETH

We presume it has something to do with this Brotherhood of yours.

SAMUEL

He talked about that? No one talks about that.

HARRIET

You did. You called it the Brotherhood.

SAMUEL

Shut up!

ELIZABETH

Is that the full name of the organization? The Brotherhood?

SAMUEL

We don't use its full name. Not since he first told me.

HARRIET

You told me. Remember? Lying in the dark. You said you wanted to tell me everything about you, and you called it the Brotherhood of the—

SAMUEL

Shut up!

HARRIET

Perilous Night. The Brotherhood of the Perilous Night. That's what you said. You said it would save all of us: Carver and you and me and Annabeth. And now Annabeth's—

(SAMUEL slaps HARRIET, who looks at him, stunned)

ELIZABETH

What a lovely designation. What's it from?

SAMUEL

The national anthem.

ELIZABETH

Quite poetic.

SAMUEL

No one knows the Brotherhood's full name. That's why no one can find 'em.

ELIZABETH

We would love to know more of this Brotherhood's workings.

HARRIET

Samuel said they build it one man at a time.

SAMUEL

Stop talking!

HARRIET

No!

(to ELIZABETH)

Strangers meet, like in a bar or something, and one tells the other about it—

SAMUEL

Quiet!

HARRIET

And it goes on and on like that.

SAMUEL

Carver'll kill you.

HARRIET

No, he'll kill you, 'cause you told me.

ELIZABETH

Where are you all going?

SAMUEL

We don't know. Not even Carver.

HARRIET

But we'll be safe, right?

SAMUEL

'Course.

HARRIET

'Cause that's what I need. A safe place for my baby.

(CARVER kicks open the unlocked door.
SAMUEL and HARRIET stare at him.
ELIZABETH continues her work)

CARVER

That bitch.

SAMUEL

I'm sorry, Mr. Carver. If I'd known—

CARVER

Did she tell you she was going to do that?!

HARRIET

No! No! Never!

CARVER

(to ELIZABETH)

You must think this is funny.

ELIZABETH

On the contrary. Your poor seed. Where will it grow?

CARVER

They'll be here any minute. What in hell am I supposed to do? I won't have Annabeth. I told 'em I had her.

SAMUEL

We still have Harriet.

HARRIET

They'll understand.

CARVER

Understand what?! I told 'em I had somebody.

SAMUEL

They probably got tons of women there.

HARRIET

Lots of 'em.

CARVER

You don't know a thing about 'em.

ELIZABETH

You keep speaking of "they". Who do you—?

CARVER

Keep out of this!

ELIZABETH

We were simply curious . . .

(A horn honks. CARVER looks out a window)

CARVER

That's them. Shit, that's them!

(CARVER quickly flashes his flashlight twice out the window. Then he grabs HARRIET)

CARVER (cont'd)

All right. She's mine.

SAMUEL

What?

CARVER

We'll tell 'em it's my kid. Come on.

HARRIET

Let go!

SAMUEL

You can't do that—

CARVER

They need to see me with her. We'll say Annabeth was yours.

SAMUEL

Annabeth—!?

HARRIET

(struggling)

No—!!

CARVER

(picking up HARRIET's bag)

They've gotta see I'm in charge. You can get a woman when you get there.

HARRIET

Samuel—!

SAMUEL

You can't—

CARVER

We're doing this! Come *on!*

HARRIET

Samuel—!

CARVER

I will break your arm!

(SAMUEL moves between CARVER and the door)

SAMUEL

Let her go.

CARVER

You don't want to do this.

SAMUEL

Let her go!

CARVER

I can leave you here.

SAMUEL

You're not going to—

(CARVER hits SAMUEL hard with HARRIET's bag. SAMUEL goes down hard)

CARVER

I'm not going to *what?! What am I not going to do!!?*

(CARVER kicks him. SAMUEL writhes in pain.
HARRIET pulls away and kneels next to SAMUEL,
trying to shield him. ELIZABETH works on)

HARRIET

Samuel—!!

CARVER

Get up.

