

The Decline
and
Fall
of
Us
All

A Dystopian Comedy in Two Acts
by Robert Joseph Ahola

*THE DECLINE AND FALL
OF US ALL*

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A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS. 4 M/3F.

RUNNING TIME: 105 Minutes.

The Decline and Fall of Us All

Synopsis

“The world is coming to an end...and is actually fun again.”

It is the 21st Century sometime in the not-too-distant future, and the world as we know it has virtually come to an end. Not through any holocaust or seeds of Armageddon—human initiative has drowned in its own comfort, and things have just stopped working. Media has lost all credibility. And all conveniences are bought on the black market. The rich, if they exist at all, are holed up on country club estates framed by high stone walls to keep away the “outsiders.” that everyone fears but no one has ever seen.

Into the midst of this sickening milieu, we find the Vanowen clan in their decaying Faulknerian mansion on Rock Ridge Country Club, proudly aristocratic and clinging to the shards of their culture like a drowning man to flotsam.

As we meet these “proudly exempt antiquarians,” we also begin to behold a world that once seemed fraught with promise come undone around us, especially when some “Outsiders” are captured and change the dynamics forever.

A DARK COMEDY IN TWO ACTS. 4 M. 3F.

RUNNING TIME: 105 Minutes.

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Character Breakdown

RODERICK Vanowen. ("Roddy") A self-confessed male chauvinist relic in his forties, he is addicted to "painkillers," martinis and antiquated rules of morality and manners. Proud of his testosterone and ties to the past, he unashamedly shares his proclivities for shooting at "Outsiders" on the country club fairway just outside his back yard.

Emily Vanowen. After her namesake Emily Dickinson, Roddy's significant other lives in a poetic alternate reality. This is no longer her plane of existence, a point she emphasizes by taking as much Zolofit as she can pour into her body in one day and by reciting poetry whenever things upset her. This elegant woman may be in her late twenties or late thirties, and seems undefined by the clichés of both age and sexual role-playing.

Gilda. Sexy, materialistic and bored to the teeth with her own socially incubated lifestyle, she longs for a diversion, even if it means bringing in outsiders from the vast unwashed. In her thirties, she dresses in a long cocktail dress and appears to be something of a caricature cut out of a 1940s film noir.

David. Gilda's beau and apparently Roddy's cousin, David is both contemptuous of the Outside World and fascinated by it. The consummate gentlemen, this first generation Brit in his early fifties is a fashion plate and fancies himself as something of a Sherlock Holmes, which gives him more forum for dry martinis and the notion of adventure.

Stedman. Always with this group but never truly part of them, he is an older gentleman who is openly and unashamedly a voyageur into this time and place. What this fey little fellow's role here, really? Only time will tell.

Clint. An "Outsider" named after his favorite fantasy actor, Clint Eastwood, he nonetheless wears splashes of Gran Guignol makeup that tends to make him look like a member of KISS. And yet, he is much more complex than his street thug image and far removed from the creatures Roddy is convinced are "dangerous to humanity."

Bridget. Common and immersed shocks of multicolored hair, Bridget is caustic and opposed to everything that even appears to be appropriate. As such, she feels that she is the only stable point of reference in the entire gathering.

The Decline and Fall of Us All

Synopsis of Scenes

Act One

Scene 1. Roddy Vanowen's Library/Den

Scene 2. The Balcony and Garden overlooking the golf course.

Scene 3. The Vanowen Library/Den.

Scene 4. The Balcony and garden overlooking the golf course.

Scene 5. The Vanowen Library/Den.

Act Two.

Scene 1. Outside on the Darkness of the Golf Course.

Scene 2. The Vanowen Library/Den. Later that night.

Scene 3. The Vanowen Library/Den. The next day.

The Decline and Fall of Us All

Production Considerations

There are basically three settings for this play. One: The Vanowen Library/Den. Two: The Balcony and Garden overlooking the Fairway can and should be an extension of the Vanowen Library/Den. So it is well served to be part of the same set. This can be best expressed in a fly space, and a fly space is preferred though not essential to the production. The Third setting is a Dark Fairway on the golf course. This can be handled with accent props and lighting and no particular requirements for set construction.

It would be ideal to have a staircase leading to an unseen room upstairs, though this is not essential (as exits can be made on the same level.)

Wardrobe is instantaneously a part of set in that the characters' dress immediately announces their style, affiliation to period and social status (as is less occasionally its role in modern life).

Additionally, two adjacent sets may carry scenes that go on simultaneously.

Two songs are recommended that would, as preamble for each act, contribute to the mood of the play: "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)" by R.E.M. And "Anything Goes," by Cole Porter.

A NOTE ABOUT THE CHARACTERS: This is living theatre in the context that at least one of the characters may assume another identity. The Character of Stedman is a constant, as are the female characters. But the male characters may be interchanged in the final scene to give the producer and playhouse a choice as to who animates and joins the dialogue and who in fact remains frozen in time. Once the animated character is revealed it will not affect the intention of the plot, but may alter its flavor and audience perceptions, for him to assume the conversation with the pivotal character of Stedman.

Props and Costume Plot

Props would include a wall of books, and an entertainment center that appears to be somewhat in disarray.

They would also include at least two changes of wardrobe, fashion statements from Saville Row, pressed and polished country squire attire, elegant women's cocktail dresses, a pistol, at least two rifles, a computer and a pair of binoculars.

There is a martini shaker, a great deal of alcohol, a couple of bottles of Champagne, and apparently some food in "Clint's" backpack.

"Outsiders" would wear black leather, boots and body art that would all appear as something of a fashion statement.

The character of Stedman would wear something resembling a jump suit or at least clothing that is monochromatic, and perhaps slightly futuristic.

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Act 1. Scene 1. Roddy Vanowen's Library/Den.

<It is near sunset, and a red light throws through the window. The room itself is elegant if shabby chic, filled with books and overstuffed furniture. There is an air about it that exudes both literacy and the remnants of good taste. There is a wall of books, but whatever technology exists in the room [television, computer, entertainment center] appears to be in disarray. Emily Vanowen is fashionably dressed in sweater and skirt and stands at a cocktail table making a pitcher of martinis while husband, Rokerick [Roddy], in hacking jacket and turtle neck, sits at a doorway to the balcony with a 30.06 rifle and scope hoisted to his shoulder, occasionally exclaiming and firing, loudly. >

RODDY: Damn! Nearly got him!

EMILY: *<without looking up>*: You nearly get everyone. But you never get anyone.

RODDY: They're elusive! Sneaky little bastards!

EMILY: As much as you do that one would think you'd be a better shot.

RODDY: They've just gotten clever!

EMILY: *<continues mixing cocktails>* Or we've grown more inept. Besides, violence is such a bore. They're probably just hungry.

RODDY: Oh, yes! They're hungry to slit our throats and take everything we have.

EMILY: Or maybe they'll just take some things from our garden—the one I tend that you ignore, the one that isn't filled with pesticides and E-coli runoffs from factory farms, the one that supplies us with fresh vegetables every week.

