

Acid

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A full-length play  
Based on a true story

By John Schoneboom

CAST OF CHARACTERS

FRANK COLEMAN, 41, biological/chemical weapons scientist

KIT COLEMAN, 39, Frank's wife

JACK COLEMAN, 16, their son

GOTTLIEB, 52, CIA mind control team leader

AJAX, 35, CIA agent

BELLE, 33, prostitute

SETTINGS

Coleman Dining Room

CIA Office

House of Ill Repute

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is set in 1950s America.

If space allows, all three settings could be on stage at the same time, with the active one lit at any given time. Otherwise, a flexible set will be required as the play shifts among the three settings quite rapidly.

ACT 1: SCENE 1

*1950s America. The dining room  
where the Coleman family is  
gathered for dinner: meatloaf.*

KIT

All right now, has everybody washed their hands?

FRANK

Yes ma'am!

JACK

The washed up hand-me-down hands of time on my hands in a  
handbasket full of candles you can't handle cuz the random  
phantom'll dandle you on his knee like a plant and an  
infantile rant that can't and shan't cuz he's not extant.

FRANK

I see it's poetry time again.

KIT

What do you call it, Jack? 'Beaten' poetry?

JACK

Beat poetry Ma. I'm just practicing.

FRANK

Well it beats me, I'll tell you.

KIT

He's an artist, Frank. I think it's nice. Would you say grace  
for us, Jack?

JACK

I don't believe in it, Mom.

KIT

You don't believe in grace?

JACK

In God, Mom. There's no evidence for it. It's patently  
infantile. Freud said so. It was in my poem. Didn't you catch  
it?

FRANK

That's enough, son.

KIT

Of course there's a God, silly. Who else do you suppose created the world?

FRANK

Your mother's right, son. There is a God and He created this world and blessed this mighty country. Now say grace or I'll put the fear of God in you good and proper.

JACK

Thanks for the food, God. Amen.

KIT

Amen. Thank you, Jack.

(Frank helps himself to meatloaf.)

FRANK

Amen. I don't hear the kind of sincerity I like to hear there son. This country didn't win two world wars so you could sit there on your raggy keister being sarcastic.

(Frank takes an ostentatious bite as Kit looks sympathetically at her son.)

FRANK (CONT'D)

Very fine meatloaf, Kit, top drawer.

KIT

Thank you dear. Everything all right at the office?

FRANK

Work is going well, dear, and thank you for asking.

KIT

But you can't really talk about it, can you Frank?

FRANK

Thank you for understanding that.

JACK

What exactly do you do, anyway?

FRANK

I work for the government, son, you know that.

JACK

Yeah but dad, I mean, what exactly do you do?

KIT

Don't pester your father, Jack.

JACK

I'm not pestering ma, I'm festering and conjestering at the destiny of our ecstasy.

KIT

Good. Just don't pester.

JACK

Come on pop, what do you do all day?

FRANK

Well I'm awfully sorry Jack but I don't answer questions from people who don't eat their meatloaf.

(Jack stands up, angry.)

JACK

You work for some ghost office that's probably the post office but it's all some big secret well I'll tell you what you can keep it!

(Exit Jack in a huff.)

KIT

Jack!

FRANK

I'm a bad father.

KIT

Frank.

FRANK

No, I am. I'm a bad father. I don't understand that boy. I end up being short with him. I don't mean to be but I am. And then he's something with me in return. I don't know quite what to call it but I see him close off before my very eyes, and I can't blame him.

KIT

Jack's OK, he's just artistic.

FRANK

Art is good. Art is nice. I am short with Jack and he is artistic with me in return. Somehow I have become the man with no art.

KIT

My little darling. I think you're very artsy.

FRANK

Am I? Dear God. In what way?

KIT

That purple shirt.

FRANK

It is an artsy shirt. You gave me that shirt for Christmas.

KIT

Birthday.

FRANK

Right.

KIT

Although you never wear it.

FRANK

I've worn it!

KIT

Once.

FRANK

Right.

KIT

On your birthday.

FRANK

Precisely. I have seldom felt so artsy.

KIT

If you wore it more often, you might become downright poetic.