HARRIET

Baby—!

CARVER

Get the fuck *up!!*

(CARVER grabs her by the hair, but she
holds onto SAMUEL)

HARRIET

No!!

(CARVER kicks SAMUEL again—and again)

SAMUEL

Aaagh—!!

HARRIET

Let him be—!

CARVER

Get UP!!

(CARVER finally hauls her up)

ELIZABETH

Strange sort of brotherhood.

CARVER

(moving toward ELIZABETH, who's unflustered)

Okay, I'm going to kill you now.

HARRIET

(grabbing at CARVER)

No—!

CARVER

She knows about the Brotherhood.

ELIZABETH

Yes! The Brotherhood of the Perilous Night. From the national anthem.
A most patriotic name.

CARVER

Who told you that?!

(kicking SAMUEL again)

Did you tell her!?

SAMUEL

Aaaagh—!!

HARRIET

I told her! It was me!

ELIZABETH

You both did.

CARVER

(to SAMUEL)

Is that what you told her? The Perilous Night?

SAMUEL

Sorry . . . Mr. Carver . . .

CARVER

You stupid shit.

(kicking him again)

Fight! It's *fight!* The Brotherhood of the Perilous *Fight!!*

SAMUEL

But . . .

CARVER

You don't know your own anthem?! "Through the Perilous *Fight*"! How stupid *are* you?!

SAMUEL

You only said the name once—

CARVER

Never tell anyone! That's what I said. And you tell *her!*?

(CARVER kicks SAMUEL in the head, knocking him out, as HARRIET screams.

HARRIET

No—!!

(ELIZABETH pays no attention. CARVER pulls some plastic restraints from his belt to handcuff SAMUEL, shoving HARRIET away as she tries to stop him. HARRIET gets up to run for the door)

CARVER

Go out that door and I'll kill him.

(CARVER pulls his knife. HARRIET stops. CARVER stands up and shuts the door to the hall. He finishes cuffing SAMUEL's hands and stands up)

CARVER (cont'd)

Come here.

(Silently, HARRIET rises and stands before CARVER. He ties her hands in front with plastic restraints)

CARVER (cont'd)

We're all going to heaven tonight—all of us, including the fucking Queen of England. But only you and me are going to heaven on earth.

HARRIET

What about Samuel?

CARVER

He lost his chance.

HARRIET

No—!

CARVER

And you, Your Royal Highness, are going wherever queens from the future go when they get their royal throats cut.

(Another HONK from the car outside)

CARVER (cont'd)

Damn it!

(CARVER rushes to the window and flashes his light twice)

CARVER

(pulling HARRIET toward ELIZABETH)

Okay. Clock's ticking.

ELIZABETH

Don't pretend you're brave enough to engage in regicide.

CARVER

You kidding? This'll be the highlight of my night.

HARRIET

(grabbing CARVER)

No! Please!

(CARVER whirls around and hits HARRIET hard. She crumples to the floor, holding her face. He then grabs ELIZABETH by the collar)

ELIZABETH

Will it be a beheading?

CARVER

(knife to her throat)

You wish.

HARRIET

How can you do this?! If all you want is to mix everyone together—

CARVER

You're too stupid to live—all of you! I don't want to mix the races. That's the opposite of what the Brotherhood stands for! Total race war—annihilation of all non-whites—*that's* the goal. I can't even join the Brotherhood unless I kill somebody right in front of 'em. It was gonna be Annabeth. Now it's you.

HARRIET

No—!!

(HARRIET tries to get up, but he pushes her down again with his foot and turns to ELIZABETH)

ELIZABETH

There's no time for an execution. Our embroidery is not complete.

CARVER

Here—let me help you.

(He kicks the embroidery frame across the room. As he does so, HARRIET tries to get to the door. CARVER grabs her. They struggle. She bites his arm; he slugs her. She drops to the floor. He hauls her up again and puts her in a headlock. As they struggle, ELIZABETH calmly retrieves her embroidery from the broken frame on the floor and sits in her chair, inspecting her work for any damage)

HARRIET

Let me go! *LET ME GO—!!!*

(He holds the knife against HARRIET's throat)

CARVER

You want it right now?! *Do you?!*

HARRIET

No, no—please, don't—

ELIZABETH

YOU HAVE TORN THIS!!!

