

Definition of Man:

A Duet in One Act

Created by Jason Rosario and Nikki Muller

Written by Nikki Muller

Blackout

SQB fade preshow into wind

"Man is the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal, inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative), separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order), and rotten with perfection." -Kenneth Burke

LQ 10

Look 1(daylight)

XX and XY sit back to back in an empty space, the vestiges of a burned out world: a box in the center. They wear tattered, identical clothing, male, female versions of each other.

XX

If we don't speak, we'll forget.

Silence.

XX

It's up to us, you know.
There's no one else but us.

Silence.

XX

Talk to me!

XY

I don't feel like it.

XX

Got something better to do?

XY

I don't see the point.

XX

It's what we do.
It's what makes us human.

We have to tell our stories.

XY

Write it down.

XX

There's not enough space.

And it's not the same.

We have to return to the basics, an oral tradition:
perform, reenact, like the ancient Greeks.

The digital age rotted our brains.

We have to regroup all we can,
the bits and jots of important things.

XY

(lying down)

Do it without me.

XX

I can't. You know that.

I need you. You're half the world.

I need your stories.

XY

(rising)

She needs to feed.... Fine.

What words do you need?

What story do you want today?

XX

I just want to talk.

XY

Okay.

(a beat; presentational)

I haven't slept in days. I'm not clean.

I smell terrible...

XX

You're not clean. You don't smell good...
you know what you are by what you are not.

XY

I don't understand you.

XX

You want to be clean.
You want to use that water to rinse off the grime,
but *thou shalt not*.
You want to be something else,
not what you are.

XY

(broadly)

Sure. I wish I were *not*.

XX

But you don't want to die.

XY

No; no, of course not.
I just wish I had never been born.

XX

"Never to have been born is best,
But once you've entered this world,
Return as quickly as possible
to the place you came from."

(beat)

Sophocles.

(beat)

You're not the first.

XY

But I am the last.

Silence.

XY

Isn't that the point of this?
That there are no new thoughts?
That everything has been thought, felt,
seen, heard before?

XX

I don't know what the point is.
I just know we have to do... something.
Two is all you need.

Shift. He rises. She freezes.

LQ 15 Look 2
SQ C (Man Strings)

XY

When I lived indoors, I used to love to clean.
I learned it from my mother.
Everything in its place.
Everything swept, mopped, bleached, pristine.
I loved to clean the bathroom:
the sting of the chemicals in my nostrils,
the burn at the back of my throat.
I imagined all the filth and grime being scorched away,
that I was being cleaned from inside out, too,
a chemical peel.
I'd scrub and scrub until every trace of man and nature
was gone. Just perfect white porcelain.
In a week's time, the chaos would start to creep in--
tiny hairs, a spot of mildew,
a collection of dust on the windowsill.
And I'd attack.
Not on my watch. Everything just so.
(beat)
The dirt out here is inescapable.
It's been years since I felt clean:
whenever we find water, it's too precious to waste
on something like bathing.
So here we are, blending back into the dust we came from,
covered in this dirt and sweat she calls a "patina".
Like twin Etruscan burial urns.

“Keeps off the bugs,” she says.
 I don’t know that I’ll ever feel clean again.
 Really, truly clean.
(pause)
 The perfect white does not exist in nature.
(he smiles to himself)
 Even she is tan.

They switch places. He is frozen, unhearing.

LQ 20 Look 3
SQD (woman strings)

XX
 Back then he always smelled of soap.
 Scrubbed his skin so hard it turned ruddy and red.
 I could never smell him, like I can now.
 Just that soap smell.
 That crisp, clean, invigorating scent,
 filling the air when he was close,
 that poured out of him with his sweat.
 It makes me dizzy when I think of it...
 his clean, smooth skin on mine and that smell.
 That goddamned soap.
(pause)
 He doesn’t kiss me anymore.
 I’m not sure why.

Shift. They sit back to back, eating leaves.

LQ 25 Look 1
SQE (wind track)

XX
 I miss bread.

XY
 I miss dessert.

XX
 I miss kitchens.

XY
 I miss ice cream

XX

I miss pizza

XY

I miss pizza!!!

XX

I miss beer

XY

I miss showers

XX

I don't miss television

XY

I don't miss commercials

XX

I miss music

XY

I miss video games

XX

I don't miss traffic

XY

I don't miss utilities

XX

I don't miss hipster beards

XY

I don't miss my job

XX

I don't miss politics.

A beat.

XY
I don't miss religion.

XX
I miss people.

XY
I don't.

XX
(turning)
I miss you.
(beat)
I miss you. I miss you.

LQ 30 Look 4

Shift. Through the following the two mirror each other, moving fluidly and in unison.

SQ F ambient

XY
Between the age of six to eighteen months,
a human child reaches what is known
as the mirror stage.

XX
Before this stage she has no concept of her self

XY
Where he ends and the world begins

XX
She is, before this moment, infinite

XY
It's why a baby will grab your lip and pull on it, hard--
your pain does not exist to her,
because she does not feel it

XX
There is no possibility for empathy

XY
Because there is no Other

XX
All is one.

XY
But in the mirror stage--

XX
--coined by scientist Jacques Lacan
as an elaboration of Freudian theory in 1936--

XY
--the child realizes itself. Himself

XX
Herself

XY
As an I

XX
As apart

XY/XX
As other than

XY
And so the divide begins

XX
From then on we struggle
to find the words that can bring us back.
Back to a state of understanding

XY
A state of togetherness

XX

Although we know that forever
we are fundamentally apart.

