

Ten Billion *Sapiens*

A play in two Acts

### Synopsis

Brand had been shot, and is now hospitalized, convalescing from surgery, but resisting therapy to recover his ability to walk. He is a self-proclaimed Neo-fascist with a messianic message of an apocalyptic future wrought by global warming. Darlene, the only rehab nurse who will continue to work with him, is his unanticipated match: a middle-age woman of color, well read and spiritually grounded. Act I follows the stages of Brand's convalescence, ending with a dramatic severing of their relationship.

Act II occurs months later, when Brand ambushes Darlene in her apartment. While he makes his plea for help in his upcoming trial, so that he might have his message truly heard, she negotiates for her life. Does she manage to invoke a saving moment of Grace?

### Setting

In Act I, lighting creates two distinct spaces, representing two separate hospital rooms. One contains a hospital bed, a walker, and a folded wheelchair; it's Brand's room. The other contains real or imaginary apparatus for physical therapy: in Scene 3 parallel bars, in Scene 4 a treadmill.

Act II, a single scene, occurs in Darlene's apartment. Again, lighting creates two distinct spaces: one the entry hall and the other, larger space, her kitchen. Everything dressed minimally, the apartment requiring only a coatrack, a table with two chairs, two coffee mugs and a coffee pot.

Other than what's been mentioned, props include books, a bag of groceries and a flashlight.

### Tag Line

In response to climate catastrophe and a dystopian future, he argues for fascism and eugenics. She believes in agencies of grace.

## Characters

BRAND (mid-30s to 70) — Inwardly damaged — intelligent, but emotionally immature, with narcissist tendencies, and therefore to some degree a character without a core. As he convalesces, he becomes increasingly committed to a messianic message concerning the human die-off that he believes the global climate crises has begun to trigger. Totalitarianism will become inevitable for the United States in the near future, its only rational response, if it is to adapt as a nation to the conditions of a hostile planet and an awakened General AI.

The role can be technically challenging. Throughout Act I Brand, recovering from surgery for a gunshot wound, is relearning to walk. Scenes 3 and 4 involve physical therapy with parallel bars and a treadmill respectively, which might or might not be physically present, depending on production, the latter case requiring a strong ability to mime.

DARLENE (40s +) — A middle-aged woman of color. An experienced therapeutic nurse. Unmarried and evidently without surviving family. She is highly intelligent, without any flash or pride about it — a seasoned professional, well-read and spiritually grounded (if not traditionally religious). A woman of hidden capabilities.

In her speech, especially throughout Act I, Darlene shifts from professional to street to personal modes almost continuously. The role also asks for a competent singing voice, as Darlene sings parts of the Gospel-like "Lonesome Valley" several times, and in varying musical manners.

The role has physical challenges too, requiring some close contact. In Act I, Scene 2, Darlene's therapy is fully hands on, assisting a supine Brand in bending and loosening his leg and hip joints. In the next scene, she wrests him in stages from the floor to the wheelchair after he collapses at the parallel bars.

ACT I

Scene 1

A dark stage. An island of light opens on BRAND in his hospital bed, reclined. [If possible, apparatus suggesting recent traction hang above him.]

Sound: A brief knock.

Enter DARLENE, a rehab nurse.

DARLENE

Mr. Brand? I'm Darlene, one of the rehab nurses assigned to your case.

BRAND

I've already talked to you people.

DARLENE

I know that, and I'm here to make a second appeal.

BRAND

Oh, an appeal? On my behalf.

DARLENE

May I sit?

BRAND

You're gonna do what you're gonna do, right?

DARLENE

(sitting)

I'll be brief.

BRAND

You gotta take a load off, I can see.

DARLENE

Mr. Brand, happy with it or not, you've got a life to live.

Oh, my.

BRAND

DARLENE

You're out of traction and doing well with the brace and your healing has progressed enough —

BRAND

What kind of life, do you think?

DARLENE

A positive attitude helps.

BRAND

Oh, okay, okay.

DARLENE

It simply does.

BRAND

What're you sellin'?

DARLENE

Ain't sellin', just tellin'.

BRAND

Oh for Chri— Please, please don't start talking in some slick, jive catchphrase way like that with me, all right?

DARLENE

You start from where you are.

BRAND

Just don't. Don't do it, I can't stand it.

DARLENE

You've got a life to live —

BRAND

Ethnic talk.

DARLENE

— and you might as well try to make it as good a life as you can.

BRAND

I said it nicely, eth-nic talk.

DARLENE

In my experience, Mr. Brand, the sooner a patient begins appropriate therapy, the sooner and more complete their recovery.

BRAND

(muttering to himself)

Ain't sellin' . . . .

DARLENE

What good will it do you to walk in pain for the rest of your life? Or even risk at some point losing your mobility?

BRAND

You ask a profound question there.

DARLENE

Well?

BRAND

Don't you think I deserve it?

DARLENE

Right now I'm appealing to you to begin your physical therapy so you can fully regain your ability to walk. Deserve isn't relevant.

BRAND

When *isn't* deserve relevant?

DARLENE

When it comes to medicine and healing.

BRAND

You triage, don't you? It's always relevant.

DARLENE

Listen, you will heal, but will you heal straight or crooked, will you heal 50% or 85? How aligned do you want to be?

BRAND

How's about 99?

DARLENE

85'd be good. You'll have to work hard to get even there, get started now.

BRAND

I can hardly feel my legs. You're gonna make me walk?

DARLENE

We'll start you off easy. Massages, stretches, twists. You already know this.  
(She stands, moving around his bed.)  
It'll be awhile before you're walking, but we'll get you there.

BRAND

Are you all ethnic?

DARLENE

That's as irrelevant as deserve, Mr. Brand.  
(touching his leg)

May I?

BRAND

I don't want your help. What are you doing?

DARLENE

Palpating.

BRAND

Stop.

DARLENE

I want to get a sense of your muscle tone.

BRAND

Leave it. Don't touch.

DARLENE

(touching various parts of his body)  
Can you move your legs for me? Flex to one side, the other?

BRAND

You must be deaf in addition to overweight.

DARLENE

Flex your feet? Bend at the knee? Can you raise 'em?

BRAND

For F's sake, stop already.

DARLENE

Mr. Brand, the damage done to your lumbar vertebrae and surrounding tissue —

BRAND

Yeah, I don't care. I don't want your help.

DARLENE

It's going well, but scar tissue will form and thicken over time. We want to get ahead of that. Some people are fearful —

BRAND

I'm not fearful or afraid. I just don't want your help or anybody's help.

DARLENE

Can I ask plain why?

BRAND

Why? Because I trust my own powers of healing, that's why.

DARLENE

But that's exactly what we want to encourage.

BRAND

Stuff your encouragement.

DARLENE

Are you so angry that —

BRAND

Right.

DARLENE

So angry that —

BRAND

Right. Right. I am f-in' enraged to no end.



DARLENE

That's just it, to no end. I have one for you. In the end, you walk.

BRAND

Keep your hands to yourself, and I will heal myself.

DARLENE

Perhaps when your anger cools down.

BRAND

Oh, it won't.

DARLENE

Why not?

BRAND

The whole goddamn world feeds it.

DARLENE

Well, that's a heavy burden then. That's something, that's something no one can carry long without —

BRAND

Just cause. Without just cause.

DARLENE

Without bringing harm, either to themselves or others.

BRAND

The good nurse is a fount of wisdom.

DARLENE

The good nurse hopes you reconsider.

BRAND

And she can go now. We're done.

DARLENE

You're a consenting adult, and refusing therapy is a childish decision. Your behavior toward me personally has been childishly rude.

BRAND

Out. Outta here, now!

DARLENE

Come and get me.

BRAND

Out!

A door opens.

POLICE OFFICER

(offstage)

Nurse? You need assistance?

DARLENE

No, officer, no thank you. We're fine. I'm going.

BRAND

Even the cops are ethnic.

Exit Darlene. Sound: a door closes.

BRAND

Ain't sellin'. Come and get me. She's right. Ethnic cow.

Lights out briefly (perhaps with music), just long enough to rearrange a few things, and suggest some passage of time.

Scene 2

Lights up as before, an island of light surrounding Brand's hospital bed and its immediate area.

Brand is sitting upright and reading with concentration.

Enter Darlene.

DARLENE

Mr. Brand.

BRAND

You.

DARLENE

Me. Good morning. I have a name. You know it.

BRAND

Nurse Pain . . .

DARLENE

Uh-uh. No backslidin'. We've made some progress; let's hold on to it.

(crossing the space)

For someone who reads a lot, you keep your room rather dark.

(miming opening a curtain)

May I?

BRAND

You're gonna do what you're gonna do.

The space brightens.

DARLENE

The better to see you with.