RODDY: The one that sprouts up things I've never heard of. I mean what the hell is a Jerusalem Artichoke? It looks like The Hunchback of Notre Dame!

EMILY: So, give it away—to them! They're harmless! They're just poorer than we are.

RODDY: They're desperate. And desperate people do desperate things. They'll kill us in our sleep if we don't do something. *<He sets his rifle down.>* Don't you even get that?

EMILY: I don't get it, because it isn't working and never has. And I sleep very well, as you know. Martini darling? *<She hands him a cocktail.>* Besides, how many of our friends have actually been harmed by Outsiders? Name one.

RODDY: *<sipping>* That doesn't mean it couldn't happen. Or that it wouldn't. We've just been vigilant.

EMILY: Ah yes, "Homeland Security." Or should I say "Home Course Security," since we don't really have a country any more; just country clubs?

RODDY: The last bastions of civilization!

EMILY: Or so you would have us believe.

RODDY: Believe?! Believe?! I know! We all know! Islands of culture in a Sea of Chaos! It's hell out there! And you know it! Country Clubs and Costco are all we have left!

EMILY: Both known for deviled eggs and bad hollandaise. *<changes the subject>* How's your drink darling?

RODDY: *<gulping>* A work of art. A monument to urbanity! If you didn't make such a great martini, I'd have left you long ago.

EMILY *<Tries to straighten him up.>*: Wife as bartender. Well why not? And I married you for your money. So, that makes us the perfect match.

RODDY: An honest woman. At least we have that.

EMILY: *<reciting>* "Title Divine is mine,
The Wife without
The Sign
Acute degree
Conferred on me—
Empress of Calvary."

RODDY: Ah, self-pity! If it isn't one of the Seven Deadly Sins it should be.

<Ignoring him, she opens a bottle of pills on the bar, pops one, and chases it with a martini.>

RODDY: *<continues>* Unless it's taking Zoloft with your martini. Why don't you just borrow my gun and blow your brains out?

EMILY: Because then it would have actually struck a target and ruined your perfect record. Besides Vodka and Zoloft is the "divine blend." It balances me out. It's the new communion...now that God is dead.

RODDY: He's not dead. He just gave up on this miscreant planet and went on to a more hopeful part of the universe...one where manners and civility still hold sway.

<As Roddy polishes off his drink and goes to pour another, David Dicks walks through the door. He is dressed in jodhpurs, hunting jacket and dark turtleneck sweater.>

RODDY: *<Continuing>* ...One where your neighbors still have the good manners to knock before they barge into your house.

DAVID: Oh come now, Roddy. I live 200 yards across the fairway. I see you every day for cocktails. And I'm your cousin from across the water. So let's not, I pray you, stand on ceremony.

RODDY: All the more reason.

DAVID: Besides, we all know that God is an Englishman.

EMILY: God should have such a high opinion of himself.

DAVID: *<presses on>* As such, I'm your only sane point of reference. Other than that, I could smell the heady aroma of gunsmoke and martinis all the way across the fairway.

EMILY: And it's five o'clock. And you have a watch that still works! *<She hands him a martini, which he gratefully accepts.>*

DAVID: *<sipping>* Oh, Emily! You are a treasure! Thank God, you stockpiled the Vermouth. We can't even get it any more!

RODDY: We can get anything on the black market, and you know it.

DAVID: If you have coin or bullion to trade for it.

RODDY: Remember credit cards? I do.

DAVID: I once had an American Express Onyx. Such a credit line! You used to be able to buy half of China with that thing.

RODDY: *<moves back to check his rifle>* The problem with that was buying "half of China," meant the polluted half.

DAVID: Whatever happened to China, anyway?

RODDY: I don't know. I think they outlawed sex and just sort of dwindled away into Oblivion.

DAVID: Two billion people do not just dwindle into oblivion.

EMILY: *<reciting>* "After a hundred years,
Nobody knows the place—
Agony that enacted there,
Motionless as peace."

DAVID: *<to Roddy>* Does she always do that?

RODDY: Only when things upset her. Then she retreats into poetry...mostly Emily Dickinson.

<Thinking about it, David strolls back across to the balcony door.>

DAVID: Well, the world's an upsetting place, these days.

<As if anticipating, David swings the door open. Gilda, an attractive thirty-something Rita Hayworth look-alike in a dark cocktail dress enters on her line. >

GILDA: At least she's got taste.

EMILY: Speaking of... *<She motions toward the martini pitcher, but Gilda declines.>*

GILDA: Not today love, if you don't mind. Something in a red.

EMILY: A Clos Voujos, just uncorked!

GILDA: Perfect!

<Emily pours a large goblet and hands it over to Gilda. Gilda toasts the room and takes a large sip.>

RODDY: *<horrified>* Good God, woman! You came across the fairway unescorted!

GILDA: I've done it before. And I'll do it again. *<She imitates Norma Desmond>* I'll do it again! I'll do it again! .

DAVID: *<goes over to kiss Gilda>* And she looks so bloody good doing it!

RODDY: One of the days, an Outsider will zip up in his motorcycle, and you'll vanish forever.

GILDA: Well, I've always had this thing for bikers! Or is it bankers? Or is it biker bankers? Anyway, there are none of either any more, because the banks have all failed, and no one can ride a motorcycle anymore, much less repair it. So, you never see them...except in a museum, most of which have been looted.

EMILY: Roddy sees both. Roddy sees everything, real or imagined.

RODDY: It's not imagined. Outsiders are not imagined! One of these days I'm going to bag one.

DAVID: Even when you claim you've shot one, they all seem to evaporate. So, you must not have gotten...anything.

RODDY: But I do! I know I do!

GILDA: They never harm anyone from what I've seen. They just sort of wander around.

RODDY: They're trespassing!

GILDA: Well, we have a security staff.

RODDY: Who are the most easily bribed people on earth. They'll look the other way for a beer and a Twinkie. *<He sets down his martini, goes to a drawer and starts to reload his rifle.>*

GILDA: Aren't Twinkies amazing? *<to Emily>* They have more chemicals than Monsanto, and a shelf life longer than most civilizations. They'll outlast you and me put together, my dear.

EMILY: I...am not long for this world.

GILDA: A Death Wish! Oh well, we all have them from time to time.

DAVID: And I'm going to have one if I don't get another drink. In fact, I think I'll do the honors, if you don't mind Emily.

EMILY: Fire away! Every pun intended.

RODDY: Well, I mind. Yours aren't remotely as good as hers.

DAVID: As if you could tell after the seventh one.

RODDY: This is only my second. So I can tell.

DAVID: What the hell. A mediocre martini is still almost as good as sex.

RODDY: Much more frequent and much less demanding. Stir on if you must! And join me on the terrace!

<He takes his rifle and empty martini out to the balcony.>

DAVID: To watch you miss time and time again.

RODDY: *<over his shoulder>* If you're such a great shot, get your own gun and join me...asshole!

DAVID: *<calling out>* I never see what you see! I think you're hallucinating anyway! *<to himself>* Damned eccentric!

<David returns to mixing the martinis. Gilda strolls over to be next to him.>

GILDA: Oh, and you're not? *<Conspires to Emily>* He plays golf in the nude.