XY

Othered.

XX

Every language is a foreign language
when you're talking about yourself.

Transition. They drop their mime, facing each other plainly, talking in different languages, some gibberish, some real, but altogether incomprehensible. They begin repeating "I don't understand you" in other languages until they say, together, in English:

XY

(overlapping/interspersed with XX)

No te entiendo

Je ne te comprends pas

Jad moduhguessayo

Aniqondi

Io non ti capisco

Wo bu mingbai ni

Ni thuigim

XX

(overlapping)

Ich kann dich nicht verstehen

Ya ni ponimayu tebya

Ana la 'afhamuk

Eu nao entendo voce

Anata ga wakanarai

De se katalavaino

Jeg forstår dig ikke

XX/XY

I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU

XX

(off)

How can someone be right in front of you
and so impossibly far

LQ 35 Look 1
SQ G

XY

Quieres que te cuente mis cuentos?
Esta Bien, pero cuando yo este listo.
(You want me to tell my stories?
Fine. I'll tell my stories. On my own terms.)

XX looks around helplessly.

XY

You said if we don't speak, we forget.

Shift. He settles into storytelling mode. Throughout his monologue, she plays every part that isn't him. He switches between Spanish and English, which she translates.

XY

There once was a Hispanic boy from Florida.
He grew up divided between his two cultures:
that of the United States and Puerto Rico

XX

Ai-yai yai!

XY

Wrong culture.

XX

(shrugs)

Sorry.

XY

My whole life, I've never belonged.
I spent half my childhood in Florida with my mom,
the other half in Puerto Rico with my father.
Here, I was just some spic, there
I was an out of place American poseur.
Always displaced. Never at home.

My parents grew up in Puerto Rico, but us, their kids,
 we never really fit in.
 When we'd visit my father, he didn't even bother
 remembering which part of Florida we were from.
 He would introduce us--

XX

(As Dad)

son mi hijos de Miami

XY

--even though we lived in Orlando.
 Miami was where he had lived,
 so to him, that was where we went
 when out of sight.
 He didn't give a fuck: it was Somewhere Else,
 that was enough for him.

We were Florida-grown transplants,
 a hybrid crossbreed, cultivated and gathered abroad,
 but my "homeland" has no soil--
 my roots dangle in open air.
 I was anomalous wherever we went.
 In Puerto Rico, my accent betrayed me as American--

XX

(as Puerto Rican)

Que lindo, sueñas como un gringito!

XY

And back in Florida, I was the "safe ethnic friend" of choice,
 the one parents could feel good about
 having stay at their house.

XX

(as Floridian parent)

I couldn't believe this woman at work.

She just kept saying I was discriminating against her
because she's black.

(mimicking)

"It's because I'm black, It's because I'm black"

I mean, seriously? You know me. I'm not racist.

My son's best friend is Puerto Rican.

(to XY- we realize she's saying this in front of him)

I mean, you guys just had a sleepover!

XY

And I'd realize: oh. I'm not human.

They saw me for what they wanted me to be,
what they needed me to be.

I was an empty vessel of Other.

My body, a symbol, emptied out of life--
the boy from "Gringolandia" here,
the exotic Hispanic there.

Belonging to no one, never at home,
having no people, because my people
were both too many and too few.

In other parts of the States,
people'd think I'm white.

I'd pass, sneak through.

But I still didn't belong,

I was just a spy, an observer, a lurker.

It's like I cracked a code,

hacked into some hegemonic mainframe.

I should've wired all the privilege back to the island...

But they'd have just wondered:

why's this white guy giving away free shit?

XX

¿Por qué este gringo esta dando esta mierda de gratis?

XY

America.

The land of immigrants.

From Europe.

Everyone else:
go fuck yourself
and weed my garden.

End of monologue- XX turns into a rambunctious asshole.

XY
Part of me still misses those
perfect summers on the beach...

XX
(singing)
"I want to go back to San Juan..."

XY
(breaking role)
Okay, now you're gonna get it.

They chase each other around, playfully, breathlessly, landing in opposite storytelling positions, him behind her, enacting every character in her story.

XX
There once was a girl from New York,
who was half German

XY
(singing)
Heil Hitler!

XX
(whips around, glaring)
I will fucking end you.

XY
(innocently)
But then you couldn't tell the story.

A beat.

XX
Fine.

She resumes: as she speaks, he acts out the roles.

XX

Her father was an East German refugee.

XY becomes her father. She cozies up in "bed," holding out her arm which he strokes.

XX

Every night he'd tickle her arm
and sing her lullabies...

XY

(singing)

"Twinkle, twinkle, little--"

XX

...in German.

XY takes a beat, then flawlessly pulls off a German lullaby.

XY

*"Die Blühmelein sie Schlafen
Schon längst in Mondenschein..."*

XX

And he'd [dance*]

*This should change every performance.

XX is fucking with him. XY glares and reluctantly does as she says.

XX

Oh wait, he didn't do that.
That was someone else's story.

XY stops, annoyed.

XX

She had a mom, too.

XY becomes Mom.

XX

She was from New Jersey.
She was beautiful.

XY likes that: pretties himself.

XX

and smart

XY looks quite pleased.

XX

and very, very passionate

XY: "sure."

XX

but had low self esteem

XY is bummed.