FRANK

If I wore it too often I might become a national security risk. I might end up on old Joe McCarthy's list.

KIT

Yeah, somehow I don't think Frank "Anti-Communist" Coleman is in too much danger of that.

FRANK

Let's hope not.

KIT

OK now tell me what else is bothering you.

FRANK

What do you mean?

KIT

Come on. You've been pensive all evening.

FRANK

Well. I've been asked to do a new job. I'd still be doing research but not with the Army.

KIT

But you probably can't quite mention who...

FRANK

I'm afraid I really can't. I wish I could.

KIT

I wish you could too.

FRANK

I'm sorry.

KIT

I know. Anyway, I'm sure it's important work and good for the country or you wouldn't be doing it. So why so down?

FRANK

I'd get to continue my research, just in a sort of different context. It's really quite an attractive offer.

KIT

Uh huh. So?

FRANK

I don't know. I just don't trust them. I shouldn't say anything but frankly they're a bunch of goddamned cowboys over there.

KIT

Frank, language! Dinner table!

FRANK

Sorry. It's a beautiful meatloaf, Kit. Top drawer.

ACT 1: SCENE 2

*CIA Interrogation Room. AJAX is nearly unconscious and tied to a chair. DR. SIDNEY GOTTLIEB hobbles over to him carrying a hypodermic needle.*

GOTTLIEB

All right you, let's see how you like a bit of desoxyn and pentothal with your sodium luminal.

(There is a knock at the door.)

GOTTLIEB (CONT'D)

Come in! Come in!

(Enter Frank Coleman.)

GOTTLIEB (CONT'D)

Ah ha! Dr. Coleman!

FRANK

Please, call me Frank. And you must be Dr. Gottlieb.

GOTTLIEB

Please, call me Gottlieb.

(Frank stares at the man in the chair, clearly uncomfortable.)

FRANK

Have I caught you at a bad time?

GOTTLIEB

Not at all!

(Gottlieb jabs the man with the needle.)

FRANK

You're sure? You look a bit, erm, busy here.

GOTTLIEB

No no no. Thanks for coming by. I hope you're here to tell me you've decided to accept our offer.

FRANK

Well, I'm seriously considering it.

GOTTLIEB

That's a start! That's a start!

(Ajax's head slumps forward.)

GOTTLIEB (CONT'D)

Would you mind terribly just giving the uppers a nudge for me?

FRANK

I beg your pardon?

GOTTLIEB

It's that needle over on your side just there. I think I may have overdone the depressants. Would you mind just giving him a quick jab?

FRANK

Actually, I think I would. I don't even know what's in there.

GOTTLIEB

Natural yohimbine from Indian snakeroot with some ephedrine, a touch of MDMA, and a dash of good old nicotine, but fair enough, I'll get it. It's just my foot, makes it hard to get around very quickly.

FRANK

Your foot?

GOTTLIEB

Don't say you haven't noticed. I'm club footed. Everyone notices.

FRANK

Actually I hadn't...

(Gottlieb jabs the man again.)

GOTTLIEB

Sorry, it's entirely beside the point. You were saying something about considering our offer.

FRANK

Yes. I do actually have a couple of questions.

GOTTLIEB

Excellent. What's on your mind?

FRANK

First of all, mind control.

GOTTLIEB

Yes.

FRANK

Forgive me. I don't know what's normal within the CIA, but I meant to phrase that as a question: Mind control?

(Ajax's head snaps up but he does not appear to be awake.)

GOTTLIEB

Sounds like science fiction, right?

FRANK

Just slightly.

GOTTLIEB

Well you're familiar with the concept of truth drugs, yes?

FRANK

Sure.

GOTTLIEB

We've looked into that quite a bit here. I myself have an enormous regard for the effects of very serious drugs.

FRANK

And what have you learned?

GOTTLIEB

Well there's so much. Getting people to talk, getting people not to talk, getting people to forget things, getting people to do things they'd never do. We're looking into all these things. Right now we're focused on behaviour control. Replacing information. Rebuilding a person, if you will.

FRANK

To what end?

GOTTLIEB

To various ends.