DAVID: I do not play golf in the buff! I wear golf shoes, a headband, and Jockey briefs.

GILDA: Talk about too much information!

DAVID: Never! Knowledge is Power!

GILDA: Even if it's carnal knowledge.

<David brushes by Gilda with a fresh batch of martinis, giving both women a kiss on the way to the balcony.>

GILDA: Don't you love the way men do that? Like a dog marking territory. Well, at least he didn't piss on my leg.

EMILY: Better to be marked than ignored, I suppose.

GILDA: And we seem to get marked every time the boys go off by themselves.

EMILY: You mean by Stedman, of course.

GILDA: You have to admit his timing is virtually impeccable. He shows up almost immediately after they leave, so he can get us by himself.

EMILY: I think he's afraid of them. He's really rather frail. Almost vulnerable, I'd say. *<She goes to refill Gilda's glass.>* He's harmless really. Just asks a lot of questions.

GILDA: Hardly harmless! He's such a devious little dick when you get down to it. And he's such a voyeur.

EMILY: I think he just wants the company.

GILDA: I think he just wants to keep us from having a moment to ourselves, so we won't have time to think about anything. It's almost calculated. Every moment weighed and measured.

EMILY: Hardly calculating. In fact I find him spontaneous and playful. That's his best quality.

GILDA: You find him attractive? *<She takes a fresh sip and looks outside. >*

EMILY: I find him...dear. *<quoting>* "Are friends delight or pain? Could bounty but remain..."

GILDA: *<mocks her>* You poetize with “cans and cant’s.” He only wants inside our pants!

EMILY: Touché. [Isn’t that cute?] Well, he is a good neighbor.

GILDA: But is he a neighbor at all? Do you even know where he lives? Have any of us even been to his house?

EMILY: No. But he’s certainly been to ours, especially when the men are gone of on an expedition.

GILDA: Sitting on their butts outside on a balcony, getting drunk and taking pot shots at a bunch of phantoms?! Hardly the stuff of intrepid explorers.

EMILY: In this season of Strange Fruit and failed expectations it’s probably as good as they can do.

GILDA: _Hardly consoling.

<Both women look through the open door to the outside balcony and garden, turn back to each other and toast. Blackout.>

Act 1. Scene 2. The Vanowen Balcony and Garden.

<Sunset is purple, almost complete. David stands behind Roddy who holds his 30.06 in his lap and a martini in his hand. He is sitting in a large armed cobra chair, peering occasionally through a set of binoculars, and popping a couple of pills. >

DAVID: What the hell are you taking now?

RODDY: Vicodin 6...for my bad shoulder.

DAVID: Vicodin 6 in megadoses?! My God! You dump on Emily for her habits, then you pop that medical morphine like jellybeans!

RODDY: It’s for my bad shoulder!

DAVID: “Side effects include impotence, shingles, suicidal tendencies, heart failure, syphilis, alcoholism and an overwhelming compulsion to shoot innocent people who happen to be trotting across your lawn.”

<Roddy ignores him and leans forward with his binoculars.>

RODDY: There’s one of the little buggars now! Darting like a firefly! Here take a look!

DAVID: I prefer to let my imagination run wild!

<He hands the binoculars to David who waves them away and drinks instead. Roddy gulps most of his martini, sets it down and lifts the rifle to his shoulder, aims and fires.>

RODDY: Got him! I got the sonofabitch!

DAVID: Let me see!

<Roddy gets up from his chair and pumps his fist. David grabs the binoculars and looks through them.>

DAVID: Can't see a bloody thing!

RODDY: What do you mean, you can't see! He's there! He's down. Two others with him! *<He rips the binoculars away from David, and peers through them horrified.>* > Damn. They must have hauled him off!

DAVID: *<affects an Irish accent>* I think it's a mirage you're seeing from partaking of too much grain alcohol. Besides you're going about it the wrong way.

RODDY: Oh, am I now, Mr. Armchair Quarterback? And how would you go about it, Great White Hunter?!

DAVID: I don't know. I can't reason with anyone who mixes metaphors as badly as you do.

RODDY: Oh, God forbid, we should mix metaphors. Nobody can even spell "metaphor" any more, much less mix them.

DAVID: Ah, outrage is not dead!

RODDY: Not as long as I draw a breath.

DAVID: Well, in that case...the way I would do it is first acknowledge that you lack any visible empirical evidence, mainly because you're sitting up here on your fat ass like a potentate in a hunting blind, trying to shoot them from a fixed position too far away to determine anything at all, especially now that it's dark. In other words, you're a dilettante and a lazy little shit!

RODDY: *<sips his drink>* Guilty on all counts!

DAVID: So...I would personally recommend venturing out into the course itself—fairways, rough, all the dark hidden places, "where evil dwells."

RODDY: You Daredevil, you!

DAVID: *<continues>*...with a hunting party, at least three people, including a gun bearer.

RODDY: A gun bearer?

DAVID: For my Smith and Wesson 30-30!

RODDY: And what century are you in? Where in the hell are we going to get a gun bearer in times like these?

DAVID: *<continues>* Let me finish...Dogs, rifles, pistols, hand-grenades.

RODDY: Good God Almighty, man! You want to start a war!

DAVID: No I don't! I want to catch these little scamps and bring at least a couple of them back as prisoners!

RODDY: Prisoners! And what will we do with them as prisoners?!

<David has to think about it. He gets up and pours them both another martini.>

DAVID: Turn them over to the authorities.

RODDY: Authorities?! What authorities?! The Homeowners association?! We are the authorities—our pathetic loosely knit little network of country clubs across what is left of the United States of America!

DAVID: Well, we'll figure something out. Catch and release...I don't know!

RODDY: Besides, No dogs on this junket! I'm not really a dog person.

DAVID: You like dogs!

RODDY: I don't like dogs. I tolerate dogs. Dogs are "yes men" with floppy ears! Dogs are the only creatures on earth that bond to another species more closely than they do their own...which goes to show you just how fucking stupid they really are! Besides, all the good big dogs are dead, killed in the canned food botulism plague of 2021. Now, all we've got left are Wiener dogs and Yorkies!

DAVID: We're not using them to hurt anybody. We're just going to track our prey. Pick up their scent and nail them that way.

RODDY: With what dogs, anyway?

DAVID: My dogs?!

RODDY: Your dogs?! They're useless!

DAVID: You love my dogs.

RODDY: That's not the point! They're not even real dogs. They're a cross between a Toy Poodle and a Chow! What is that?! A "Choodle!" They look like dust mops anyway. They're Choodles!!

DAVID: That's right! Choodles!

RODDY: Sounds like a breakfast cereal.

DAVID: Choodles are officially a breed now.

RODDY: Officially?! By order of what...the Nonexistent Kennel Club?

DAVID: The Rock Creek Country Club Breeders Association!

RODDY: Oh, for God's sake that's us!

DAVID: Exactly!

RODDY: How does a male Toy Poodle even get up that high anyway?

DAVID: Actually, the female Chow got down that low. "She Stoops to Conquer!"