XX

When the girl was young,
her parents were in love,
she was sure of it.

She rises during her speech, becoming Mom and greeting XY as Dad. They smile, kiss.
She returns to her seated position as her girl self. XY Dad pats her on the head.

XX

But then it stopped.

XY turns expressionless, staring ahead.

XX

And he became cruel to Mom.

XY embodies cruelty.

XX

And they divorced.
And the girl became a very old human
in a very small body.
He never stopped loving *her*, though.

XY turns pleasant. Pats her on the head. She speaks the following in German while XY translates, line for line, while embracing her from behind and touching her face in a confusingly comical way.

XX

Sie wurden sehr vertraut miteinander.

XY

They became very close.

XX

So vertraut, dass sie manchmal vergaß, welche Teile von ihr zu ihr gehörten und welche Teile zu ihm.

XY

So close that she sometimes forgot which parts of her were her and which parts were him.

They disentangle. She switches back to English.

XX

And when he died, all he was became a part of her.
So she was a 19-year-old American woman
with the heart of a 64-year-old East German.

XY

(singing)

He died of AIDS...

XX

What the fuck? No he didn't!

XY laughs like an asshole. XX can't help laughing.

XX

I will turn you over my knee!

XY

Oh, you'd like that, Mamasan.

XX

What do you know about what I'd like?

XY

I think I know a thing or two.

XX

You think you think you know.

LQ 40 Look 3
SQ H

Shift. XX addresses the audience from flag.

XX

I've already been married.

I've been loved
and used
and misused
and worshipped
and forgotten.

I've lost my name and lost myself
and lost my power and lost my body.

I've been a matriarch and a grandmother.

I've been a concubine and housewife.

I've been a wife.

A ball and chain.

A missus to a mister.

A sacred cow

(He bought the milk)

I've belonged to someone,
who belonged to me.

I completed a part of a whole,
filled a missing half,

and in that my half became empty.

Now I want to be nothing but myself.

No one's but my own.

I want to be whole without halves.

My love is not a commodity to be owned or traded,
consumed, weighed, assessed, valued or devalued.

I am not some slightly bruised fruit

you buy shrinkwrapped on clearance
 at the grocery store.
 If I love you, it is because I choose to.
 Every day.
 I choose.
 Not because I swear to it,
 Not because I follow some thousand year,
 agrarian vestige of the patriarchy.
 I want to be free.
 And I want to be with him
 These are not mutually exclusive.

LQ 45 Look 1
SQ I

XY
 Airplane!

Quick shift- it's playtime. Circus-like, slapstick fun. XY runs over to XX, who drops to the ground and lifts him up with her legs. XY and XX play around with different balances throughout the scene. They speak out to the audience intermittently.

XY
 Wooo!
 Liftoff!
 Nosedive!

She throws him off and flips him around, coming to standing.

XY (cont)
 Now your turn!

XX
 I don't know, I've got some good mass on me.

XY
 I can handle it.

XY lifts her up and she laughs gleefully He rotates her on his feet.

LQ 50 Look 4
SQ J

XY

(turning his head toward the audience)

At the initial stages of physical attraction,
the human brain will fire off a variety of chemicals.

XX

Norepinephrine, or adrenaline,
leads to pounding heart and sweaty palms.

She drops down after an elaborate move.

XX

If you're so strong, then why'd you drop me?

He rolls her off, they laugh. She lifts her legs and he grabs her ankles.

XY

Ally-oup!

(to the audience)

The infatuated brain floods with dopamine,
the brain chemical of
(enjoying the word)
Pleasure.

He takes a deliberate dive roll between her legs. She comes to standing.

XX

(to the audience)

Dopamine is also released in the brain by crowd favorites
such as nicotine, cocaine and heroine,
giving you the feeling of being high.

She grasps his ankles and takes a dive roll, followed by him.

XX

Unhand me, sir!

She releases his feet, walking away, faux scandalized.

XX

Well, I never!

She swings around, handstands her legs around his neck, coming up to find his head between her legs.

XX

(Groucho-style aside)

Though I wish you would more often!

XY

Oh no, you don't.

He drops backwards. She lifts him up, pushing him away, taking a fighting stance. They start to circle each other.

XY

(like a Kung Fu movie)

You may be strong, but I am quick.

He kicks her lightly and fast, dodges away.

XX

Ow, what the fuck!

He does it again.

XX

Quit it!

She finally tackles him, taking him down in a grappling move. They roll around and she lands on top of him with her legs wrapped around him.

XX

(Russian spy)

We have ways of making you speak.

XY

Never!

They laugh. There's a moment-- a tension. Freeze.

XY

There's also serotonin,

the brain chemical associated with happiness--

XX

--which can cause you to go temporarily insane.

They look at each other intensely. Then. He extracts himself breezily. She looks visibly defeated and pent up.

LQ 55 Look 1
SQ K

XY

New game! Eye spy.

I spy with my little eye...

something beginning with... d.

XX opens her mouth to make a sexual comment. Stops. Resigns.

XX

Dirt.

XY

Yup!

(pause)

This is probably not the best game for the setting.

XX

Agreed.

(to audience)

Oxytocin is the chemical associated
with love and trust.

It's what gives us that calm feeling of safety and belonging.

It causes a mother to bond with
her child upon breast feeding,
and releases during prolonged embraces.

A woman's brain floods with it.

After orgasm.

(She smacks her head on the ground. He doesn't hear:)

I don't understand you.