CARVER

What?!

(ELIZABETH holds up the embroidery)

ELIZABETH

You have torn our embroidery! Right here!

CARVER

You fuckin' —!

ELIZABETH

Mr. Carver, drop whatever you are doing and answer for this now!

CARVER

Shut the fuck up!

ELIZABETH

We shall not “shut the fuck up”. We shall cry it from the rooftops!

CARVER

Jesus Christ—!!

(He hauls HARRIET toward ELIZABETH and grabs ELIZABETH’s shoulder with his free hand)

CARVER (cont’d)

You’re gonna fuckin’ wish you *were* beheaded—!

ELIZABETH

(insistent, pointing at the embroidery)

LOOK AT THIS! LOOK WHAT YOU’VE DONE!

CARVER

(infuriated, pushing his face closer)

What!?!?

(ELIZABETH thrusts a very real needle into his eye. He screams, letting HARRIET go. He manages to keep hold of his knife. HARRIET falls to the floor and pushes herself away from him as best she can. ELIZABETH sits still. Blood issues from his eye, dripping through his fingers. He makes a wild swipe at ELIZABETH with his knife but misses)

CARVER (cont’d)

Aagggghh!! You BITCH—!!! What the fuck did you—!?! What the—?! CHRIST!!

(CARVER rushes into the bathroom. SOUND of RUSHING WATER)

CARVER (off)

JESUS—!!!

(As he continues groaning in the bathroom, ELIZABETH rethreads her needle. HARRIET struggles to stand, looks at the bathroom, then grabs a piece of the broken wooden frame and rushes into the bathroom. SOUND of her bringing it down on his head)

CARVER (off)

GOD—!!!

(SOUNDS of him falling to the floor and HARRIET hitting him over and over)

HARRIET (off)

(after a silence)

He's still breathing.

ELIZABETH

You have our royal permission to finish him off.

HARRIET (off)

I can't.

(SOUND of the wooden frame hitting the tile floor)

ELIZABETH

What if he wakes up?

HARRIET

I don't know. I . . . I can't.

ELIZABETH

Then use his restraints—those convenient little plastic things. Tie him to the pipes.

(SOUND of HARRIET doing this. ELIZABETH has by now threaded her needle. She stares at it with great satisfaction)

HARRIET (off)

Okay. Okay . . .

(after a beat)

Now what?

ELIZABETH

If it were up to us, we would open his trousers.

HARRIET (off)

What— Why?

ELIZABETH

Do you or do you not wish our guidance?

HARRIET (off)

Where'd you get that needle?

ELIZABETH

The demented girl who calls herself our niece has proved most suggestible. She brought these only yesterday. Do you have his knife?

HARRIET (off)

Yes?

ELIZABETH

Good. Now, if we were you, we would finish old business by pressing the current advantage. We would do justice and uphold the right.

HARRIET (off)

What do you mean?

ELIZABETH

We mean, uphold the right.

(A silence. Perhaps the SOUND of a belt being unbuckled and a zipper being unzipped)

HARRIET (off)

There is no right.

ELIZABETH

Oh—of course.

(with a musical laugh)

How silly of us. Uphold the left.

HARRIET (off)

(after a beat)

Okay.

ELIZABETH

And now . . . do justice.

(A silence)

HARRIET (off)

Oh, God—! Oh, *God—!!* He's bleeding! There's so much *blood!!*

ELIZABETH

Excellent! Congratulations! At long last, we have a fine castration.

(Sound of a knife hitting the tile and a key chain being taken from CARVER's belt.

After a moment, HARRIET reenters. Her hands, which are covered with blood, are still in the plastic restraints)

HARRIET

Will he die?

ELIZABETH

Come here.