RODDY: What if it was the other way around?

DAVID: I didn't think to ask.

RODDY: Talk about lowering your standards! *<to himself>* God, why am I even arguing? *<to David>* Okay! Okay! So, we get your dogs, and your paraphernalia, your blunderbuss of a rifle and we go to track "The Outsiders."

DAVID: Think of how you'll feel vindicated. Visible, tangible evidence!

RODDY: We'll have to bring them back alive.

DAVID: We can let them go later. Tie them up and drop them off on a highway or park somewhere.

RODDY: Credibility at last!

DAVID: Let's make our intentions known.

RODDY: Oh, God! Do we have to? Anything a man does that's "manly" is always greeted with that kind of bitchy skepticism that women throw at you. Maybe we could just lie about it.

DAVID: As we go trotting off into the sunset armed for Armageddon? Hardly! Besides, remember what Mark Twain said: "When in doubt, tell the truth."

RODDY: Mark Twain lived when the truth actually meant something...

<The two men pop a High Five and go back inside. Blackout >

Act 1. Scene 3. The Vanowen Library/Den.

<Roddy and David have just come back in and announced their plans. Gilda remains surprisingly impassive, while Emily has uncharacteristically grown furious and very animated in her protests. >

EMILY: What a ridiculous notion!

RODDY: It's not a ridiculous notion!

EMILY: It is! It is! In the first place, these people have never have never harmed anyone that we know of.

RODDY: Yes, they have! Yes, they have! It's like it was in South Africa in the early 1990s after Mandela took over. Whites we're being attacked and murdered at stop lights. They were being killed in their sleep on their ranches and farms in the countryside. They had to hire private armies to protect them.

GILDA: What the hell does that have to do with anything?! That was another century for God's sake...and another country.

RODDY: It is the same thing. Just like it was at River Oaks Country Club in Houston. A bunch of boat pirates, came in from the Caribbean, flooded the fairways, attacked in speedboats, slaughtered everyone there, and seized the clubhouse!! It took a year to drive them out and get it back.

EMILY: You don't know that. It was hearsay. Never in the news!

DAVID: What news?! There is no bloody news. The New York Times Online, isn't even online any more.

RODDY: It was so! It was a Blog!

EMILY: Exactly! A Blog!

RODDY: It was the God's truth!

GILDA: *<matter-of-factly>* Was not. Some drunken oilman ripped to the teeth on Lexapro and Margaritas got on his short wave radio and broadcast this ridiculous War of the Worlds farce as an S.O.S. Then later, when he sobered up, he admitted it was a fabrication. As if we needed another fabrication!!

RODDY: It was true! It was true. I have the article to prove it!

EMILY: Then produce it! Produce it! Where is it?!

RODDY: *<relents.>* I misplaced it.

<Emily goes to fuss over the cocktail table as if straightening out the glasses and bottles will somehow calm her down.>

EMILY: You didn't misplace it, because it never was. All credible news died so long ago we can't even remember. Now all that exists are blogs and liars and weavers of fantasy. Besides, we're so insulated in our incestuous little country club terrarium who could even possibly find it interesting enough to come here in the first place?

RODDY: Except for food! Except for water! Except for the finest wine cellar west of the Mississippi.

DAVID: *<interrupts by hoisting his glass in toast.>* Ah, the undrinkable, unsinkable, rancid Mississippi.

RODDY: *<presses on>*...not to mention the finest collection of hard cheeses anywhere in the world.

DAVID: Which they would gladly slit our throats for.

EMILY: :Why should they have to? Why don't we share it? If they're hungry, why don't we feed them? Why don't we help them? Why...don't...we...help them?! Civilization may have died The Death, but has humanity as well?! They're not targets, they're human beings! They're part of the family of man. "Each man's death diminishes me, because I am a part of mankind. *< She becomes entirely emotional as she utters each word until it becomes something of a mantra. >* Send forth therefore not to ask for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee!"

RODDY: Oh, God! It's Dial-a-Poem!

EMILY: What you're doing is wrong! It's cruel!

RODDY: It's justice done! The Outsiders are a plague. They're diseased! They breed like rats, and they're everywhere. That's the reason we can't even travel anywhere any more! *<He hurls his glass against the wall.>*

EMILY: *<hurls hers as well, shouting out>* We can't travel because there's no more gasoline! Or batteries! Or electricity! Or cars that run for more than fifteen minutes without breaking down!

<David calmly steps between them, motioning for calm.>

DAVID: Please, boys and girls! How you do dramatize! Roddy and I are just going out for an evening stroll. We're taking the dogs for a walk, and going forth to reconnoiter, as it were...properly fortified of course.

GILDA *<interrupts>* With infrared scopes no doubt.

DAVID *<continues>* For our protection; just in case. And if we happen upon some Outsiders, we're not going to harm them. We're going to accost and arraign them...and bring them in as proof.

GILDA: Proof of what?

DAVID: Proof of life, my dear! Proof that we're not deluded...or at least that Roddy's not deluded. [I don't care really.] Catch and release. We'll learn all we can about them, have a "civilized" cultural exchange, pump them about what's really happening on the "outside," and then let them return to their wretched existence unharmed.

GILDA: *<interrupts>* If they actually know anything; which I doubt.

DAVID: Then...we'll let them go! We'll even let you feed them, if you like. [You will anyway, knowing you.] What do you say?

<He gestures in affiliation toward Emily who seems to calm a bit. >

GILDA: Anything to break the monotony. *<She goes to refill her glass. >*

DAVID: *<solicits>* Emily...only with your permission.

<Emily doesn't respond but goes instead to clean up the mess she and Roddy made with the glasses. She falls to her knees, rag in hand, reciting.>

EMILY: "I measure every grief I meet
With analytic eyes.
I wonder if it weighs like mine,
Or has an easier size..."

DAVID: *<turns to Roddy>* Is that a "yes?"

RODDY: How in the hell should I know?

<He motions David toward the door. David pauses to watch Emily on her hands and knees, scrubbing reciting>

DAVID: Rather sexy, really.

RODDY: Yeah, for me too, the first two hundred times.

<They exit through the balcony door. Just as they do, another man, Stedman, enters the room from stage right. He is not dressed like the others, and is in fact attired in what looks like a kind of grey or black jump suit. He smokes a cigarette from a long black filter.>

Other than that, he is clean cut, well groomed and very polite. Noting his arrival, Gilda replies without turning to greet him.>

GILDA: <flat> Hello Stedman. What a surprise.

EMILY: <looks up from her cleaning> Stedman!

STEDMAN: <extends his arms to her> My love!

EMILY: Drink?

STEDMAN: From you? Anything!

<Emily brushes herself off, seeming to preen herself for him, while Gilda looks on. >

GILDA: Your timing is impeccable, as usual. You always show up just at the moment the real men have left.

STEDMAN: Not my kind, really—too much tweed and testosterone for me, thank you very much. *<Stedman goes over to embrace Emily. She gives him her cheek to kiss, and pours him a martini. He takes a grateful sip. >* Give me a beautiful woman every time. You share the same pulse with the Universe. Your hearts all beat to the rhythms of Nature. You are the essence of life!