FRANK

Hmm. Are such things possible?

GOTTLIEB

We're getting reports out of Korea right now about captured US servicemen being paraded in front of film crews and spouting a lot of nonsense about workers and exploitation and so on straight out of the Communist Manifesto.

FRANK

Interesting.

GOTTLIEB

It has to be a combination of drugs, physical coercion, and psychological intimidation, obviously.

FRANK

Maybe they just write an extremely persuasive pamphlet.

GOTTLIEB

The Soviets and Chinese are lightyears ahead of us here Frank. Doing nothing is not an option.

FRANK

Why me? Where do I fit in? This is well outside my expertise. I'm just a researcher. I don't do brainwashing.

GOTTLIEB

Just a researcher he says. Frank, you're a legend. You single-handedly weaponized anthrax!

FRANK

You exaggerate.

GOTTLIEB

And you're too modest. The agency needs a man with your talents, Frank. Your drug work is breathtaking. There aren't five men in the world with your insight.

FRANK

Thank you.

GOTTLIEB

What do you know about LSD?

FRANK

Lysergic acid diethyl-amide. Powerful hallucinogen. Sometimes called acid. Thought to have properties useful in psychotherapy.

GOTTLIEB

Or for other purposes.

FRANK  
Mind control.

GOTTLIEB  
Impossible?

FRANK  
Not necessarily.

GOTTLIEB  
We're very interested in it. Very very interested. It could be the game changer.

FRANK  
Is this what the Commies are using?

GOTTLIEB  
I don't know everything the Commies have, Frank. But I know they don't have you.

(Ajax's head flops backwards.)

FRANK  
Um, do you need to, you know, do anything, with this guy?

GOTTLIEB  
Eh. He'll keep.

FRANK  
OK. So, what else do you know about me?

GOTTLIEB  
I know how you feel about the Agency.

FRANK  
Oh?

GOTTLIEB  
I believe the word 'cowboy' has been used on occasion.

FRANK  
Now how did you...

GOTTLIEB  
Frank, that's my job. I'm paid to know things. We don't make job offers to people we don't know a little something about.

FRANK

Hmmm. Well, it's true. I've heard a little about what you fellows are getting up to in Laos. Cowboy stuff.

(Ajax moans. Gottlieb turns some dials. Ajax goes back to sleep.)

GOTTLIEB

Of course! You're absolutely right, the agency is full of cowboys, covert operations and dirty tricks and it's all quite shocking until you consider that they're up against an implacable enemy that will stop at nothing to destroy our way of life.

FRANK

Your persuasive pamphlet could use a little work.

GOTTLIEB

Ouch. But it is true, you know. You can't trust Russians, they're ruthless. They'd dose our water supply with LSD in a heartbeat if we didn't figure out how to do it first.

FRANK

I can only imagine how colorful their merciless pamphlets would be then.

GOTTLIEB

We need you Frank. But if you're in, you're in. You might find some of our methods peculiar. I'm telling you right now this is no place for the squeamish and it's all classified above top secret. You're either on the bus or off the bus.

FRANK

I understand. I appreciate your candor.

GOTTLIEB

That's just self-interest. I pride myself on my ability to read people. I'm not going to get anywhere with you by deception.

FRANK

I would hope that would be true.

GOTTLIEB

So what's it going to be, my friend? In or out?

FRANK

Boy, you don't mince words, do you?

GOTTLIEB

Not when I can help it. Your country needs you, Frank.

(Frank leans back, takes a deep breath, exhales. He pauses for a few moments.)

FRANK

I'm in.

GOTTLIEB

Good.

FRANK

I'm in.

(Ajax's heads pops up straight and he opens his eyes wide.)

AJAX

Wow.

FRANK

Who is this guy anyway?

GOTTLIEB

Ajax. You'll be working with him. I better get him a cup of coffee.

AJAX

Coffee.

ACT 1: SCENE 3

*House of Ill Repute. BELLE, dressed in the provocative manner of her profession, sits on the edge of her bed brushing her hair. Suddenly the door kicks open and Ajax storms in. Belle continues brushing her hair, not concerned in the least.*

BELLE

No really, do come in darling, I insist.