LQ 56 Look 3
SQ K.5

Shift. XX lies on the floor while XY performs his monologue.

LQ 60 Look 2
SQ L

XY

When we first had sex,
 it was... face melting.
 Really good stuff.
 Stuff you brag about the day after
 but pretend you're talking about
 someone from a while ago.
 She was just so-- free. Uninhibited.
 Didn't cling to me, didn't need me.
 And I liked that.
 But then... (*gesturing around*) this.
 And time.
 And that growing....

XX

...intimacy...

XY

(*gesturing with right and left hand*)
 As a guy, you try to keep sex over here
 And the other great stuff over there
 because when the two mesh...
 you're fucked.
 Women can smell that on you.
 It smells desperate.
 They hate that dopey shit.
 There's a reason animals won't eat a rotting carcass.
 It's a dead thing, it's poison.
 And suddenly the sex will stop
 and she'll control you utterly
 because the sound of her voice and her face
 make you want to forget everything else you ever were
 and just take care of her
 but instead
 you're just this poor fuck with blue balls
 trying to prove you're good enough for her
 so she'll stay around
 but she's already halfway out the door
 ready for the better option.

Maybe it's crazy to say this,
 given the circumstances,
 but I'm still terrified of that.
 Even now.

I know she doesn't need me.
 And if I start to need her...
(hands mesh)
 I'm fucked.

Shift: XX orbits XY, expands towards the audience. She grabs XY, they do a seductive tango move, and she continues off into orbit. He wanders, chasing her, a slower, hapless orbit. XX flirts with the audience, intentionally torturing XY, who grows increasingly jealous.

XX
 Jealousy is a dance
 in which everyone moves.
 (Anne Carson.)

XY
 Incomplete, insufficient, unsatisfactory.
 Not enough.

XX
 A kissed mouth doesn't lose its freshness
 for like the moon it always renews itself.
 (Boccaccio. *The Decameron*.)

XY
 Sometimes I dream we come across another guy
 and she just fucks him right in front of me

XX
(sings)
 "You don't own me,
 don't say I can't go with other boys..."
 (Popularized by Lesley Gore.)

XY

Can you be jealous
of someone who doesn't exist?

XX

Out of the ashes I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air
(Sylvia Plath, "Lady Lazarus")
(to audience member)

Hey.

XY

Stop that.

XX

What?! They aren't even real.

XY

They are to me.

XX

"Oh, these men, these men!"

(beat)

(Othello.)

(beat)

You're not the first.

XY

But I am the last.

Shift.

LQ 65 Look 4

SQ M

XX

Happiness.
The ultimate perfection.

XY

The ultimate myth.

XX

When you find that one...

XY/XX

Happily ever after.

XY

What does that even mean?

Happily Ever After?

To me, it always sounded like a
Disney-themed death march.

XX

To me, it always sounded like
laziness.

Married a prince?

You don't have to do anything else.

You're good.

XY

Why don't they just say...

XY/XX

...and they all continued living
the best they could until they died.

Silence.

LQ 70 Look 1

SQ N

XX

Could you make me happy RIGHT NOW?

That's all I'm asking for.

A very long silence.

XY

Hey.

XX

Hey.

XY

Things aren't so bad.

(beat- wry smile)

It's not the end of the world.

XX rolls her eyes.

XY
I mean. At least... we're alive.

XX
We're alive.

XY
We're ALIVE!!!

A spontaneous, ebullient celebration of living.

XX/XY
(to the audience)
WE'RE ALIVE!!!!
Wooooo!

When they calm down, they transition to seated for an easy conversation.

XY
Do you think we're cursed? Or special?

XX
Seems kind of special to me.

XY
Ever wonder if maybe we're just terrible people and
everyone else was raptured?
Sent flying straight up to heaven and we're just... so fucked
up we're the only ones who stay?

XX
Nah. I mean, I've thought about it.
Of course. I've broken contracts with God.
The "thou shalt nots."
Hortatory negatives. *(XY giggles)*.
Heh-- you can lead a whore to tory,

but you shall not make her... I got nothing.

Anyway.

I used to be super Christian.

Suuuuuper Christian.

And I went to a Bible camp where they had us all sign these
pledge stickers we could put in our Bibles.

One said I pledged to accept Jesus as my personal savior--
whatever, did that when I was four-- signed it, stuck it in,
had my friend sign it as a witness. The other was a pledge
to remain physically pure until marriage.

I signed it.

I did not have my friend sign it as a witness.

It's like the ghost of my future self was telling me "don't do
it" and I was hoping I could get out of it later on a legal
technicality.

XY

I went to one of those Bible things.

I was ready to be all into it.

But my suspicious Puerto Rican side
smelled a cult and said no fuckin' way.

White people start running around
waving their hands in the air, 'feeling the spirit?'

I'm out.

Shift.

LQ 75 Look 4

XX

SQ O

Adam and Eve.

As it was in the beginning,
so shall it end.

XY

With two
in an anti-paradise

XX

With two
remembering what has been
as we hurtle towards this conclusion

XY
Decreation

XX
Evaporation

XY
Rotten, rotten, rotten

XX
It's never been enough and will never be enough

XY
Rotten

XX
Couldn't just be happy, had to try that fruit

XY
And here we are again,
alone in the wilderness
In a world of plenty that we destroyed

XX
Is that not the most human drive?
To destroy?
Implode?
Tear Up?
Drain?
Dessicate?