GILDA: Stedman, you sneaky little bastard! You just come at times like these because Roddy has threatened you with physical violence, and David makes fun of you to your face.

STEDMAN: <amused> Ah! I love it when you rebuke me. It's so...sensual!

GILDA: Here we go!

STEDMAN: No, no! That can all wait.

GILDA: How patient of you.

STEDMAN: No, not at all. It's just that your bold intrepid knights will be out on their Grail Quest well into the night.

EMILY: More of a wild goose chase if you ask me.

STEDMAN: I don't know. I strongly suspect they might come up with something.

GILDA: Stedman speaks. And we all know Stedman is never wrong.

STEDMAN: <to the room> Sarcasm drips from her lips like honey from a Venus fly trap.

GILDA: Do you ever stop coming on to us?

STEDMAN: It's all in good fun. No one gets hurt. Do they Emily?

EMILY: The youthful fantasies of an adolescent boy. All I know is that I'm glad when you come. You...get me somehow.

STEDMAN: Completely and utterly.

<They nuzzle a moment, while Gilda grimaces at their intimacy>

GILDA: Oh, God but you creep me out!

STEDMAN: No, I don't.

EMILY: No he doesn't. There's a kind of innocence about him.

GILDA: Oh, please!

STEDMAN: *<takes note>* "We see the world not as it is, but as we are."

GILDA: Too smart to have originated with you. You have no originality.

STEDMAN: Who keeps the wine in vogue: the vintner or the connoisseur?

EMILY: Is that a conundrum?

GILDA: Sweetheart, you're such a beautiful antique! Nowadays people think a conundrum is something you fit over your penis.

STEDMAN: Only if it has a hole in it.

EMILY: I think there's a hole in this life we're living.

GILDA: Only one?!

EMILY: How many do we need? How many are there? And don't all empty spaces lead to the same void? We squander our brilliance in cycles of sameness. We drown in our own comfort. We dwell in the past. We live every day as a repetition of the one before, hell bent only on survival and the taking in of air.

GILDA: Sounds like a good start.

EMILY: I'm serious.

GILDA: I know you are, love. That's your problem.

EMILY: *<presses on>* It's not my problem. It's my truth. We bask in traditions that the world has abandoned as if they were anchors to some antediluvian civilization lost a thousand years ago. We chase notions of right and wrong that the world outside has forgotten. I know. I know. I do it myself. I wear these frills and parrot my poetry even as I hate myself for doing it. It's as if I have no choice, and yet I know that, if I were not allowed to do so, a part of me would die.

STEDMAN: No please! Please understand! You're perfect as you are. All of you! You are the remainder of all that's right, good and decent, of civilization, of arts and letters, the muses of Higher Mind. You are my favorite people on earth. You are the Sentinels! And you're destined for great things...even though you can't see it at the moment!

GILDA: Wait a minute! What do you know?! And why should you even care, you meddling little fag?!

EMILY: Gilda! Please! *<to Stedman>* She doesn't mean it. Just as I know she bears you no ill.

STEDMAN: Oh, I know she doesn't..

GILDA: Don't be so sure.

STEDMAN: *<to Emily>* Just as I know she loves you very much.

GILDA: Of course, I do.

STEDMAN: Just as I know she'll kiss you now to show you how much she does.

GILDA: Don't tell me what to do!

STEDMAN: But you will, won't you?

EMILY: It's quite all right, really.

GILDA: For you, perhaps, but not for me! Nobody tells me what to do!

STEDMAN: Of course they do. Of course we all do. You have no will of your own where certain things are concerned. You know that! Kiss her, now. You know you will. You've done it before. Show me you can just one more time.

< As Stedman speaks, he starts to circle the women, almost physically nudging them close to one another, as if he were wrangling souls. >

STEDMAN: You know it's in you. Isn't it Gilda. You're the living Rita Hayworth. You have that androgynous allure that draws you to deflower all things, devouring it with that all consuming passion!

<The two women draw together almost hypnotically, coming face to face as if they have no will of their own. Stedman is the dream weaver. He continues to weave around them, bringing their faces together until they're only a breath away. They feel the heaving passion of it. >

STEDMAN*<Continues>*: Emily! You feel it too for reasons of your own, for reasons that go deep inside the soul—that need for beauty, that transformative touch of tenderness that you can find from nothing else.

GILDA: *<only a breath away>* I detest you, Stedman. I can't believe I'm doing what you say. I'm going for it, and I don't even know why!

EMILY: Just be with it. It isn't so bad. Perhaps it's the right thing to do. Life is so brief, and we have lost all reference.

<They kiss one another on the lips, softly at first, then passionately, with a special tenderness that only women seem to give one another. But just as they begin to feel it, Stedman steps up next to them so closely they can feel him breathing on them. Gilda rips away and turns her body toward the outside.>

GILDA: Stedman! You disgusting Svengali! You impotent bastard! You lack the balls to do anything yourself, so you get us to do it for you. I don't even like it, and still I do it. All I know is that, at this point, I'm bored shitless and would probably try anything short of sex with a snail. So, I suppose I've become that jaded.

STEDMAN: Jaded? Or seeking? Or merely incomplete?

GILDA: We're all incomplete, professor. You should know that more than any.

EMILY: I am. Perhaps that's why I felt it all the way to my soul.

STEDMAN: Is it so bad? Is it evil? Or is it merely a kiss? Is it a prelude to something else? Or is it a beautiful bonding—the sharing of oneself with another, if only for a moment?

GILDA: The plea of the eloquent sociopath. I recognize it in all its forms.

EMILY: I know what it is for me. At least I think I do. It's a tenderness a woman can give another woman that a man somehow leaves behind when it no longer serves his lust. Vulnerability, consideration, and poetry in the soul—all die in quick succession, casualties to the conquest waiting in some distant faraway place.

GILDA: Ah, never has self-pity taken on such eloquence. For my part, all I can say is this: A man will only take me for granted in peril of his life.

STEDMAN: And in peril, my beauties, I must go.

GILDA: Of course you must. You've taken your sensual circus as far as you can take it. I'm not sure you'd know where else to go even if you could.

STEDMAN: On the contrary! It's just that I have other business.

GILDA: But "Sted Muffin," there is no other business. You've had your little guilty pleasure, and now you're running away before the boys come back and bully you around. Especially when they come back empty handed and spoiling for a fight.

STEDMAN: I don't know. They might surprise you. They might return triumphant, prisoners in hand.

GILDA: Those two? Do not, under any circumstances hold your breath.

EMILY: But will it matter? Will it matter at all?
"Victory comes late
And is held low to freezing lips
Too rapt with frost
To take it."

GILDA: What the hell was that supposed to mean?

STEDMAN: It's a metaphor on death and immortality, I think.

EMILY: Thank you.

GILDA: Well, they are bringing their "metaphors" back alive ...or so they say.

STEDMAN: And they will, I'll wager.

GILDA: What did you do, pay off some Outsiders to come give themselves up?