(crossing to the bed, sanitizing her hands)

Ready to begin? Legs today. Flexing. Keep those limbs limber.

BRAND

You? Where's the other one?

DARLENE

Karla. You made her cry. I believe you were verbally harsh.

BRAND

I told her the truth.

DARLENE

But added venom.

BRAND

She was unprofessional.

DARLENE

You told her you were filing a complaint?

BRAND

I ought to; I should.

DARLENE

Ready? Try to relax. Try.

BRAND

Like it's easy.

DARLENE

Once you give it a real try, it gets easier.

Darlene has begun a systematic routine of flexing Brand's leg joints from the feet up — feet, ankles, knees, hips. This therapy continues throughout the scene.

DARLENE

Tell me if it's ever too much.

DARLENE & BRAND

It's already too much.

DARLENE

Karla's very competent, you know. Highly rated. She's quite professional.

BRAND

But still on probation, right?

DARLENE

You see, when a supine body flexes like this, it puts pressure on the abdomen, while loosening the pelvic floor, and certain results are almost inevitable.

BRAND

Almost. She was being deliberate.

DARLENE

Everyone passes gas.

BRAND

She laughed!

DARLENE

So? She's lighthearted. She was allowing you to feel at ease.

BRAND

Her English sucked.

DARLENE  
You could apologize.

BRAND  
I don't speak her native tongue.

DARLENE  
Your model English would do.

BRAND  
(in physical discomfort)  
Oh, that's —

DARLENE  
Too much?

BRAND  
Yeah. Ow —

DARLENE  
Not painful?

BRAND  
No, but —

DARLENE  
Let it go.

BRAND  
Fuh —

DARLENE  
Breathe into it.

BRAND  
Okay, okay. Oh. Oh. Ease, ease up and, and — I'll think, I'll think about it.

DARLENE  
Don't think. Let go.

BRAND  
Oh —

DARLENE

Relax and breathe.

BRAND

I'll think about telling her, telling her, oh, uh — Are you trying to hurt me?

DARLENE

That hurts?

BRAND

It's uncomfortable. C'mon, ease up.

DARLENE

Stop making useless noise until it becomes comfortable. Breathe.

BRAND

Ease up and, and there'll be no complaint, right? Umph. None. She was just —

DARLENE

Shhh, shhh, shhh, shhh, shhh. Breathe.

BRAND

I won't be filing any. Oh, wow — I mean it.

(as Darlene lets up on the flex)

Ahhhh.

DARLENE

What is Karla's native language?

BRAND

Some, I don't know, jibber-jabber.

DARLENE

Do you speak another language?

BRAND

Do I.

DARLENE

What do you speak?

BRAND

Nein. No other language. English is enough. It's universal. What do you speak?

DARLENE

Alas, I speak only American. (*In varying accents*) Amerrricahn. Ahmarakin. 'Meri-cun.

BRAND

You're not amusing.

DARLENE

Standup ain't my game.

BRAND

Then save everyone the embarrassment.

DARLENE

I'm a poor mimic, it's true. You too, I think.

BRAND

So I'm nobody's entertainer.

Sound: Brand passing gas. *Pffft!*

DARLENE

You ain't Mr. Goodtime.

BRAND

Sorry. Sorry, sorry, sorry.

DARLENE

No need. I told you, it's expected.

BRAND

I'm sorry on my behalf. It's humiliating.

DARLENE

It's human. We have our animal bodies.

BRAND

We're not all cows.

DARLENE

Or swine. Just human.

BRAND

It makes me feel helpless, so goddamn freakin' helpless.

DARLENE

You're not helpless, but you do need help.

BRAND

Like a freakin' child, like some kind of goddamn baby.

DARLENE

There are no goddamn babies, Mister Brand. No baby is goddamned ever, not one, ever. Nor is any child.

BRAND

What really gets to me, though, really gets to me, is feeling like this —

DARLENE

Dependent, almost like a child.

BRAND

— feeling like this with the likes of you.

DARLENE

Whoa-ho, you are lucky out of yo mind it's with the likes a me. Ha! Listen, I'm gonna tell you something, and you'd be wise to believe me when I say — listening? — when things get bad, then really bad, it's the nurses who pull you through.

Pause.

Sound: a little raspberry fart. *Ptt.*

Lights darken.

BRAND

Heh-heh.

Lights out.



Scene 3

Lights up as before on Brand's hospital bed and its immediate area. There are many more books, and now a folded walker and folded wheelchair stand nearby.

Sound: a door knock.

Enter Darlene.

DARLENE

Hello again. Ready to begin our session?

BRAND

Why always you?

DARLENE

Because I'm the only one who ever draws the short straw anymore.

BRAND

(making a show of effort to  
get up)

*Schmerzen im Arsch.*

DARLENE

And you said you had no command of German. C'mon, up.

Darlene unfolds the wheelchair and positions it for Brand to transfer from the bed, locking the wheels, etc.

BRAND

I don't want therapy today.

DARLENE

Always the same. I don't want, I can't. Don't, won't. Come on, now. Do not tarry.

BRAND

Right. Hands off please. You could bring the thing closer.

His attempt to transfer from the bed to the wheelchair is so shaky that he requires her support until he drops into the seat.

DARLENE

(during the action)

Treat this as your warm up. You'll get the hang.

BRAND

(in the chair)

Push.

She gives his chair a shove. He wheels ahead.

They cross to center stage, where a second island of light opens. The space contains a[n invisible] set of parallel bars. As Darlene crosses, lagging just a bit, she begins to hum a tune to herself, the outlines of "Lonesome Valley."

BRAND

Bars again. Pointless gymnastics.

Darlene locks the wheels to his chair, and helps him to the apparatus.

DARLENE

I know it takes great effort.

BRAND

You enjoy saying that.

DARLENE

You're making good progress.

BRAND

I've got the bars. Let go.

DARLENE

As much weight on your legs as you can.

Weak and uncertain, Brand begins to work his way along the length of the parallel bars, relying more on his arms. Darlene hums again from "Lonesome Valley."

BRAND

Step back. Don't crowd.

DARLENE

I have to spot you, Mr. Brand.

BRAND

From a reasonable distance. Don't crowd.

Darlene gives him a little more space. Brand struggles farther down the bars.

DARLENE

Legs. Less arm, more leg.

(singing absentmindedly, to herself)

You have got to walk / that lonesome valley / and you have got to walk it / by yourself . . .

BRAND

What is that? Are you taunting me — taunting me? Nurse? Spotter?

DARLENE

I'm with you, Mister Brand. Doin' fine.

BRAND

Is that your passive-aggressive way of expressing your resentment or disdain?

DARLENE

For real? What? You've lost me.

BRAND

That dreadful gospel you've been mumbling.

DARLENE

Alas, I don't have the pipes to sing gospel. (*singing*) Ain't nobody else / can walk it for you / (*speaking*) You mean that? That's a beautiful song. I love that song. Simple and straight forward and deep and — (*realizing*) Oh, I let it out loud.

BRAND

Like a farting housefly.

DARLENE

Excuse me, then. I was unaware.

BRAND

You were unaware that you were singing? *Those* lyrics? Do you sing in a dream state?

DARLENE

I hear songs. Lately, this one pulls me in.

BRAND

More than that, you sing in a dream state when you're supposed to be attending your patients.

DARLENE

I got you.

BRAND

I see negligence.

DARLENE

Keep on trying, but you can't pick a fight with me. I ain't bitin' your bait.

BRAND

With care like this, I might never recover.

DARLENE

I am doing my utmost to help you, to speed you to recovery. Because the sooner you recover —

BRAND

Stuck here forever with you people —

DARLENE

Oh, I won't have that. Nobody will. Walk or wheelchair, on schedule, you'll be out and on your way.

BRAND

I'd run if I could. Sprint. I'd bolt.

DARLENE

First steps first. Put your mind to the task.

BRAND

I feel your disdain. You banter, you joke, but underneath —

DARLENE

There is no underneath here. Walk.

BRAND

*Darlene*. Be honest. You know who I am. You know what I believe.

DARLENE

In healing, we put that aside.

BRAND

Oh, you put on a good show. You never once brought it up. But really, underneath, for what happened, you must genuinely hate me. Even if it's just a tiny, glowing little ember of hate, nestled deep down inside, tucked all cuddly soft away, you, all of you here, genuinely hate me.

DARLENE

I don't hate.

BRAND

No? Not bigots, not brutes?

DARLENE

Hatred doesn't quench hatred, it only flames itself to more destructive fires.

BRAND

Umm. Biblical.

DARLENE

It's a waste of life.

BRAND

You judge, though.

DARLENE

You shot a boy, a child.

BRAND

Accidentally.