XY
God has forsaken us

XX
And we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Shift.

XY
I never thought I'd make it to the ripe old

age of 30. I always assumed I'd be dead by now.
When I was little, adults would ask me

XX

"What are you gonna be when you grow up?"

XY

I told them whatever I thought they'd like to hear.
A cute, empty shell to color in.
At 10, I started to imagine my death--
this was when Clinton was talking a lot about cancer and
shit-- so I would imagine the doctor, telling me

XX

(as doctor)

You have cancer.
It's terminal.

XY

I always felt comforted by that.
Relieved.
No need to worry about the future,
what I was going to be, how to provide.
It would just be... over.
So, in my imagination, I'd never cry.
I would simply say:
(as boy)
Gracias.

(turns to leave, turns back and rattles off)

I trust you'll respect my patient confidentiality and not
disclose this news to my family. I shall not be seeking any
further treatment. The cost would be prohibitive and I do
not wish to place that kind of financial burden on them.

XX

(as doctor)

My, what a mature and well spoken 10-year-old you are.
Godspeed to you, Puerto Rican American boy.

XY

And with that, I'd leave my family
and simply fade away.
Irish exit my life.
Vanish.
But since I was 10, I also imagined

XX

(as 10 year old boy)
untold adventures and epic dojo battles
for the final farewell in a blaze of glory!

XY

But here I am.
Still alive.
Imagine the irony.
I've been ready to disappear
since I was a kid.
And now I'm the only one left.

XX

When my parents got divorced,
I had some kind of psychological split,
and became obsessed
with telling my family members
"I love you" compulsively.
I guess I was afraid I might lose them at any time.
This slowly faded into a habit:
no matter what, upon saying goodbye,
the last thing I said to someone I cared about
always had to be "I love you."
Just for the record.
Just so I'd know.
Otherwise, I was tempting fate.
Sometimes, on the phone, I'd fuck up and wind up saying,
"love you, bye!... uhhh LOVE YOU"
the final one a quick, terrified addendum
before hanging up;
My insurance policy against regret.

LQ 85 Look 3
SQ R

What a weird, sad child.
 I never stopped, though.
 Or, I should say,
 I never stopped noticing when I failed.
 I was right about fate.
 The last time I spoke to my father on the phone,
 I ended with
 "See you soon."
 And I noticed.

Shift.

LQ 90 Look 4
SQ S

XY

(spoken concurrently with XX below)

I always imagined
 I'd do the family thing/ if I lived long enough
 the house the kids the wife the white picket fences

XX:

(concurrently)

I never imagined
 I'd do the family thing...
 No house No kids No husband no white picket fences

XX:

And I guess I was right.

XY:

But I guess I was wrong.

XX/XY:

Who could have seen this coming?

XX

(to the audience)

To realize it's the end of the world
 and you've got an IUD...
 that's a lot of pressure.

Shift.

LQ 95 Look 1
SQ T

XY:

So you don't want to have kids?

XX:

Nope.

XY:

I thought that's what all chicks wanted.

XX:

Well, given that there are no longer chicks, but only chick, I
guess those beliefs no longer apply.
Dudes, chicks... it was all just roles, anyway.
The play is over.

XY:

You never thought you'd have them?

XX:

I don't know. I never really thought about it much.
Honestly I figured my biological clock would sort itself out,
but the doomsday clock beat me to it.

(pause)

You think this situation would finally be the thing to spark
my drive to procreate... but no.
The idea of having children is still terrifying to me.
A baby is so permanent.
So... inescapably final.

XY:

(guffaws)

Wow. You really did read too many books.

(gesturing)

What could be more final than this?!
Having a baby, that's not final, it's fucking normal.
It's nature. People fuck.
People have babies. People die.
You're so far in your head
you don't even remember you're a person.
Everything doesn't have to be so complicated.
It's just life.

XX:

No. It's *my* life.

XY:

Yeah. Wouldn't want to have to share.

A beat.

XX

You want our children to fuck each other?

LQ 100 Look 2

Shift: XY speaks out to audience.

SQ U

XY:

She said "our children" and it felt... weird.

Kinda good.

Even though she wasn't saying she wanted it.

I think she doesn't want it
because then she'd need me.

Although...

I don't want our children to fuck each other.

(pause)

Our children.

Our children.

LQ 105 Look 4

SQ V

Shift. They are face to face, now playing the stack-your-hands game, starting slowly, one hand on top of the other, slowly moving hands upward. This shifts into a dance-like progression of movement, exploring physicality of climbing, reaching, lifting. XX incorporates her book.

XX

I've never felt comfortable
staying still or being quiet

There's always been something more
worth reaching towards

XY

Instability is my only constant.

My life has always been in a state of flux:

The bottom repeatedly dropping out,
never any time to take a rest

XX

Just when you think you've arrived

you realize: there's more

XY
and more

XX/XY
And more

XX
More to learn
more to plan for
something greater than you to strive towards:
Plato's forms that call to us

XY
more that I'll never see
more that I'll never be
new ways in which I never knew I was failing
(to audience)

She's brilliant, and I love it
there's always something new to learn.
but sometimes, she makes me feel
so... stupid.

And I don't even think she knows.
(to her)

What did you even study,
that you know all this...
random shit?

XX
Comparative Literature.

XY
Which entails...

XX
(lightly)
It's like an English major,
only you read everything written

in every language.

XY
(he laughs)
 Of course.