STEDMAN: No. Not at all. I have no influence with them as such.

GILDA: You...have influence with everyone, Stedman. That's the only thing that makes you interesting.

STEDMAN: You overrate me.

GILDA: No. But I suspect you...of everything! Anyway, I'll bet you they come back empty-handed. And I'll also bet you, if they do come back with anything or anyone at all, that you had some hand in it.

STEDMAN: Complicated wager to say the least.

GILDA: Just hedging my bet.

STEDMAN: <thinks about it> Done!

GILDA: The prize?

STEDMAN: One of the winner's choosing. As long as they are "Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not."

GILDA: Jesus! I'm drowning in epigrams. *<She sticks out her hand to shake. He takes it. >* Done! Now, run along, you fey little fellow, before the real men show up.

STEDMAN: *<proudly to the room>* Isn't she brutal?! I love you for that!

<He blows her a kiss and quickly slips from the room as if to vanish through the wall. The women look on, and then almost as quickly forget him.>

EMILY: I'm always sorry when he leaves. I miss him when he does. He makes the days more bearable.

GILDA: You've got to be kidding!

EMILY: He is a gentle soul. He's the only one I feel truly comfortable with.

GILDA: Then you need to adjust your comfort level.

EMILY: I mean it. I think he's an angel.

GILDA: He's the devil! He's always hovering around, waiting for us to fall apart, which we all do at the very worst moment! And he's never wrong. I hate that! Everything he predicts comes true. And he's always so damned smug about it.

EMILY: Perhaps we're just predictable.

GILDA: Predictable?! How can we be predictable?! How can anything be predictable?! Half the time, we don't even know where our next meal is coming from!

EMILY: And yet it always does, miraculously.

GILDA: But from where?

DAVID: *<from offstage>* From the wilds! From the rough and forests of Rock Ridge Country Club! *<David enters on his line, seeming to hold a backpack as if it were a prize.>* Caviar! And Loot! And prisoners to boot!

RODDY: And oh, what prisoners we have!

<Roddy enters behind him, holding two "Outsiders" at gunpoint who look no worse for the wear. Rather than appear tattered and worn, the two—a young man and a young woman in their twenties, Clint and Bridget [she even looks like Bridget Bardot!]- are quite the Y-Generation fashion statement.>

Dressed in leather, body art and silver jewelry, Clint wears greasepaint. Other than that, they appear extreme but reasonably well groomed and not the least bit frightened. In fact, this captivity seems to be something of a lark to them. They look around in wonder as Roddy nudges them at gunpoint into the room.>

RODDY: <continuing> All right you two! Sit down!

CLINT: Oh, so butch!

RODDY: I said sit down!

< Roddy jabs his pistol in their general direction. Dutifully, the two sit down on a couch facing the others. >

CLINT *<aside to Bridget>* It's just like a B-Movie. Isn't this a rip?!

BRIDGET: *<under her breath to Clint>* You find the strangest things to amuse yourself. You are weird, and these people are all damaged! And I'm already bored as fuck all!

CLINT: The world is damaged! So what's new? At least it's a change of pace.

<Gilda comes over to study them, fascinated.>

GILDA: Who are you? What are you?

BRIDGET: What am I? What are you?! Look at you! You're a film noir cliché!

DAVID: Well, whatever they are, they brought in a classic repast. *<He reaches down into the bag and brings out several items. >* Beluga Caviar! Laurent Perrier Special Reserve! Fresh sour cream! Smoked Salmon!

RODDY: Smoked salmon?! I thought they outlawed salmon fishing 30 years ago.

DAVID: They did.

GILDA: I thought these people were supposed to be starving...or something.

DAVID: ...Or something! But you have to admit they've got one hell of a black market.

CLINT: We do!

DAVID: Or that's what we're being led to believe. That's what we're about to find out.

CLINT: Is that why you "captured" us?

DAVID: Part of the reason.

CLINT: <to Bridget> See! I told you they were completely in the dark!

EMILY: Good heavens! We're all in the dark these days. The world is shrouded in darkness. We don't know anything. We only think we do.

BRIDGET: Speak for yourself! We know everything. <Clint jabs her in the ribs.> Well, a great deal, anyway.

DAVID: Let's just say we've brought you in for a little cultural exchange.

RODDY: Like...what is left? Is anything left? Is anything as it was?

DAVID: They wouldn't know. How would they know?! I've got sneakers older than these two.

CLINT: Sneakers? What the fuck are sneakers?

DAVID: To illustrate my last remark.

RODDY: What is that supposed to mean?! It doesn't mean anything! What matters is they're out there. And they're trying to get in here! That's what matters.

BRIDGET: I'm not trying to do anything.

RODDY: "Proof of life." We've got it. Besides, look at them. They've got nothing I want. Let's let them go back where they came from, either that or turn them over to the authorities.

DAVID: What authorities? We are the authorities!

CLINT: Oh, I'd love to see your authorities! <to Bridget> Wouldn't you like to see their authorities?

BRIDGET: Cut the crap, Clint! You're such an arrogant little shit!

RODDY: <fascinated> Clint? Like Eastwood? Bridget? Like Bardot? You're named after movie stars! You are, aren't you?!

DAVID: Yes! And by God, they even look like them. At least she does!

BRIDGET: Yeah! So what's wrong with that?! We have to be named after somebody. Why not somebody...special?

RODDY: Movie stars? Special? So that's what it's come to. <pumps his fist in triumph> I knew it! They're cloning the little fuckers.

CLINT: Movies are all we have. It's all we remember. It's all that that we have in our libraries!

DAVID: Your libraries are all video libraries?!

BRIDGET: What else is there?

CLINT: They're the best. Everything on Digi-beta, MP6 or Holograms! We even get video downloads. That way we don't have to read.

EMILY: There are no books any more?

RODDY: You have no shelves of books like these?

<He gestures around to the wall filled with books, proudly displaying them. David joins him, pulling a volume off the shelf. >

DAVID: No Keats, Shakespeare, Milton, Mann, Tolstoy...Hunter Thompson?

BRIDGET: Don't be ridiculous!

<Clint jabs her in the ribs.>

CLINT: Well there are some. And we do have a few librarians who speak them for us.

EMILY: They speak them?

CLINT: Yeah! And we have Audio Books. But you should know that. You're supposed to know everything about us! Right!

RODDY: *<shoves his pistol at Clint as he speaks.>* We do know everything! We know the world is diseased and dying, and so are the people on the outside. We know we're the only hope for civilization. And you want what we have, and you can't have it!

GILDA: Don't be such a liar, Roddy! We don't know anything. There's no media anymore. The media are all a bunch of two-faced duplicitous, backstabbing, self-serving assholes! They killed their credibility years ago by making up the news to suit their personal biases. News as fiction! News with agenda! People just stopped watching.

RODDY: We stopped watching because we can't get any reception any more. Whenever we can get anything electronically, we can only get broadcasts on the weekend. And then it's BBC and Al Jazeera. And they can't even tell what's true any more.

DAVID: Magazines all went bankrupt. Nobody reads any more, anyway. And besides we ran out of paper.