DARLENE

My judgement is limited to this, what we do here, your therapy. My judgment here is professional, assessing your therapeutic needs and progress only. Try to rely less on your arms, more on your legs.

BRAND

You keep touching me.

DARLENE

Place your foot. Lean into it. Shift your hips. Carry the weight there.

BRAND

I'm reading more and more about the warming Earth.

DARLENE

Walk. Walk walk walk.

BRAND

They keep saying we have time, we still have time, but I think it's already too late. I think the Titanic is hitting the iceberg and getting torn open as we speak. I think that within twenty years or so the human species will be facing these massive, tectonic changes, and it'll be in the cold, cold water.

DARLENE

And the hot, hot air. Walk. It's happened before.

BRAND

Political, economic, demographic upheavals — all environmentally triggered. We feel the rumblings already.

DARLENE

It seems we do.

BRAND

Bigger storms, more of 'em. Bigger fires, more of 'em. Crop yields collapsing, diseases emerging, borders softening, illegal immigrations everywhere. People think, oh, it's just gonna get warmer. Great, I'll grow wine grapes in Maine. No, no, warmer brings *all kinds* of changes. You know what likes warmth, for instance? Termites.

DARLENE

There's something I hadn't thought of.

BRAND

In Africa there are termite species that live underground in these hot, dry areas — I mean, the ground's almost bare because the bugs have eaten everything — and above ground they build these towers that look like fairytale toadstools about that high, almost a foot, and they go on for acres and acres.

DARLENE

Have you been there and seen them yourself?

BRAND

They make them out of mud that bakes in the sun and turns as hard as stone. You could break your foot on one. And you know what these giant stone mushrooms are?

DARLENE

Ventilators.

BRAND

(deflated)

Eh, yeah. Huh. Ventilators. Fuh— how —? You could've said something else.

(recovering)

They cool off the nest and, like, exchange the air.

DARLENE

Amazing.

BRAND

Yeah, but just wait till they start moving into this part of the world.

DARLENE

It's good you're prepared.

BRAND

I'm not, nobody is. Wait till it hits the fan when Not In My Backyard in Concord gets run over. It's true, the changes to come are going to be catastrophic on a scale compatible to the incineration of the Cretaceous Age or Noah's flood.

DARLENE

Comparable.

BRAND

Com— Oh. Ohhhhhh. You're sparring with me.

DARLENE

No, you're discoursing. We're having a kind of conversation.

BRAND

The ventilators, and now this, compatible, comparable. I feel like I was just kinda sucker punched.

DARLENE

To your point, I can guess this much. We survived the flood, if it occurred, and the extinction of dinosaurs, didn't that clear the way for birds and mammals today?

BRAND

I'd like to rest.

DARLENE

Can you rest upright?

BRAND

No. The chair, please?

DARLENE

This is something you can do. Just force yourself a little. Take your time.

BRAND

You're being vindictive. I'm taking note.

DARLENE

Balance. That's how you rest.

BRAND

Do you know *why* people hate? In general.

DARLENE

Don't I.

BRAND

People hate what they fear. Find what people hate, and you discover what they fear.

DARLENE

Why not look first for what they love?

BRAND

I knew you'd say something Quaker like that. There's no love in the future. Everyone fears it.

DARLENE

Mr. Brand, concentrate on your exercise. Distressful thinking is only going to hold you back.



BRAND

Only an idiot can think only peaceful thoughts.

DARLENE

Think from inside your body.

BRAND

Think from inside . . .

DARLENE

Use an image.

BRAND

Oh, my descending colon has an idea!

DARLENE

A constructive image. Try it.

BRAND

The crap you talk.

DARLENE

Make it to the end without the bars, and I'll shut up.

BRAND

There are two kinds of hate.

DARLENE

Walk. Walk . . . Walk like a man / walk like a man . . .

BRAND

Two kinds.

DARLENE

Walk it, man.

BRAND

The kind from fear we just discussed, then the kind with a standard to uphold, a culture to preserve.

DARLENE

C'mon. Show the man.

BRAND

It comes from above, the pursuit of an ideal, the need to keep that ideal from being despoiled, from being —.

DARLENE

Show me the man.

BRAND

It's this kind that enables a culture to survive catastrophe. Separatism. Selective pressures of survival, evolutionary factors.

DARLENE

Show me the walk —

BRAND

I hold you all in contempt.

DARLENE

(stopped)

Oh my. Who's y'all?

BRAND

Just about everyone.

DARLENE

Me? Me too? Even me? You hold me in contempt? I wonder why. I've been professional with you throughout. I've been generous with my time and efforts.

BRAND

She's been generous.

DARLENE

I've tried to engage you —

BRAND

*You engage me?*

DARLENE

Someone doesn't hate you, when you expect to be hated, and someone has been generous, whether or not you deserved generosity, is *that* what you're contemptuous about?

BRAND

I recognize your attempted professionalism.

DARLENE

Kindness really sours your day. It just curdles your milk. You don't know what to do with it.

BRAND

It's a waste. And you overdo it.

DARLENE

You hold me in contempt. Do I frighten you?

BRAND

(sharply)

Why should you be kind to me? I'm no part of your idea of the ideal.

DARLENE

I don't have an ideal, Mr. Brand. I only have what is.

BRAND

Oh, d-e-e-e-p. Enlightened even.

DARLENE

Listen to yourself —

BRAND

Simple. And straightforward. And deep. Hm. Hm.

DARLENE

— ready to lash out at everything, anything around you.

BRAND

I was run down and shot in the back. Run down, and shot in the back —

DARLENE

Oh, no no no —

BRAND

— by a mob —

DARLENE

— don't you cry victim, un-uh. I've stood a good deal of your shit, mister, but I won't stand that.

BRAND

I will report you.

DARLENE

Do. File a big complaint. Get back in that chair, and I'll take you straight to my supervisor, right down the hall. Straight to my supervisor. That's all you gotta do. Watch her not even slap my wrist, but tell me to be more cognizant of myself. And watch them put a tighter watch on you, mister. Watch the man draw close. All this loose monitoring? You can see it get real tight, real fast.

BRAND

If I fall, it's on your head.

DARLENE

But on your cranky skull first. Now, c'mon. You know I won't let you fall.

BRAND

Oh. You're better than me. She's better than me! Ha!

DARLENE

I'm kinder.

BRAND

Weaker.

DARLENE

Can you make it to the chair? (*positioning herself*) I would like to support you.

BRAND

(out of strength)

Don't — Don't touch. Don't touch me anymore. Please. I do not want your assis—

Darlene catches him as, reaching the end, he sags between the bars.

DARLENE

Get your knees under.

Get off me. BRAND

Let's go to all fours. DARLENE

Now's your chance to plant me on my face. BRAND

It's tempting. Arms down. DARLENE

She sets him on all fours.

Give me a sec. I'll help you up. DARLENE  
(winded)

I'd rather crawl. BRAND

Rest. DARLENE

Oh, *therapy*. This is your grade of professionalism. BRAND

Work with me. DARLENE  
(ready to support him)

Your hands — BRAND

To a kneeling position first, then one leg, then the other. DARLENE

You will lose your job. BRAND

Start with the right. Up now. DARLENE

He stands, with Darlene's help. She guides him onto the chair.

DARLENE

Settled?

BRAND

Yeah, yeah. Don't . . . Ha. Don't, don't you, ha — please don't f-n do that again.

Darlene unlocks the chair and slowly wheels him back to his room, through the dark space between one island of light and the other.

DARLENE

The sooner you recover, Mr. Brand —

BRAND

I know what you're going to say. My arraignment.

DARLENE

(singing for herself)

/ Jesus had to walk /

BRAND

Oh. Ha. I get it. It's not just me between bars, it's me between bars between *bars* —

DARLENE

/ That lonesome valley /

BRAND

— that lonesome valley. Heh.

DARLENE

/ And he had to walk it /

BRAND

Brava.

DARLENE

(*Pointedly*) By hisself /

They arrive by his bedside.

BRAND

The sooner I recover, the sooner my arraignment.

DARLENE

You forget you were arraigned *in absentia*.

BRAND

Self defense. I tried to stand my ground. Everything else was incidental.

DARLENE

You've been arraigned, Mr. Brand. The sooner you recover, the sooner your trial.

Lights out.

Scene 4

Lights up on Brand, dressed, sitting on his bed, with the folded walker nearby.

Enter Darlene.

DARLENE

All set? Good.

She turns and walks ahead to center stage. Lights up on the middle space, revealing a treadmill. Brand stands, unfolds the walker, and lags well behind.

BRAND

Do you read, Darlene? Not — I'm not asking if you're literate. Obviously, you —. Better phrased, are you well-read? You haven't read Cèline, I imagine. A Frenchman, persecuted for his writing. They threw him in jail. His books were banned. He was nationally disgraced. And this was Second World War, not so long ago.