(HARRIET approaches as ELIZABETH produces a pair of scissors. She cuts through HARRIET's restraints, freeing her)

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

You have the keys. Excellent. You are now free to leave us.

(HARRIET goes to the window)

HARRIET

The car's gone!

ELIZABETH

Take Samuel with you. His audience is also at an end.

(HARRIET goes to SAMUEL)

HARRIET

Samuel—honey, wake up.

(he's unresponsive)

Wake up!

ELIZABETH

Is he breathing?

HARRIET

Yes, but . . . Samuel! Samuel, our baby almost died. The future almost—

(to ELIZABETH)

He won't wake up. What are we going to do?

ELIZABETH

(working on her embroidery again—sans frame)

What do you mean, "we"? Some of us are returning to the future. We have no idea what you're doing.

HARRIET

Take my baby with you.

ELIZABETH

What?

HARRIET

Wait for my baby to be born and take her to the future with you.

ELIZABETH

Impossible.

HARRIET

You have to! Without her, the future can't exist.

ELIZABETH

Oh, for goodness' — Why am I white?

HARRIET

What?

ELIZABETH

Look at me not as your Queen, but as your fellow human. You are black; I am white. I am from the future. Ask me how many black people live in the future.

HARRIET

How many?

ELIZABETH

None. Nearly three hundred years to intermarry. More and more people should be brown, yes? But they're not. Everyone is white. Like me.

HARRIET

But . . . Why?

ELIZABETH

Most black people died early in the cataclysm—the natural victims of indifferent nature. Those who did survive were largely swept away in the Wars of Population Reduction. Any who remained underwent forced sterilization.

HARRIET

Why?

ELIZABETH

Who would begin an entirely new world order by sowing the seeds of racial dissension? If they need not be planted, why plant them?

HARRIET

That's not what happens.

ELIZABETH

It's nothing personal. A natural process worked out calmly and logically in the human arena.

HARRIET

That's not human at all.

ELIZABETH

Our point is, the one-race society so esteemed by Mr. Carver is on its way no matter what you do. This audience is at an end. Please remove Samuel when you go.

HARRIET

Where should I take him?

ELIZABETH

Back to his desk. Leave him in the restraints. Far less to explain. Oh, and while you're in the office—

HARRIET

Yes?

ELIZABETH

You should feel free to call the police.

HARRIET

What do I say?

ELIZABETH

“Hello, this is a crazy person. There has been a terrible accident.”

HARRIET

Won't everybody be mad? They'll . . . they'll take away my baby.

ELIZABETH

Perhaps Samuel will be allowed to claim it. He is the father.

HARRIET

What'll you do?

ELIZABETH

We shall complete our embroidery then return to our home in the future.

Already we feel the effect of the powerful drugs beginning to ebb.

(with renewed energy)

So—off you go. We are grateful for your visit. Our time with you has been most edifying.

HARRIET

You're wrong about the future.

ELIZABETH

Everyone's entitled to an opinion. However, ours is the only one that counts.

Try to enjoy the present. It is the best of tenses, and also certainly the worst.

(HARRIET opens the door to the hall, then goes to SAMUEL, who's still unconscious. She tries to lift him by his shoulders but gives up and drags him by his feet to the doorway. She takes one last look at ELIZABETH, who gives her a royal wave without looking up, then drags SAMUEL into the hall and out of sight. We hear her off, practicing as she goes)

HARRIET (off)

Hello? This is a crazy person. There's been a terrible accident . . . Hello?
This is a crazy person. There's been a terrible, terrible . . . accident . . .

(HARRIET's voice fades away. ELIZABETH gives a deep-fetched sigh of relief. She looks around the room, then inspects her embroidery. She smiles and passes the needle through it carefully once. She cuts the thread and ties off the knot, snipping off any loose ends—the final stitch. She holds up the embroidery up to the light and smiles)

ELIZABETH

Finished!

(She sets down the embroidery and stares at the open door. She gives a beaming smile and a slow, royal wave in the direction of her loyal subjects. Lights fade to black)

THE END