EMILY: Oh, God I miss *The New Yorker*.

GILDA: You actually read *The New Yorker*?

EMILY: Somebody had to.

BRIDGET: Jesus Christ! Is this all you people do?! Stitch and Bitch about how bad things are and how great things were?! Good God! No wonder your world came tumbling down.

EMILY: Our world.

BRIDGET: What?

EMILY: It's all our world.

BRIDGET: No, it's your world! Yours...just yours, alone! You stupid, shallow insular people! Shit!

EMILY: What do you mean by that?

BRIDGET: Just what I said. *<She whips out a pack of cigarettes and singles one out.>*

RODDY: What are you doing?

BRIDGET: What does it look like?

RODDY: No smoking! We don't smoke inside this house.

BRIDGET: *<getting up to leave>* Fine. I'll go outside.

RODDY: No you won't!!

BRIDGET: *<contemptuous>* What are you going to do, shoot me?

RODDY: I might!

BRIDGET: Go for it! *<Defiantly, she gets up to go outside.>*

GILDA: I'll join you.

<On Bridget's way out Gilda joins her at the hip and loops her arm under Bridget's. Bridget, to her own surprise, accepts. Emily immediately falls in behind.>

EMILY: I'll join you too.

RODDY: I didn't know you smoked.

EMILY: What you don't know about me could fill a book. But then you've never read one. You just talk about them as if you did.

<Suddenly, in defiant lockstep, the women go outside to the balcony, leaving the men to gawk in awe and wonder.>

RODDY: They all smoke?! I didn't know our women smoked!

DAVID: You can't blame them, really. There's not all that much left to do when you think about it.

CLINT: Your women! Your women! Women as chattel—interesting concept, however antiquated! No wonder you people disappeared as a society!

RODDY: What do you mean, "disappeared?" We're here. You're not. You're trying to get in here! That's how we caught you!

CLINT: You really don't get it, do you? Nobody wants "in here." They just want to play in here—like a retro bordello or a dirty sandbox or a Noel Coward play. You're not the real world! We are!

RODDY: I love this! *<to David>* Don't you just love this?! Super freak here now believes he's the last best hope for civilization—fashion, intellect, and of course, global awareness! And we're his test market...

DAVID: I don't know. Maybe he is. Maybe we are. There are certainly more of him than there are of us. And maybe they are better off. That's why we've all come together—for the sweet joy of discovery!

CLINT: Would you mind including me in the conversation?

DAVID: Well...are you?

CLINT: Are you kidding?! Better off?! Of course, we're better off! And you're just...off!

RODDY: By whose standards?

CLINT: What do you mean, "standards?!"

RODDY: The fact that he has to ask, says it all.

CLINT: But I don't have to ask. You have to ask! That's because I know all about you, and you know nothing about us! So...who's in control here, would you say?

RODDY: *<wags his 9 mm.>* This is in control.

DAVID: *<clearly irritated>* Oh, come on, Roddy. Jesus!

CLINT: Listen to yourself. What a joke you are! It isn't bad enough that you believe your own bullshit! It's that you haven't got an original bone in your body.

DAVID: *<steps between them, apologizing to Clint>* You'll have to forgive my friend here. He's been watching too many old Humphrey Bogart movies. [It's all there is to do anywhere.]

CLINT: *<interrupts him>* And whose fault is that?

RODDY: What do you mean by that?!

CLINT: I mean that your world is coming down around your ears because you're all letting it. You're no longer productive or useful as human beings because you've convinced yourselves that there's nothing left to be productive or useful about! So you just quit! All of you!

RODDY: We have not!!

DAVID: He's hitting on something. Let him finish.

CLINT: You have no passion left for life except for these empty shells of literacy and culture, riches and opulence.

RODDY: And the problem is...

CLINT: You're running around in this Caucus Race of shallow self-indulgence because there's nothing left for you.

DAVID: "Caucus Race!" He said, "Caucus Race!" That's Lewis Carroll! There's a literate soul in there after all!

RODDY: *<Ignoring David.>* Oh, yeah! And just what do you do to make yourself a productive member of society?!

CLINT: Plenty!

RODDY: Yeah? What? Nuclear physics? Brain surgery?! Biomedical engineering?! What?!

CLINT: I do a great deal!

RODDY: A great deal of what?! Be specific!

<Clint doesn't answer, but David brings out the champagne.>

DAVID: Well, why don't we open this delightful bottle of champagne and get to the bottom of it all?

CLINT: I don't drink.

DAVID: You don't drink? But you had these in your backpack.

CLINT: Because I knew you'd like it. Bait for the trap.

RODDY: Bait! You baited the trap?!

CLINT: Call it a peace offering.

DAVID: Well, that makes it a bit more civilized, doesn't it?

<He starts opening the champagne, when Roddy motions for him to stop>

RODDY: Wait a minute! How do we know it's not poisoned...or drugged or something?!

CLINT: Poison! You still don't get it, do you? The last thing I would ever want to do is poison you. And drugs? Well, everybody's drugged in our world these days. So what's new?

RODDY: We don't allow drugs in our world.

DAVID: Allow them? That's all we allow. The only corporations that survived are the pharmaceuticals. Big Pharma—a pill for every ill!

RODDY: I mean, contraband drugs, illegal drugs. Consciousness altering drugs! Not legitimate drugs.

DAVID: Oh bullocks, Roderick! They have their drugs. *<He holds up the champagne. >* And we have ours!

CLINT: An honest man! I'll drink to that!

DAVID: So, you're going to join us in sharing the grape. In vino veritas!

CLINT: I've had it before. It's just that I like to smoke my high. In this case, in fumo veritas...

RODDY: See! Druggies all of them!

CLINT: Just as the women are doing right now.

DAVID: They're having a cigarette.

CLINT: Oh, they're doing a lot more than that. And I can bet you they're cutting to the chase and getting to all the issues we're still jerking each other off about.

DAVID: That's the beauty of women—they have a gift of bonding that we do not. It's in their DNA.

CLINT: *<amused at the thought of it>* Bonding! Yeah, well Bridget's big on bonding all right! If that's what you want to call it. They'll be bonding all right.

DAVID: *<popping the cork on the Champagne>* So, they're bonding in their way, and we're bonding in ours. Let's hear it for progress.

<The cork pops. He grabs the glasses and begins to pour.> Blackout.

Act 1. Scene 4. The Vanowen Balcony and Garden.

<Bridget has lit a rather strange colored cigarette and has given another to Gilda and Emily who now seem to be sharing theirs.>

GILDA: *<Noting>* Unusual flavor. Not a taste I'm familiar with.

BRIDGET: It's Ecstasy.

EMILY: I have to admit. I'm really starting to relax.

GILDA: If I'd chomped on half a dozen Zoloft I'd relax too.

BRIDGET: No, you don't understand. You're smoking Ecstasy!

GILDA: You mean, like the drug?

BRIDGET: I mean the drug!

GILDA: Didn't know you could smoke it!

BRIDGET: Welcome to modern technology. If anything has grown in the last twenty years, it's the drug companies.