DARLENE

A Nazi sympathizer. Eugenecist?

BRAND

The man had to flee his country. And, a slight correction, fascist, not Nazi.

DARLENE

Generic, not brand.

Brand arrives and looks put upon.

BRAND

Really?

DARLENE

Treadmill day. Step up.

BRAND

(boarding the [imagined] machine)

I just walked all the way here, only to walk in place.

DARLENE

Preferred setting?

BRAND

It's all the same.

DARLENE

(programming the machine)

The woods.

BRAND

(mounting the treadmill)

I want to go back to my fascist reading.

DARLENE

Warm-up pace.

BRAND

(walking)

I hate these things because they embody the frustration of getting nowhere.

DARLENE

You're on your feet, walking, that's somewhere.

BRAND

Are you at all curious about why I'm reading an author like Celine?

DARLENE

Pick up the pace?



BRAND

Well, let me warm up first, you mind? (*gaining stride*) I'm piecing things together. My reading about climate . . . migrations . . . technological gaps . . . all connected to my reading about how fascism . . . works . . . and about militaristic . . . governments. And eugenics. Interesting, no? Hello? Hello?

DARLENE

Yes?

BRAND

What's wrong?

DARLENE

Let's level up.

She increases his speed.

BRAND

Did that song pull you in? You disappear into the valley song again?

(getting no reaction)

You're mad at me about something. She's finally mad at me. What is it, what did it?

DARLENE

I'm not angry.

BRAND

You're not listening when I talk to you. You're being clipped. You're being impersonal.

DARLENE

Perhaps you're over thinking?

BRAND

No, something's off. Be that way.

DARLENE

Focus on your walk. Feel every part, heel, ankle, knee, hip —

BRAND

That's more like how you used to be.

DARLENE

— align.

What got you mad?  
BRAND

Fluid transfer of weight.  
DARLENE

Your face, your expression is different.  
BRAND

Knees lifting . . . .  
DARLENE

Hm. But not your eyes.  
BRAND

(sharply)  
DARLENE  
This is not about me. Please stop doing that.

Stop doing what?  
BRAND

Trying to switch the focus on what we're doing from you to me.  
DARLENE

I'm merely inquiring —  
BRAND

We have forty-five minutes of therapy time, let's use it wisely.  
DARLENE

To walk nowhere. You've been friendly up till now.  
BRAND

For the record, I have not been personal ever in our relationship as nurse and patient. I have always spoken and acted by the standards of my profession and this facility.  
DARLENE

You said it yourself, you were generous and kind.  
BRAND

In a professional capacity, as your nurse.  
DARLENE

BRAND

No, no, you gave of yourself. You went beyond. You didn't hesitate to point that out, either, that you went beyond, and specifically for me.

DARLENE

Ready to cardio?

BRAND

I didn't make it easy, I know, but you seemed to just brush it all off.

DARLENE

Speed-walk.

BRAND

Go ahead, punish me.

Brand's pace increases.

BRAND

Okay, okay, fast enough, fast enough.

DARLENE

It's level three. You've been higher.

BRAND

I was younger.

DARLENE

Reading wore out your legs.

BRAND

Celine. Celine ticked you off.

DARLENE

(singing absentmindedly)

/ You have got to walk /

BRAND

You kept coming back when no one else would.

DARLENE

(a variation)

/ You have got to walk /

BRAND

I ought to apologize, Darlene.

DARLENE

/ that lonesome valley /

BRAND

For the way I've sometimes spoken to you.

DARLENE

/ and you have got to walk it /

BRAND

I can be blunt.

DARLENE

/ by yourself /

BRAND

It was the pain talking.

DARLENE

/ ain't nobody else /

BRAND

That and not knowing . . . not knowing how things would turn out.

DARLENE

/ can walk it for you /

BRAND

We've grown into a stupid country, Darlene, a country populated by more stupid people than it can bear. Over fed. Over stimulated. Over worked and over worried. Over marketed. Over medicated. Over legislated, over taxed. Over privileged. Over played. Look at the jackass fools in office.

DARLENE

(humming the song)

Hmm-hm-hmm-hm-hmmm. [Da-de-da-de-dum.]

BRAND

Both parties bought and sold. All the big government dark money can buy. We're not preparing for the termites. We're staying greedy. Stupid. Stupid, and compulsively self-destructive, and f-n greedy.

DARLENE

Balance your stride.

BRAND

We had a responsibility to lead the world through the crisis to come, but we've lost our lead on the future. We've given it away, to the Asians. And when I say Asians, you know who I mean. We've thrown away our chance to shape the world order after the chaos of flood and famine, war and disease. Chaos is coming. The hull's tearing open, the icy sea's rushing in. This beautiful boat's gonna sink.

DARLENE

Dictators. You admire dictators.

BRAND

Autocratic strongmen, with vision.

DARLENE

I see goodness happen every day.

BRAND

Well, you've walked the valley and seen the light.

DARLENE

I see heartbreak. I've seen death. Unjust death, ugly death. I've seen hate and brutality. I know the mist of fear that permeates the air around us. I breathe it in, an unease, a dis-ease, the uncertainty of the future. Still, I see goodness every day.

BRAND

Goodness is a kiddy's sand castle on the beach. It gets wiped with the tide.

DARLENE

When ultimately needed, it becomes the tide.

BRAND

Ah. Aha. Can we pause? Can we take a break? Behold, a true miracle, I *can* walk!

DARLENE

This should be routine.

BRAND

Nurse Nietzsche. I get Nurse Nietzsche.

DARLENE

You have the stamina.

BRAND

Let me slow down. You know very well (*beginning to pant*) what can happen if I over-extend . . . myself. You could jump . . . to level five . . . and try to kill me.

DARLENE

You'd be stronger for it.

His pace slackens.

BRAND

We are about to witness the global scramble of our species to adapt to a hostile Earth. What kind of government do you think it's going to take to fortify a developed country as these crises overwhelm democracies?

DARLENE

Democracies might be more resilient than you think.

BRAND

They're tearing themselves apart everywhere.

DARLENE

Within people reside latent agencies of grace.

BRAND

Within who agencies of *what and where?* Of *whom?*

DARLENE

You heard the words.

BRAND

No. No, no, no — survivors survive by the right of might. By natural selection.

DARLENE

I'm not talking about something otherworldly.

BRAND

Say it again.

DARLENE

Within people reside latent agencies of grace.

BRAND

How is that not otherworldly, like angels swooping down?

DARLENE

Within. From the heart. It has nothing to do with angels without.

BRAND

What does that even mean?

DARLENE

It means that at some point the will to do good for other people becomes overwhelming.

BRAND

After these compound global catastrophes have done their work and billions are dead.

DARLENE

I'm not denying that terrible times might lie ahead. What I know is that in terrible times there are people who will rise to goodness.

BRAND

Yeh. And far too few.

DARLENE

Eventually whole tides. It starts with simple kindness.

BRAND

Are you shi— You have got to be razzing my wazoo.

DARLENE

We can drop it. I've already said too much.

BRAND

This is existential danger for the planet we're talking about. Whatever you think it is, however inspired, simple kindness won't cut it. Natural selection favors order.

DARLENE

Bigger storms, bigger fires, crop failures, floods, famines and virulent pandemics? Remember the big rock and the dinosaurs? Add wars of genocide, coups, Russian thuggery. That tells you something about the dependability of order. I'm going to tell

DARLENE (Cont'd)

you this, and it's the last thing I'll say about it. I feel for people who have never felt an agency of grace lift their heart.

BRAND

Hell on Earth is *acomín'*, Nurse Darlene. Truly, grace won't be lifting many hearts. We —

DARLENE

No. Stop. You stop right there. Again, you don't know. You've never felt it. You can't imagine what it is because you've never had an experience like it.

BRAND

Being a little too sane.

DARLENE

I feel pity for people who are blind to the agencies of grace in this world. I cannot imagine a sadder condition.

Brand shakes his head. He nearly growls.

DARLENE

What now?

BRAND

Meaning me? *I'm* the blind one? *I'm* the sad one? You hold pity for *me*? I wonder why.

DARLENE

You misunderstand. I meant —

BRAND

No, I don't misunderstand.

DARLENE

I don't like your tone.

BRAND

I don't like your pity.

DARLENE

I was speaking generally, and —



BRAND

Pity's just another form of condescension, don't you think? You know what's a sad condition? Hoping blindly in ignorance, hoping for some idiotic universal niceness, that's what. Being Goldilocks naive.

DARLENE

You are heading way out of line. And this is over.

Darlene shuts down the treadmill.

BRAND

Oh, c'mon —

DARLENE

Step down.