AJAX

Knock knock.

BELLE

Let me guess. Vice squad. What's the matter honey, did my last check bounce?

AJAX

Wrong, two more guesses.

BELLE

Well if you're the local mafia representative you can talk to the Madam. That's not my department.

AJAX

I get it. She's business. You're pleasure. Last guess?

BELLE

It's not that I hate games, big boy, but did you know I've got a scream that can break glass at twelve paces?

(Ajax sticks his head out of the door.)

AJAX

Come on in fellas. We're alone.

(Enter Gottlieb and Frank Coleman.)

BELLE

Hey now, what's the big idea? You can't just barge in here like this, what do you take me for?

GOTTLIEB

Mademoiselle, I do apologize. My colleague here sometimes gets a little carried away.

BELLE

Well I have a good idea. Why don't you all go carry yourselves away together and go charm some other lucky gal huh?

FRANK

She's right. Let's get out of here.

GOTTLIEB

I beg your pardon?

BELLE

Now this fella makes sense. Is he the brains of the operation?

FRANK

I'll be honest with you, I'm a little embarrassed here.

BELLE

That's what they all say the first time, slim.

FRANK

No, I mean, when I first met your friend here he was absolutely lovely. On account of being unconscious. Since he woke up I haven't been impressed with his manners.

AJAX

Ouch.

FRANK

Well what's wrong with knocking, tough guy?

AJAX

A question of style.

FRANK

May I ask your name?

BELLE

Belle.

GOTTLIEB

I already told you in the car her name was Belle.

FRANK

My name's Frank, Gottlieb is the creepy one who knows your name before he meets you, and you're already acquainted with Ajax.

GOTTLIEB

So much for our code names.

FRANK

You want to take over? I'm happy to leave right now.

GOTTLIEB

You're doing fine.

FRANK

Look Belle, I'm really sorry about busting in here like this. Totally unnecessary. Are you all right?

BELLE

I'll live.

FRANK

Belle, we have a proposal for you, we'd like you to hear us out.

BELLE

One on the bottom, one behind, and one in front?

AJAX

I think I'm falling in love.

FRANK

Belle, I am a happily married man. It's nothing like that. We work for the...

GOTTLIEB

Department of Health.

FRANK

Right, the Department of Health, that's part of the government, and we'd like you to help us out with an experiment.

GOTTLIEB

A health program.

FRANK

It's a health program.

BELLE

Is this about how not to get the clap?

FRANK

No.

GOTTLIEB

Yes.

FRANK

Perhaps my colleague here could explain it better than I could.

BELLE

Perhaps, but I'd still rather talk to you.

GOTTLIEB

Miss Belle, how would you like never to have to worry about policemen or mobsters ever again?

BELLE

And can I have a pony, too?

GOTTLIEB

I'm perfectly serious. Work with us, and there's not going to be any more hassles, no more pay-offs, no more nights in jail. You'll be untouchable. So to speak.

BELLE

I never knew the Department of Health had so much pull. And just who or what do I have to do?

GOTTLIEB

There's a new medicine, very helpful. We'd just like you to help us disseminate it. To your customers.

BELLE

You want me to ask my clients to take your drugs?

GOTTLIEB

Definitely not.

BELLE

You want me to sneak it in on them. Slip them a Mickey.

GOTTLIEB

Would they sometimes have a glass of water? A glass of wine?

BELLE

Sure.

GOTTLIEB

Well you could just put a little drop of it in there then.

BELLE

Uh huh.

AJAX

Easy peasy.

BELLE

You could almost call it against their will, in other words. You could call them unsuspecting.

FRANK

That was my first thought as well.

GOTTLIEB

But you'd be helping people. That's the main thing.

BELLE

Yeah? What people? It just seems like a dirty trick to me.

AJAX

Our specialty!

GOTTLIEB

No no no no no...

BELLE

What kind of drugs are we talking about? What's going to happen to these guys? I can't have people dropping dead on me in here you know, I don't care how much pull you have with the cops. I got a conscience too you know.

GOTTLIEB

No no no, it's nothing like that.