XX
 I like to think we build off one another.
 In a quest for something greater than ourselves,
 we stand on the shoulders of those before us
 so that we may all be elevated.

XY
 She thinks
 every moment we speak
 is an opportunity to change
 another for the better.

XX
 Richard Weaver
 said that rhetoric at its truest
 seeks to perfect men
 by showing them better versions of themselves,
 links in that chain extending up toward the ideal,
 the divine, that unreachable vanishing point
 on the horizon.

XY
 But what do my words have to offer?
 I open my mouth to speak--
 but I feel no connection to "the divine."
 So I shut up.

XX
 It's the reaching movement
 that's most human.
 We have to move to stay alive
 Hope is the motion of the soul

XY

Sometimes I think that's all she sees,
when she looks at me--

My Potential.

My future form when I am better
this me in ten seconds from now
who's just a little smarter,
a little closer.

And I feel jealous
of this image-man she's created
and angry
that I am not enough
and sad
that I have nothing to say

XX

Love is seeing in another person
the best version of himself.

XY

it will never be enough
it all just seems so pointless
I've never felt so ignorant
so impotent
so fucking angry

They shift back to the hand game.

XX

(singing, playful)

"Anything you can do, I can do better,
I can do anything better than you!"

XY gives up.

XY

Yes. You can.

He turns away. A long silence as we shift.

XX

I learned the power of language from my father.
 The artful turn of phrase, finding the perfect word
 the ability to craft a string of symbols so potent
 they could move another person
 like the dexterous manipulations of a puppeteer.
 There is a solemn power in words,
 and it can be used for good or evil.

(beat)

He used to write gorgeous letters,
 gorgeous, hate-filled masterpieces of vitriol
 sharpened, aimed and custom hewn for my mother--
 a poison perfected to her DNA.
 She would read them, and cry, and throw them away.
 I never understood how you could be so perfectly cruel to
 someone you love.
 Though I suppose that's a part of it.

Love is knowing exactly how to destroy someone.
 Whether or not you do so
 is another question entirely.

LQ 115 Look 4
SQ X

Shift. They stand side by side and deliver these respective monologues to the audience.

XX

In my imagination, I have a dick.
 And it's fucking HUGE.

XY

I had a dream that I had a baby.
 Like... actually had a baby.
 Like in my womb.

That I had.

(thinks)

I guess I should call it a nightmare.

XX

People respect my dick.
 Women, when they see it, run in fear.

XY

I could feel it move inside of me,
like a scene from *Alien*.
Is that what it's like?

XX

And I walk around with my big dick
and I'm afraid of no one. Nothing.
I see something I wanna fuck,
I get hard, and I fuck.
Then my brain turns off
and I fucking go to sleep.

XY

And all these thoughts start racing through my head--
is it a boy or a girl? What should I name it?
What if it gets sick?
Will I still like it if it doesn't look like me?
Am I bad mother for saying it feels like an alien?

XX

I fight. I fuck.
I eat. I sleep.
No problemo.
I sure as shit don't worry 'bout other people's
(*making air quotes*)
"Feels".

XY

And I look at my body and it's all stretched out and floppy
and giving birth has split my genitals in half like a fucking
horror film and the baby looks like this squishy screaming
red worm and I'm so afraid I won't love it enough or I'll love
it too much and it's going to suck the life out of me, make
my nipples crack and bleed and
WHO WILL WANT TO FUCK ME EVER AGAIN?!?

XX

Having a dick is pretty fucking awesome.

XY

Being a woman is fucking terrifying.

Shift. They sit across from each other, playing the hand flip game. XY is intensely focused on winning. XX looks at him with abject longing. She continually “fails” because it gives her a moment to touch his hand.

XX

Stanislavski said,

“Love is the desire to touch someone.”

LQ 120 Look 1
SQ Y

XY

Come on, you’re not even trying!

XX

I am trying. I’m trying.

XY

(irritated)

I don’t understand you.

He leaves her isolated. She looks at her hands, slowly begins to touch herself intimately, mournfully, eyes closed.

XX

(sings)

Meine Ruh’ ist hin,

Mein Herz ist schwer,

ich finde sie nimmer und nimmermehr.

(pause)

Goethe. *Faust.*

LQ 125 Look 3
SQ Z

Shift. She rises and paces over the course of this monologue.

XX

I don’t want to think.

I think all the fucking time.

I think about thinking:

what I’m thinking, what he’s thinking,

what he isn't thinking,
 how I can stop myself from thinking
 Words, words, words, this endless stream,
 filling up my mind, spilling out my mouth,
 forgotten bits of lost thought,
 remembered pain, re-emerging shame/
 Shame comes from a thought.
 The thought of a lack.
 The doing it wrong.
 The I could do better.
 Moralized by the negative:
 All it takes to feel shame is an idea
 and a witness

XY

*(softly repeating from the slash
 until the end of the paragraph)*
 /shame, shame, shame...

She turns to him. He stares at her.

XX

When he touches me
 it's the only time I don't have to think.
 I can be free.
 It all goes still and all I do is feel.
 The language of the body is a quiet one.
 When we were together,
 I felt calm, safe.
 Present. Here.
 And I never had to feel ashamed,
 or less than,
 or worry about doing it right or wrong
 or better or worse,
 because what it was was perfect.
 A perfect moment of living,
 being, and connecting.
(beat)
 We used to fuck.

All the time.
 Now I can barely get him to talk.
 I'm going insane.