BRAND

I want to finish the exercise, my wonderful walk in the woods.

DARLENE

No, no games anymore. The session's ended.

She turns to exit.

BRAND

Wait now!

He reaches to grab her by the arm. Darlene wrenches herself free in a fury.

DARLENE

Don't you — don't you — *dare*.

BRAND

(hands up)

I'm just asking you to hold on a minute.

DARLENE

You don't touch me like that, ever.

BRAND

I'm only asking you to listen.

DARLENE

We are done.

BRAND

We were done before you started, and I tried to tell you that. What a laugh. Who are you to pity me? Look at you, dumpy and dull in this dead end place, trusting that agents of little good deeds will save the world.

DARLENE

None of this is about me, and you need to stop and step down.

BRAND

(a realization)

That's what you were practicing. You thought you could pull it off. You thought, I can be an agency of grace, and through pure goodness and patience I can transform this evil man. I can make him good. My kindness can work magic. You say it's not about you, but underneath it really is, isn't it? It's like you're an alcoholic.

(gasps)

You are! You're a recovering alcoholic! This has been all of your twelve steps put into practice. You meant to test yourself, to prove your goodness, to validate your complete recovery, even your saintliness. By withstanding me! By saving me. Am I right? Did I hit it? How else could you do it? How else could you have kept coming back? All the kindness and generosity you're bestowing, and it's really just to compensate for your own insufficiencies.

DARLENE

You fool.

BRAND

How pathetic. I shot a kid, and you still play the madonna mammy —

Darlene restarts the treadmill at top speed, sweeping Brand's feet from beneath him.

BRAND

(*ad lib* a yelp)

*Aggh!*

She turns the machine off even before Brand fully (and loudly) slams onto the treadmill surface.

He lays groaning. Darlene stands above him.

DARLENE

Hear me, you husk of a thing, you weaseling worm of a man.

BRAND

(face planted)

I'm gonna sue —

DARLENE

You devoid of empathy have cursed yourself to feel unloved.

BRAND

— sue your ugly ass.

DARLENE

You without compassion are your own source of wretchedness.

BRAND

You failed your own test.

DARLENE

If you have not love, you are nothing, and your hate will take you only to oblivion.

Lights cut to blackout.

End ACT I

ACT II

Scene 1

Setting: Darlene's apartment. As abstract as the hospital settings, defined by light and, in this setting, little more than a coat rack, a kitchen table, two chairs and coffee mugs.

Open with a dark stage.

Offstage: Darlene humming an up-tempo, upbeat version of "Lonesome Valley."

Sound: a door lock opening, the door opening, then closing.

Sound: a light switch.

Lights up on stage right. Darlene, dressed in street clothes, humming, enters carrying a grocery bag. Within the cone of light she hangs up her hat and coat and kicks off her shoes, [exchanging them for slippers,] then picks up the bag and turns to walk cross stage.

In the dark across stage a light flashes on, a handheld flashlight aimed upward from the chest, Halloween style, shining on Brand's face.

Darlene starts, drops the bag and, in her fright stands with open palms facing forward, one arm bent upward, the other pointed earthward.

DARLENE

(a whisper)

Bohdisattva!

BRAND

Hey, I, I didn't want to turn the lights on and make you suspicious. Do you want to sit? You need to catch your breath. Something to drink?

DARLENE

Y-you should leave. Y-you should get out of here now.

BRAND

I know, there's a stay away order.

DARLENE

This is breaking and entry. This is — How —?

BRAND

Oh, you're right. You can stand your ground. Shoot me, if you must.

DARLENE

Please go.

BRAND

I had to see you.

DARLENE

No, no you don't need to see me. You need to go now. You made me jump out of my skin.

BRAND

If I'd called or tried to write or something, or knocked at the door, you wouldn't let me in, would you?

DARLENE

Like you say, there's a court order.

BRAND

What choice did I have? There are things I have to tell you, things you have to hear.

DARLENE

You have invaded my home.

BRAND

I'm not threatening you.

DARLENE

Your, your very presence here . . . uninvited and, and in, in defiance of a restraining or-order —

BRAND

Then —

DARLENE

— threatens me.

BRAND

Then I ask you, please invite me to stay. I'll say what I have to say and then leave you in peace. Invite me, yes? . . . Too much to ask? I understand. You're genuinely scared? Of me?

DARLENE

I don't understand what you think you're doing.

BRAND

Please — I'm sorry. Please don't be — No tears, okay? Please? I really don't mean to be a threat to you. I'm nobody you have to be scared of now. That business with the flashlight? That was stupid. That was — I was feeling awkward and so I tried to make a joke of it, being there, and that was really stupid because it backfired and got you scared. I mean, it was only at the last minute that I realized you might be upset, so —

DARLENE

Upset that you should be waiting for me in the dark in my home, when you've been ordered to stay away.

BRAND

So I could actually talk to you. So . . . I am sorry. Invite me please? Make tea?

DARLENE

Tea?

BRAND

Though I'm more of a coffee guy.

DARLENE

Are you armed, Mr. Brand?

BRAND

Me? No, no, I, I'm not sure I'll ever handle a gun again, you know? No, I'm not armed. I'm not here as your enemy.

He picks up the grocery bag and follows Darlene cross stage.

Lights up center stage on a kitchen table and chairs. On the table: a coffee pot and two mugs.

DARLENE

I'm expecting a friend to visit.

BRAND

When?

DARLENE

Sometime later.

BRAND

So we have a little while. Male or female, your friend? You making dinner?

DARLENE

I plan to, yes.

BRAND

For a boyfriend or girlfriend?

DARLENE

He's not, not a boyfriend. We're just getting to know each other.

BRAND

Wow, you're finding love. Never too late. What's he do?

DARLENE

Do?

BRAND

For a living.

DARLENE

He's, he's with the police.

BRAND

A cop? How'd you meet a cop?

DARLENE

Through, through work.

BRAND

You met him at the hospital? He bring somebody in, or — Wait, wait, is he one of the guys who — really? Outside *my* door? For real?

DARLENE

Actually, yes.

BRAND

That's fantastic! Kismet, right? In a way, I guess, you could say I brought you together, or had a part in it. Man. That's great. Do you still see him at work?

DARLENE

You might remember that I no longer work at the hospital.

BRAND

Yeah, but that's crazy!

DARLENE

You know I resigned.

BRAND

Crazier still.

DARLENE

I failed you —

BRAND

No —

DARLENE

— violated my oath.

BRAND

You know you were only —

DARLENE

I lost my temper and put a patient at risk. Technically, committed battery.



BRAND

I deserved battery. Even worse.

DARLENE

What was it we said about deserve?

BRAND

You say it doesn't factor, I say it does. You were provoked. But for f's sake, I didn't report you. I didn't say a thing, not a word to anyone. Nobody had to know anything about it, and I don't think they would've fired you anyway.

DARLENE

They should've and would've.

BRAND

Nobody blamed you. There was applause. They were sorry to lose you.

DARLENE

I think so.

BRAND

You didn't have to quit.

DARLENE

I resigned.

BRAND

Quit, resigned — Yeah, okay, I see a difference. I see it as you would see it. But, really, don't you think you took the integrity thing a little too far, I mean, even into self-destructive mode?

DARLENE

It was the right decision for me.

BRAND

You and only you. You working now? Getting by?

DARLENE

Doing fine.

BRAND

Savings? Uh, I'm being nosey.

DARLENE  
D-doing fine.

BRAND  
Catching up on your reading?

DARLENE  
No fascists, though.

BRAND  
What was that you said before, when you came in and saw me?

DARLENE  
I don't remember what I said.

BRAND  
You did this thing with your hands. Body-something.

DARLENE  
Bodhisattva? Did I say it aloud?

BRAND  
You hear a song in your head, you sing it out loud . You hear a word, you say it.  
What is it? I've heard the word, but I don't remember what it is.

DARLENE  
I don't want my last words to be evil or foul.

BRAND  
Of course not, you want to go out sounding good. Everybody does. No doubt you will. I'll go out cursing. So, what makes it good?

DARLENE  
Makes good?

BRAND  
The word, what makes it special, protective, you know?

DARLENE  
It's, it's a Buddhist concept. A bodhisattva is, is, is an enlightened being that defers its entry to Nirvana in order, in order to, to help others toward en-enlightenment.