EMILY: The pharmaceuticals. They're larger than most nations now.

GILDA: They are the nations.

BRIDGET: You think that's an accident?

EMILY: I try not to think of it at all.

GILDA: Well, maybe it's time you did. And these kinds of drugs?! *<She holds up the cigarette.>* They're not legal.

BRIDGET: Oh, but they are. They're all legal now.

GILDA: Anyway, Ecstasy has a Bell Curve. I remember.

BRIDGET: *<sucks in a deep drag and holds it>* Not any more. Works every time. The same high, every time.

GILDA: *<studies the cigarette>* New and improved!

EMILY: I'm glad something's improved.

BRIDGET: It's truth serum, really. Opens you up like a flower.

GILDA: I see no bouquets on you.

BRIDGET: Oh, you'd be surprised.

GILDA: It makes me randy.

BRIDGET: Randy?

GILDA: Horny. Passionate! Very sexy!

BRIDGET: Thought for a minute you were turning into a guy.

GILDA: I want a man!

BRIDGET: I get that too. *<taking a deep drag>* Well, there are several inside, right now...

GILDA: No! I want a real man!

BRIDGET: A couple of them might qualify...with a little reprogramming.

GILDA: No, no, no!! You don't get it! Not those limp flaccid, inbred excuses for masculinity: and certainly not that foul, Grand Guignol circus-freak that you seem to have hooked-up with!

BRIDGET: My, my, my! This stuff is supposed to get you to the point of all-accepting, all-encompassing universal love, and you flip the script over to Zero tolerance.

GILDA: Call it ruthless compassion!

BRIDGET: Oh, sister! We get enough of that already.

GILDA: I'm not your sister! I don't even like you. I like your cigarettes!

BRIDGET: You underrate Clint. And you underrate me! You don't even know who we are. You don't even know what you are!

<Ignoring them. Emily goes to slip on some garden gloves and looks around for a spade and hand rake. Finding them, she picks them up>

EMILY: If our basic desires start to come out. If it's really a truth serum, then I'm going to my garden.

BRIDGET: Your garden? You have a garden?

EMILY: I know who I am. And all I know is that there in the garden is the only time I ever feel anywhere nearly complete. We've given up the idea of children. There are no churches anymore—no one to give us solace. So at least I can go here in my own backyard and feel the subtle force of life in my hands.

<She starts heading down the steps to the garden.> I can feel things growing. I can feel life spring into being. And I know there is a God. And no one can deny me that moment of intimate communion.

BRIDGET: Communion from a flowerbed. Well, why not?

EMILY: An enchanted garden. Eden!

GILDA: They had the right idea with the original. Maybe on the second pass...

<Gilda takes the Ecstasy cigarette and her drink, trots down the steps and heads out toward the golf course>

BRIDGET: *<calling out>* Where the hell do you think you're going?!

GILDA: Out for an evening stroll. Maybe I'll find a real man somewhere in the darkness.

BRIDGET: Is that what you're looking for out there, a real man?! Well, let's hear it for evolution—a woman who only sees her life as valid through the portal of some man! Wow! What a unique concept!

GILDA: I'll be glad when this Ecstasy crap has kicked in for you, because right now you have all the softness of No. 9 sandpaper.

BRIDGET: This is my soft side!

GILDA: I suspected as much.

BRIDGET: Then it should come as no surprise to you.

<She pops some pills of unknown origin. Down in the garden, hoeing, Emily starts to weep as she recites>

EMILY: "Mine enemy is growing old—
I have at last revenge.
The palate of the hate departs
If any would avenge—"

<Gilda walks by her and stops to comfort her, as she continues her poetic rant.>

BRIDGET: *<looking down at her, bemused>* What the hell is that? A mating call?!

GILDA: She only does it when things upset her, which is most of the time. It's poetry.

EMILY: It's iambic pentameter.

BRIDGET: And I'm Jurassic Park! *<thinks about it>* And the only poems I know are song lyrics. *<She jumps up onto the ledge and starts mimicking Mick Jagger with a hand mike.>*

"Please allow me to introduce myself to you.
I'm a man of style and taste.
I've been around for a long, long year
Stole many a man's soul and faith..."

<For a moment, Gilda starts to clap to the rhythm, but then stops herself cold.>

GILDA: I'm out of here. *<aside to herself>* At least she's got good taste in music.

BRIDGET: *<jumping down>* I'm going with you. You need a chaperone.

GILDA: You can't. You're our prisoner.

BRIDGET: You don't buy into that myth, do you?

GILDA: *<thinks about it, amused>* Not really...David and Roddy couldn't catch a cold with a cannon.

BRIDGET: Exactly!

GILDA: Shouldn't we be bringing along a gun or a bazooka, or something?

BRIDGET: What do you think?

GILDA: Oh, well, rape and abduction beats boredom any day...

BRIDGET: Don't tease me!

EMILY: You two amaze me. You long for romance and a real man to sweep you off your feet, and all you do is complain about everything in your midst. You're at odds with your own desires. And you confuse your angels. You pray for deliverance and then do everything you can to block it.

GILDA *<to Bridget>* Pay her no mind. She talks down to everyone. People on pedestals do that.

BRIDGET *<caught by it>* No, no, I can take it. What she says makes sense. *<She walks up to Emily who busily tends her garden and stoops to confront her face to face.>* That's quite all right, little girl. You're the steel magnolia after all. You're tougher than nails beneath all that pale and wan, shrinking violet crap. I dig that about you! You could kick all our asses if you wanted to. Couldn't you?

EMILY: *<Busted, she keeps hoeing. >* Perhaps.

BRIDGET: Come join us, sweetness. I like your style!

<Emily pauses to consider. Bridget's candor disarms her. >

EMILY: You're a decent woman beneath all this, I see it. But no, thank you! I have another destiny...

GILDA: *<steps up, interrupting>* She has her own set of fantasies. She has another master.

BRIDGET: At least she knows what she wants.

GILDA: And we?

BRIDGET: Who knows? Nothing is quite as sexy as pure uncertainty!

GILDA: The danger.

BRIDGET: The joy.

GILDA: The man...the boy!

<Bridget takes Gilda by the hand toward the gate to the fairway. On her way out, Gilda regards Emily for a moment.>

GILDA: Are you going to be all right?

EMILY: I'm always all right. I'll outlast you all, you know.

GILDA: I know...

<Gilda gives her a hug and a kiss, loops her arm into Bridget's and the two disappear into the darkness upstage left. Emily resumes her raking and hoeing, when a dark figure emerges from the shadows, stage right>

EMILY: Hello, Stedman. I knew you were there...somewhere.

STEDMAN: I'm always here for you.

EMILY: *<pauses at her work>* I know.

STEDMAN: Are you ready to find that perfect world?

EMILY: *<puts down her hoe and looks over to him>* More than you can possibly imagine.

STEDMAN: Oh, dear lady! Nothing is more than I can possibly imagine.

<He comes over to her and extends his hand. Setting her hoe down, she removes her glove and takes his hand. They stroll off together into the darkness, beyond.>

<Blackout>

<To Be Continued>

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