LQ 130 Look 1
SQ AA

Shift.

XX
 It was good once, wasn't it?

XY
 What?

XX
 This. Us.

XY
 It's still good.

XX
 It's not the same. I think back on how it was
 and I feel jealous of myself.

XY
 That's silly.

XX
 We had it. Now it's gone. And I'm sad.
Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?
 ...Villon.
 "Where are the snows of yesteryear?"

XY
 Yup, another thing I don't know.

XX
 I'm sorry, I didn't mean...

XY
 What is it with you, anyway?
 Why are you so obsessed with quoting?

And why not English?

XX

Because it's been said before,
and they said it better than me.
And sometimes you can't say exactly
what you want to say
unless you use another language.

XY

But who cares about saying it perfectly?
You said so before,
every language is a foreign language
when you're talking about yourself.
I can never really know what's happening
in that fucked up mind of yours
and you will never know mine.

XX

Yes. Exactly. That's exactly it.
But we have to TRY.
We have to TRY to find the words.

XY

Why does it matter so much to you?
What we say and how we say it?
There's no one else here.

XX

But *we're* here.
It's our responsibility.
The words we use shape our world.

XY

(wryly)
What's left of it.

XX

Yes, even with just us two.

The way we speak to each other reinforces values
that influence the way we think.

The way you close yourself up,
close yourself off...

you weren't born that way.

Someone taught that to you.

Look at us.

What makes me "white" and you not
other than what we've been told?

It's a separation entirely outside of nature.

These things we learned,
they're still in our bodies.

But they don't have to be.

We invent the rules.

They don't have to be the same.

XY

So how do we change them?

XX

We try. We notice.

We are critical of our assumptions.

We grow... uncomfortable.

XY

I'm uncomfortable enough.

XX

What are you afraid of?

XY

What are YOU afraid of?

XX

Losing you.

Going crazy.

A long pause as she summons her courage.

XX

Even now I still find that I can barely speak sometimes.
 I'm so afraid of saying something you're not going to like.
 So I continue to weave this ridiculous web of language and
 behavior in the elaborate self-presentation of a version of
 me that I think you'll like because I am a fucking coward
 and I'm too afraid that who I really am isn't good enough.
 And I hate the way I am with you since I love the way I feel
 with you and your indifference kills me--that, when I want
 you so, so badly, I am so fucking resistable.

What kind of a person settles for bland indifference?
 But I take it because the other option-- the nothing-- is too
 terrible to imagine. Any touch-- even violence-- lets me
 know I exist. Without you, I am nothing. I have no anchor.

I float away. The chaos of my mind is slowly going to
 consume me if I don't get you to touch me and prove that
 I'm real.

(A beat.)

You, now. What are you afraid of?

Silence. XY stews, his back to her.

XX

Okay... what makes you mad?

(pause, strategic)

If words don't matter, why do you get so mad when
 someone calls you a fag?

XY

Fuck you.

XX

Fag, faggot. It's just a word, a symbol.
 It has no inherent meaning. Just some arbitrary sounds.

Etymologically speaking,
 it actually means a bundle of wood.

So why does it make you angry?

It's from what you believe in.

You hear that word,

you hear a challenge to your masculine identity.
 Without beliefs, words mean nothing.
 With them, they move us.
 How else could we hurt each other with them so well?

A beat. XY stays silent, brooding, rage building increasingly over the course of this monologue. He stays facing away as XX moves increasingly closer.

XX
 Ha. Of course. Nothing.
 Hold it all in.
 That's what you do.
 Why bother trying anything new, or-- *gasp*--
 non-heteronormative.
 No way you'd ever let yourself express an emotion with
language, God forbid.
 Just stay silent. Give me nothing.
 Oh, or if I'm lucky, maybe you'll punch a wall, right?
 (We'd have to build one, first.)
 (*beat*)
 Maybe you are a fag.
 That's why you won't fuck me! You're a faggot.
 I mean, who else would stop fucking
 at the end of the world,
 when you have a willing and ready subject
 just begging you for it?
 What kind of a man turns that down?
 What kind of a man?
 Must just not be that into pussy, I guess.
 Oh, or you're scared. That's way worse.
 You're a coward.
 That sounds better in French:
Lâche. Lâche.
 You gonna cry? Nope, couldn't do that.
 That wouldn't be manly.
 Can't allow yourself to feel vulnerable.
 No, little dog, you'll do exactly like they trained you.
 Violence is the only appropriate masculine outlet
 for emotion of any kind.

LQ 135 Look 5

Slow fade to Red 1:05

You've got your back against the wall and you've only ever
 learned two ways out: fight or fuck.
 So fine. You won't fuck me? Then fight me. Hit me.
 Hit me, pussy. Can't let some chick talk to you that way.
 Hit me. *Pon esta cabrona en su lugar.*
 Hit me. Hit me. Hi--

XY whips around, swinging at her as she dodges. He grabs her by the throat, eyes wild. She laughs, submitting, equally mad.

XX

That's it. This is easier. This is what you understand.

He throws her to the ground in a paroxysm of rage, charging around the space. She watches him closely. He pauses, seething. Then charges over, grabbing her by the hair and pulling her head back. He pulls back on her hips, readying himself, manhandling her. She is shocked.