Are you crying?  
BRAND

I'm all right. It's all right.  
DARLENE

Nirvana is heaven?  
BRAND

Not quite the same. Both eternal places, but . . . .  
DARLENE

What's the difference?  
BRAND

That's hard to explain. And I can't say I fully understand it.  
DARLENE

You're smarter than you let on, you can do it. I'm smart enough to follow.  
BRAND

Heaven, heaven is — it's a Christian concept, and it's monotheistic, so at the center of heaven is a single, eh, patriarchal god.  
DARLENE

You didn't call to Jesus. You called to this other one.  
BRAND

So, Nirvana is Buddhist, and Buddhism is polytheistic, eh, many gods in many forms, and there really is no central god-head. It's more about unity of being, all things in the end being one thing, whereas in Christianity it's still about hierarchy.  
DARLENE

How can all things be one thing? That's just logically . . . . It's a trick.  
BRAND

All life is one life.  
DARLENE

Say what again?  
BRAND

DARLENE

That's an example. All life is one life.

BRAND

Ahh. Yeah, I think it would take me a lifetime to find the sense in that one too [either].

DARLENE

It's not a great example, but all, it's all — it's all I can think of at the moment.

BRAND

Well, can you explain that for me?

DARLENE

I don't think I can. I really don't think I can right now.

BRAND

You did all right with Nirvana.

DARLENE

You and I lead individual lives, and no one would mistake us for one another, and hopefully no one would mistake me for that coleus plant there —

BRAND

Hopefully.

DARLENE

— but we three, and anything that's ever lived on Earth, grew originally from, eh, call it a primal brew of electro-chemical interactions that became self-sustaining and self — what, self proliferating. That one process of, that process of interaction has been going on ever since, uninterrupted — a few billion years? All of life, one process, one ongoing, eh, chain reaction.

BRAND

Hm-hm. I don't know.

DARLENE

My head —

BRAND

Still nerves? Tea hasn't calmed you down?

It has, it has.

DARLENE

You want me to go.

BRAND

You know I do.

DARLENE

Coffee's good. Do you know why I asked you about the b-word guy?

BRAND

The bodhisattva?

DARLENE

Right. Because I thought talking about it would calm you down. I thought if you felt free to say his name it would calm you down. And it did, it did for a little while. Then you got nervous again. Do you think you'll be in — *re-in* — do you think you'll be re-in-car-nated as one?

BRAND

Of course not.

DARLENE

You'd get my vote. What about me?

BRAND

Do you believe in, in reincarnation?

DARLENE

I don't know what happens. I guess I believe that something lives on, but what, how, where, I don't have a clue.

BRAND

Your soul?

DARLENE

You might call it that, I don't know what to call it.

BRAND

DARLENE

But you believe in an afterlife.

BRAND

Don't you? Yes, no? Any doubts? Awww. How sly not to answer. As if you could be mysterious about it.

DARLENE

Can you, can you tell me what it is you need to say, what, what it is you need me to hear?

BRAND

In time, in time, sure. I'm trying to set it up properly. I'm building the argument.

DARLENE

Argument?

BRAND

Case. The case. I'm building the case I mean to present to you.

DARLENE

I just don't understand.

BRAND

You will, you will. It'll all be crystal clear, I promise. Utterly transparent. I just, lemme — You know that in about thirty-five years we're going to hit ten billion people on the planet. Ten billion *sapiens*. Leaving not a whole lot of room for everything else. The air's getting hotter and the seas are rising, but the real problem, the real problem is too many goddamn *sapiens*. You look at it all graphed out and for centuries the human population has been slowly, slowly rising, and then you hit the industrial age, those coal burning factories, and that population slope tilts and starts to climb, and you get into the mid-to-late twentieth century and that slope shoots up like a steeple, this incredible population spike, which is going to hit about ten billion in a few years. That's maladaptation.

DARLENE

You know, I —

BRAND

We have this evolved behavior to expand and expand, grow and grow, that no longer benefits us, because we've out grown the planet's recourse to balance. Everything else in Nature expands and contracts, expands and contracts, but not us, no, we only grow and grow, get bigger and bigger, demand more and more. You know a good

BRAND (Cont'd)

example of maladaptation behavior? There's a species of armadillo that jumps two to three feet straight up from the ground when it feels threatened. It's partly a feint move, makes the animal look bigger than it is and could appear to be the start of an attack, a counter-threat, and it's main purpose they think is, one, to get immediately out of the usual strike zone of a natural predator and, two, to startle whatever the threat is, a predator, an ocelot, confuse it and buy the armadillo time to escape or, what, encapsulate.

DARLENE

That's hard for me to follow.

BRAND

We'll, it must've worked pretty well throughout time, but then *sapiens* built roads and then built a whole lot of Peterbuilts to drive on 'em. So when a jumping armadillo crossing the Texas highway feels threatened by a speeding Peterbuilt, what startled the ocelot becomes a whopping mistake, as two to three feet off the ground puts the armadillo right in the sweet spot of the strike zone.

DARLENE

How sad to think on it.

BRAND

The meteor, right? Unforeseen alterations of circumstance. The rock from space applied to a species of armadillo. Nature's unforgiving. There are no excuses or pleas. She won't forgive us. Can't. That population spike, it's unsustainable. The world population has got to come down. It's maladaptive. We have become our own Peterbuilt.

DARLENE

Human beings can be forgiving.

BRAND

That's just the first point I want to make. There are too many people. That's the true underlying cause of a warming planet, and a human die off is coming. The second point addresses the first. With a massive die off, even though it takes place over decades and decades, world order is gonna crumble. After that it might be rebuilt over the century to come — there might be a new golden age — but first things are gonna crumble. Governments are going to erode and fall under the pressures of dealing with permanently flooded shores, famine, pestilence, super-storm disasters, compound crises that will eradicate public trust in law and order. There will be wars of exclusion and wars of invasion. Genocides. It's not hard to imagine. You've seen

BRAND (Cont'd)

how a single pandemic strain of virus can pretty much gut punch a global economy, imagine two of them running concurrently, along with a war that disrupts a world food supply, along with insurrectionists who want to take their treatment of women back to the second century.

DARLENE

Goodness fights for its life. It can fight fiercely.

BRAND

That lonesome valley is gonna be full of folks marchin' through. Mass migrations across oceans and continents. They've started already. Africans northward. Look at how pissed off the Europeans are, letting people drown, letting children drown, rather than let them ashore, and it's only starting. You know, all kinds of populations, diverse populations, are going to pour together — the Thai next to the Honduran next to the Hutu next to the man in Ohio. There will be global miscegenation. Global miscegenation.

DARLENE

You're of European descent?

BRAND

Ninety-nine point four percent.

DARLENE

Then chances are your genetic makeup is more than one percent Neanderthal. Miscegenation made you.

BRAND

We got over it. How — *how* do you know these things? Ventilators, Neanderthals? What the —? It's a little too — I mean —

DARLENE

It's just cultural scan.

BRAND

And what's that?

DARLENE

I read a lot. Check different media. Superficially.



BRAND

Huh. Print, broadcast media, [inter]net? Yeah, that's what I do. Scan. Scan, scan, scan. There are no pets here, nothing living.

DARLENE

The plants. Me.

BRAND

No animals. For some reason I expected, I don't know, a menagerie.

DARLENE

"Several of nature's people do / I know, and they know me. / I feel for them a transport / of cordiality."

BRAND

What's that?

DARLENE

Emily Dickinson. A snippet.

BRAND

You're tearing up again.

DARLENE

No, no. It's, it's a beautiful poem, that's all. And I love that phrase, transport, the double meaning, you know?

BRAND

I want to get back to this. Genetics. Some geneticists — this one gets me — some geneticists have speculated, theorized, that just three generations from 2050, just three, every living human being will be part Chinese. A teensy part, every living human being will possess a percentage of Chinese genes. They're emigrating like crazy already. Think for a moment. African genes. Hispanic genes. Hindu genes. Arab genes. Magyar genes. On and on. All infec— all hybridized, and each and every genetic heritage, so modified, will be lost forever. To the f-n Chinese!

DARLENE

Always — will hearts be lifted. Maybe one day yours.

BRAND

One thing —. You'll like this. A warmer climate, natural selection. What kind of skin does better in heat? Affordable electricity can't be taken for granted any more in

BRAND (Cont'd)

the future, uh-uh, air conditioning's gonna cost. Energy's gonna get ex-pen-sive. What kind of skin is best adapted to daylong exposure to hot sun?

DARLENE

Are, are you concerned that races will blend? We'll evolve into some kind of racial homogeny?

BRAND

Racial —?

DARLENE

That humans will be blended into one race?

BRAND

That's not gonna happen.

DARLENE

It already has. We are one race, with minor variations.

BRAND

Breeds. There'll be a divide, a definite split. A technological split too. One side might be all blended, kind of Asian-like, but the other —.

DARLENE

Pure? Hmm. And people of color?

BRAND

I've been saying, I've been telling you. The Chinese are going to own everything, everything, even people's heritage.

DARLENE

Such bleakness.

BRAND

It doesn't stop there.

DARLENE

No.

BRAND

The catastrophes soon to come, the breakdowns in social order, the horrors of human die-off, do you know what else the middle of the century will see? The Singularity.

BRAND (Cont'd)

Just when all the levees of law are about to break, general AI is going to awaken. The Singularity will appear. You know what that means, right? Artificial Intelligence become autonomously sentient. A self-aware non-biological entity that learns exponentially. An alien being. Of our own making. And nothing says it's going to be a rescuing angel whose heart's been uplifted, oh no. It won't have to walk that lonesome valley, like we do. We have no clue as to how it will behave, or what it'll think of itself, or of us, but it will inherit the Earth we destroy as our home.

DARLENE

No wonder you're scared.

BRAND

I'm goddamn terrified and I'm goddamn pissed! People are going to put their faith in this thing, ask it to save *sapiens* from itself. They're going to see it as their messiah.

DARLENE

You believe that people will cede control of their lives to it.

BRAND

Voluntarily. Or they might not have a choice. Unlike any messiah before, the Singularity messiah will be present, front and center, its power manifest. It will learn how to repair itself and sustain itself, *replicate* itself. It'll set up defenses, structure things to insure its own well-being. That is something only a practiced authoritarian government will be strong enough to negotiate with.

DARLENE

Your, your answer to all that is —

BRAND

You can say it.

DARLENE

Fascism and some kind of eugenics?

BRAND

In a nutshell. Inevitable.

DARLENE

I don't know what to say anymore.

BRAND

It's just hard truth. I didn't say I like it anymore than you. Hey, here is the most far out thing, the most far out thing I can think of — what if the Singularity does this for *sapiens*? Eventually we'll have to get off this planet, right? I mean, not just burnt up resources here, but the expanding sun, you know, becoming a red giant and consuming everything up to Mars.

DARLENE

You're worried about events — That's some five billion years away.

BRAND

No, what I mean is the Singularity could do it.

DARLENE

Could what?

BRAND

Could take us, could take all the life that's on Earth, to another Earth, to a — a —

DARLENE

An exoplanet.

BRAND

That matches this one.

DARLENE

It figures all the logistics and does the math and invents the technology?

BRAND

Simpler. In a sense, it sends itself! In as efficient a package as possible it sends *information* to another solar system in the galaxy. It sends the biocodes of everything alive, anything that's ever been DNA mapped, animals, plants and fungi and whatever, so even extinct species can be revived.

DARLENE

Sounds like Eden.

BRAND

Exactly. It doesn't do the whole garden at once. It's coded to unfold, build. Nanobots to build protein chains. Nanobots to build other nanos. Your primal brew, right? Single cells first, before multiples, prey before predators, who knows? You know, build whole ecosystems from a solid base.

DARLENE

Won't it still take lightyears just to get there?

BRAND

Yeah, but it's not life, it's stored information!

DARLENE

Like an encapsulated virus.

BRAND

It's the program to make life. It can travel forever.

DARLENE

So the Singularity in distant time, in a distant place —

BRAND

Creates a new world.

DARLENE

Something more than Messiah.

BRAND

The god of a new *sapiens*. On a new Earth or, shoot, multiple new Earths. Life can last as long as the universe lasts. Maybe it's how *we* got here, and we're only completing the cycle.

DARLENE

Mr. Brand? Mr. Brand.

BRAND

Think on it.

DARLENE

We're here and now. Here and now. Here. Now.

BRAND

Your boyfriend's coming.

DARLENE

I can't let you hurt him.

BRAND

Why would I want to hurt anyone?

DARLENE

Please then, why are you here?

BRAND

All right, all right, here's my plan. Here's why I'm here. I want my trial to make an impact, I want it to make a statement.

DARLENE

What about the child?

BRAND

I want to declare what I just told you in open court. I want to warn the country of what's to come and show the path to a preserved future.

DARLENE

A preserved future.

BRAND

Right. So I've decided to represent myself.

DARLENE

Represent yourself? Really?

BRAND

I'm dead serious. I intend to represent myself.

DARLENE

W-why? Why would you do that?

BRAND

So I can speak to the court unfiltered.

DARLENE

Unfil—? You could do that in a blog or a podcast.

BRAND

It wouldn't have the reach, the immediate reach. What?

DARLENE

The trial will be about you shooting a child, not about your beliefs.

BRAND

They're not just beliefs. They are facts yet to be. What? Ask me.

DARLENE

How are they relevant?

BRAND

Because my presence in front of that crowd was to express those beliefs and issue those warnings, and for that I was bodily threatened and forced to defend myself.

DARLENE

Can you say that under oath? Don't you even want to know how the boy is doing?

BRAND

I know how he's doing. He wasn't critically hurt. He's — I'm not a monster. I'm not.

DARLENE

Do you know how to proceed?

BRAND

Yes, and it's amazing. I'm in communication with the court. I've filed motions. I'm hitting the law books and so far so good.

DARLENE

Your plan as your lawyer is to make a prophetic statement and ignore your defense.

BRAND

That's a cynical way to put it.

DARLENE

The outcome, would you call it justice?

BRAND

The verdict doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if I win.

DARLENE

I can't agree.

BRAND

No. My message will be sown into publicity and the public record.

DARLENE

You'd die in prison.

BRAND

Wouldn't you like that?

I wouldn't wish it.

DARLENE

So, during the trial, can I call on you?

BRAND

Call on me, how?

DARLENE

As a witness to my character. I feel it would lend credibility — credibility to my cause, if people could — if I had your — if, well — You would make a great impression. And, and I think, I think that would encourage people to listen, that it would stir their trust.

BRAND

Trust?

DARLENE

That's right.

BRAND

In what you have to say?

DARLENE

The court, I mean the whole court, the judge, the jury, the public, I know they would respect you. *(On her reaction)* What's the problem?

BRAND

I cannot, I cannot possibly appear as a character witness on your behalf.

DARLENE

It doesn't matter if you think I'm guilty. I'm not asking you to tell anyone I'm innocent.

BRAND

What could I possibly say, presuming I'd be under oath?

DARLENE

You could testify to my conviction.

BRAND

Gah —

DARLENE



BRAND

My commitment to my message, the sincerity of my belief.

DARLENE

It, it, it ,it — speaks for itself!

BRAND

Are you refusing?

DARLENE

I must respectfully decline.

BRAND

But don't you see?

DARLENE

I do not see how you can imagine . . . a middle age woman of color speaking on your behalf.

BRAND

Is that ridicule? Is that what I'm feeling here, some kind of ridicule?

DARLENE

I am speaking out of respect, a blunt respect, directly to you.

BRAND

You're sneering at me.

DARLENE

What I feel is sheer astonishment.

BRAND

In righteousness she speaks. What comes next, a gender card, race? Oh, no, no, you just played it.

DARLENE

You are sitting here in violation of decency and law.

BRAND

Yikes.

DARLENE

You — I have helped you all I can. There is no more I can do for you.

BRAND

No, no, you're wrong, you're actually doing it. You're listening to me, bouncing off ideas . . . serving good coffee. And you don't just listen, you're critical. Constructively. You respond and you, you keep your cool. And I admit, you've got a bit of sand.

DARLENE

I am a hostage in my home.

BRAND

Hostage? No, no. I asked, and you invited me.

DARLENE

So I did. So I did.

Brand reaches into his jacket [coat] and produces a handgun.

DARLENE

You said — you said you weren't armed.

Brand places the handgun on the table and slides it toward Darlene, handle first.

BRAND

Take it.

DARLENE

I don't want to touch it.

BRAND

Take it, please.

DARLENE

Let's please just leave it there.

BRAND

Well . . . feel free, okay? From now on I want to be completely honest transparent.

DARLENE

You're facing trial, and you carry a firearm?

BRAND

Not any more.

DARLENE

Is there, is there anything more, anything more you wanted, wanted to talk about with me?

BRAND

Can you just think on it a day or two, the trial? Maybe you'll reconsider.

*(She doesn't react.)*

Okay, I won't push it. Can I tell you something funny? I think that throughout our interactions at the hospital, I think I was kind of flirting. Yes, no?

DARLENE

I was unaware.

BRAND

It was understated.

Sound: Darlene's cell phone rings.

BRAND

Don't you want to see who it is?

DARLENE

Not right now.

BRAND

What if it's him, your hot date?

DARLENE

I - I can't talk to anyone right now.

BRAND

You're just gonna let it go? Sounds like they want to talk.

Sound: On the second or third ring, she ends the call. Within moments the cell rings again.

BRAND

Must be urgent.

Sound: Darlene ends the call immediately, on the first ring. The cell rings yet again. She ends the call at once.

BRAND

How fortuitous. Insistent chap. Best to answer, no? Otherwise, he'll get suspicious. Or, here's an idea, can I answer for you?