XY

This is what you want isn't it? Yeah?
 Your brute, your dog, your Stanley Kowalski?
 Yeah, you're not the only one who's read a goddamn book.
 Well, here. You got me.
 You fucking got me.
 This is what you want right?
 Yeah?
(noticing her silence)
 Wow, and now the words stop!
 Not so fucking verbal now, are you.
 Well. You're fucking welcome.
 That's my role, isn't it. The body.
 You're the mind, the writer, the words and I'm the body,
 just this fucking caveman here to take you out of your mind
 and root you in flesh.

He whispers the following in her ear, leaning over her, biting the lobe. Her breath quickens. He touches her between her legs, his other hand around her neck. She takes his finger into her mouth.

XY

I'm too fucking stupid to be anything more, right?
 I can't quote your fucking-- whatever--
 philosophers, rhetoricians, sociologists.
 You talk at me in French so I can stare at you mutely,
 like a dumb, fucking-- *heteronormative*-- dog.
Regarde-- "il est docile comme un chien"
 Isn't that it? *No Exit?* Sartre?
 Ha! You're surprised I pick these things up?
 What, because "men never listen?"
 Yeah, I listen. I remember.
 Like a good fucking dog.
 For me, it's always "Speak, boy. Speak,"
 and I don't think you've heard a word I've said.
 What kind of a man am I?
 You should know exactly by now.
 You don't need my fucking stories.
 You don't fucking care what I say.

XX

(softly)

That's not true...

He pushes her away. Grabs her book. She gasps.

XY

You don't need me--
this is all that matters to you.
 The words of so many dead white guys
 I was never smart enough to read.
 Good enough for a lay,
 But no, I'm not worthy of "the canon,"
 I'm not good enough for your fucking book.

He slams it down in front of her and grabs her by the hair again.

XY

My words don't count.
 Not unless they're grunts, moans, panting

and fucking pornographic commands.
You wanna write that down?

Forcing the pen into her hand.

XY

Here.

(into her ear)

"Gimme that pussy, baby.

Take that hard cock."

(mocking her)

Oh, but it sounds better in German, right?

"Gib mir die Fotze, Du Schlampe"

You want it in French? *Donnes-moi ce con, salope.*

In Spanish? *Dame esa chocha, puta.*

Is that what you want? Yeah?

Your stupid fucking Puerto Rican poolboy
at the ready to fuck whenever you bend over?

Is that what you want, princess?

Yeah?

Edify me.

Find me that perfect turn of phrase
from your book that will tell me
whatever the fuck it is you want me to do with you.

He pushes her head down toward the book, holding her there.

XY

Do it. Read.

Hands trembling, she slowly lifts the book. He maintains control of her.

XY

Fucking do it.

She slowly finds a passage and begins to read. As she does so, confusion comes across XY's face, and he loosens his grip, backing away.

XX

(reading)

And in that moment,
you saw me so completely
that I couldn't find myself.

It's like I wandered out onto a frozen lake
and I turned around and all the ice caved in
and now I'm stuck and I don't know what to do.

She places the book on the cube, looks up at him. They lock eyes.

XY

Who said that?

XX

You.

You did.

XY is overcome. He collapses to the floor.

XY

Why... why did you write that in there?

XX

Because it was important.

Because it was perfect.

Because... I saw you.

I see you. I hear you.

You matter.

You are enough.

(beat)

I'm so sorry.

LQ 140 Look 6

(30 sec fade)

XY holds his face in his hands, crumpled. XX crawls over to him.

XX

I'm sorry.

SQ BB

She approaches him tentatively. Takes off a piece of her tattered outfit, gingerly pours water onto it. He starts-- eyes widen at the waste-- she hushes him, coaxing him back into rest. Slowly, gently, she bathes him. It is tender, maternal and nurturing. He watches her quietly, calming down throughout. When she is done, he grabs her hand, taking the rag. He wipes in a long, confident motion along her body, caressing/kissing lightly on each place after every stroke, but never her mouth. It is intimate, sensual and powerfully erotic.

Shift. They face each other, as in the mirror stage, but with rapturous looks. From here, they move together throughout the scene, but touch and shift in a complementary way, moving in and out of positions that vary between tender dance-like gestures and erotic embraces.

SQ CC
(fade lower)

XY

According to Plato, a state of ecstasy,

XX

or *ekstasis*--

XY

--meaning, in ancient Greek, "standing outside of oneself"--

XX

--is reserved for geniuses, lovers, and the insane. In such a state the self sublimates, is annihilated, and we return, in a rapture, to the divine.

XY

The self leaves itself behind and for a moment the place where he ends and the world begins is, again, infinite

XX

She is both nothing and everything

XY

In this moment, there is no Other

XX

All is one.

XY

A moment of transcendence

XX

A return to infant's amnesia, realizing

XY

Himself

XX

Herself

XY

As not alone

XY/XX

As an us

XX

Here we speak through touch,
learn to read the Braille
of the body

XY

See the world
in another person's skin

XX

There is a wisdom that we only learn
when our minds are still.
Embodied knowledge

XY

as old as time

XX

waiting for us
to turn our gaze in
and our thoughts off

XY
let's reconnect together
to what's been cut off
Go back to the beginning

XX
Roland Barthes wrote,
"what language conceals is said through my body.

XY
My body is a stubborn child;

XX
my language is a very civilized adult."
This is no time to be polite.

XY
Words are imprecise.
They hurt. They fail.

XX
Sometimes you need to just stop talking.

They kiss.

Blackout.

END.

LQ 145
(3 sec fade to black)