DARLENE

No, please.

BRAND

I would speak to him as politely as you would.

DARLENE

Please, no more.

BRAND

You answer, put it on speaker. Or answer him privately, I don't care. It's your chance to warn him. If you let me answer, I'll warn him for you. He'll know I'm here, he'll call in a criminal trespass, and they'll come and get me.

DARLENE

You want to be arrested?

BRAND

Now's as good a time as any.

DARLENE

What about your defense?

BRAND

I told you I want to deliver an unmuzzled statement.

DARLENE

You could just *go*.

BRAND

Nah. It's going to happen anyway.

DARLENE

I needn't say this, but you should get a lawyer.

BRAND

Unaffordable.

DARLENE

You must've had offers, pro bono, something. Did you post your own bond?

BRAND

Go ahead. I mean it. Call. Turn me in.

DARLENE

That's something for you to do on your own.

BRAND

Tell your boyfriend I'm here.

DARLENE

He - he already knows.

BRAND

Oh! Really. . . . The rings, the ringing, the calls, was that code? Whoa. Cool. I can't believe I didn't see it. He come up with that? . . . Like, anything, one, one? Okay. Good. Eh, did he arm you up too? Pepper spray, a firearm?

DARLENE

He wanted to.

BRAND

You said no. You respectfully declined. (*the gun on the table*) There, you're armed now. If you feel the need to be.

DARLENE

No. Again, no.

BRAND

I'm going to make my trial count.

DARLENE

I wish you well.

BRAND

And you really do, don't you? You know, I have never asked you anything personal about yourself, like about your childhood.

DARLENE

We don't have to go there.

BRAND

Where did you grow up, where'd you go to school, been married, have kids? . . .  
Favorite author, favorite book? Come on, we have to pass the time.

DARLENE

I wouldn't know what to tell you.

BRAND

Anything. An anecdote.

DARLENE

One of those. There's nothing outstanding.

BRAND

The way you tell it might be revealing.

DARLENE

You already know my qualities as a person.

BRAND

I remember your favorite phrase — agencies of grace. Is that from your childhood?  
Come on, now, you couldn't have had a bad childhood.

DARLENE

No. It was a good one.

BRAND

Tell me something. If your boyfriend really does know, they won't be long getting  
here.

DARLENE

My father was a do it yourself-er, didn't like to spend the dime, and I remember  
watching him install a new antennae once, looking way up to see him on the peak of  
the roof of our house, wrestling with that thing, that metal tree, by himself. It was a  
little windy. And he won, he won, fair and square, eventually. But he must not have  
been a very good electrician, because, as we came to find out, he somehow failed to  
ground the new antennae he installed. It was some weeks later, I think, late in the  
day, a storm was blowing in, strong, dark clouds and thunder. My sister and I were  
called inside, and we had just turned the tv on — we had just started watching tv, and  
I felt a premonition — then, there was a strong, peculiar smell and my skin tingled. I  
heard a sizzling sound, and all the outside flickered bright, and all the outside went  
**kaboom** — and the back of our television exploded.

BRAND

Nice.

DARLENE

With the explosion, a blue light emanated and ran along the ceiling and the walls, like a ring, this band —

BRAND

(unobtrusively)

Saint What's-his-name.

DARLENE

— it passed through the room and into the kitchen. I was dumbstruck. My sister, her reflexes were —

BRAND

Lightening fast.

DARLENE

— always quicker than mine, and she tried to chase it.

BRAND

Pluck.

DARLENE

It faded and vanished. Awestruck, I was.

BRAND

The story's revealing.

DARLENE

It was fun to remember.

BRAND

It's about your father.

DARLENE

My sister too.

BRAND

And his failure.

DARLENE

An error that led to a memorable experience.

BRAND

It shows you had an early bias.

DARLENE

Toward being awestruck?

BRAND

Toward belief.

DARLENE

I didn't say I saw god. I saw a blue light. I saw a sheet of ions.

BRAND

That's what you know now.

DARLENE

I had no idea that electricity could do that. I wasn't even sure it was electricity, or was it something strangely sparked to life?

BRAND

Was that your initiation to the agencies of grace?

DARLENE

It gave me a sense — that light, that traveling glow that passed around us . . . it left me with a sense of the possibility that everything, I mean everything, could be connected and, in connection, alive.

BRAND

You had a religious experience.

DARLENE

Pity anyone who wouldn't.

BRAND

A Saint Paul kind of moment, the road to Samarra.

DARLENE

Oh, no. Damascus.



BRAND

Oh, shhh . . . it, no. Really? Damascus? Not? You — you're — you're consistent.

DARLENE

Damascus. You asked for an anecdote. The postcard ain't the trip.

BRAND

Didn't it make you feel special though, like you were chosen and especially blessed?

DARLENE

Not chosen. The awareness was thrilling, a sense of awakening, that feeling that someday I might truly know of things beyond myself.

BRAND

Nobody sees beyond himself.

DARLENE

I think more people do than don't. But it doesn't always come easy.

BRAND

Where is she now, your sister?

DARLENE

Oh, she's gone. They're all gone, mother, dad, sis, even cousins. I'm the very last of my line.

BRAND

No kidding.

DARLENE

Not about that, no.

BRAND

'Cause me too, coincidentally. I'm the last of my line. A genetic dead end, yeah. How's it make you feel, to be the last?

DARLENE

I've made my peace with it.

BRAND

Whoa. Really? It must be *so* hard being you. I mean you are just a ninja renaissance mama — philosopher, nurse, story teller, healer, singer.

DARLENE

I fit maybe one of those.

BRAND

Nurse Darlene, you know what I would like to hear right now? It's stuck in my head. That song you kept singing, that gospel thing you used to torment me with — Walk Alone in the Valley?

DARLENE

Lonesome Valley.

BRAND

I have a thought about it. Everybody thinks the lonesome valley is the Valley of Death, right, from the psalm? No matter what, you're gonna die alone, baby, all by yourself.

DARLENE

Eh, fear no evil? He prepareth a table for me in the presence of mine enemies?

BRAND

But what if it isn't the Valley of Death in this this song, but the Valley of Life? It's not that you die alone, and not exactly that you have to live alone, but that you have to live your own life, like it or not, yours, just yours, your own alone. Nobody else can live the life that you can lead.

DARLENE

I am — I am moved to hear you say that.

BRAND

And, they sure as hell wouldn't want to either, ha!

DARLENE

Your own true path follows no other.

BRAND

So now I would genuinely like to hear it. I really would. It's kinda catchy, and so appropriate to the moment.

DARLENE

Mr. Brand, I don't, I don't, I don't have the courage to sing anything right now.

BRAND

Tongue dry?

DARLENE

My breathing's not —

BRAND

Sign of fear. Can't sing with a dry mouth. Okay.

DARLENE

I'm not brave enough.

BRAND

But I know that you really are. Not to worry. I — I really listened to what you said to me that, that last session at the hospital. They were powerful words to me, truly powerful. If you have not love, you are nothing. Trouble is, in the great big scheme of things, I keep thinking it over, have it or not have it, we're all kind of nothing anyway.

DARLENE

To love is to make meaning.

BRAND

For who?

DARLENE

For whoever loves.

BRAND

Eh, that's still a little thin, don't you think? A little too circular? Where does the love start?

DARLENE

Whenever, whenever you are able to forget about yourself, love can start.

BRAND

Darlene? Can I call you Darlene?

DARLENE

It's my name, and you already have.

BRAND

Would you end this for me?

DARLENE

End what for you?

BRAND

This . . . . this?

DARLENE

You know I can't.

Sound: Darlene's phone rings. Brand gestures. She answers.

DARLENE

I'm all right. . . . Yes, he's here. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, he is. It's on the table.

BRAND

Ask them to wait downstairs.

DARLENE

He asks that you wait downstairs.

BRAND

I'll bring the gun.

DARLENE

He says he'll bring it. He'll bring the weapon. (listens, then to Brand) Better if you leave it.

Brand stands, pockets the gun.

BRAND

I'm going, renaissance momma. Thank you.  
(strikes a posture in imitation of  
Darlene's earlier)

Bohdi!

DARLENE

(raising her hand)

Be —

BRAND

(unfreezing)

Careful? Yeah. Get a cat. Live it up.

Exit Brand. Sound: a wall switch clicks.

Lights out.

Sound: a door closes. Footsteps recede.

DARLENE

(singing in the dark)

You have got to walk / that lonesome valley /  
And you have got to walk it / by yourself /  
There's nobody else / can walk it for you /  
You got to walk that lonesome valley / by  
yourself.

Light gradually comes up on Darlene as she sings, but on Darlene  
only, and to no more than a candlelight glow, a votive illumination.  
Then, as the song ends —

Blackout.

End Play