FRANK

You don't have to do this, Belle. You can say no. We'll walk out of here right now.

GOTTLIEB

Of course you don't have to do it. It's a simple proposal, take it or leave it. It's a harmless drug for health purposes. They may get a little disoriented, sure, but it's absolutely safe.

BELLE

If it's so harmless and beneficial why can't you just ask them if they want to take it?

GOTTLIEB

We can also offer you two hundred dollars a month.

BELLE

Four.

GOTTLIEB

Three.

BELLE

Three fifty.

GOTTLIEB

Done. I love negotiating. That was exhilarating, thank you. It's really so nice to deal with professionals.

BELLE

Likewise, I'm sure. I'll sleep a lot better knowing the government is sparing no expense in the interest of public health.

GOTTLIEB

And just one other thing, my dear.

BELLE

Oh yeah, and what's that?

GOTTLIEB

I'm sure we can count on your absolute discretion in this matter.

BELLE

Honestly. In my business, you want to lecture me about discretion?

GOTTLIEB

Forgive me. I tend to err on the side of clarity.

FRANK

Thank you for your time, Belle. We'll leave you in peace now.

BELLE

You come back any time now, Frank. You know some of my best friends are happily married men.

GOTTLIEB

Oh, and we'll need to make a few modifications to your accommodations. For research purposes.

BELLE

What kind of modifications?

(Gottlieb smiles.)

ACT 1: SCENE 4

*A secret viewing room in the house of ill repute. Frank, Gottlieb, and Ajax sit looking out towards the audience, as if there were a window on the fourth wall.*

*Scattered around the room are bottles of pills and liquor, powders, vials of various description. GOTTLIEB and AJAX DRINK MARTINIS.*

AJAX

Wow. She just dosed him again.

GOTTLIEB

She's showing a certain enthusiasm for the work.

AJAX

I'll say she is. I love these one-way mirrors. I think we should put them absolutely everywhere.

FRANK

I still feel like a pervert sitting here watching them.

AJAX

Me too -- and we're getting paid for it!

*(Ajax reaches over, grabs the nearest pill bottle, takes one out and pops it.)*

FRANK

You're an unbalanced individual, Ajax. I know I've said this before, but I often have a hard time believing I've actually agreed to work with you people.

AJAX

Hey could you turn the wattage down on that halo, Captain Anthrax? You're blinding me here.

FRANK

I'm fully complicit in a completely illegal program to dose unwitting American citizens with LSD against their will, while spying on them without a warrant.

AJAX

In a whore house.

FRANK

Do you have any actual skills, Ajax? Just wondering.

AJAX

I can perform lobotomies.

GOTTLIEB

It's true, he can.

FRANK

What?!

(Ajax reaches into his pocket and  
pulls out a large steel needle.)

AJAX

I use this. It's not too hard really. You just poke in  
through the front and dig around until the light sort of goes  
as dim as you want.

FRANK

Sounds like you went to one of the finer medical schools.

AJAX

Never underestimate bull-headed self-confidence and a bit of  
trial and error.

GOTTLIEB

He does a good job though, I've seen him do it.

FRANK

Unbelievable.

GOTTLIEB

Did you know that Siamese Fighting Fish on LSD will surface  
for ages?

FRANK

Excuse me?

GOTTLIEB

Siamese Fighting Fish.

FRANK

Have we changed subjects?

AJAX

New subject. Siamese Fighting Fish.

GOTTLIEB

Yes, you give them LSD and first thing they do is they'll  
surface.

FRANK

OK. Well, that's actually interesting. Is that true?

GOTTLIEB

Oh yes. They'll go straight to the surface and just hang there vertically, tails down, staring up into the sky, their little pectoral fins moving them ever so slowly, gently backwards. For hours on end.

AJAX

I gotta try some of this stuff.

GOTTLIEB

And spiders weave the most beautiful webs on LSD.

FRANK

Is that right? Because I know on marijuana they do very shoddy work. On caffeine their webs are just stupid.

GOTTLIEB

That's what makes it so interesting. A normal spider web always has a number of irregularities. On LSD, they become extraordinarily precise. The webs come out so perfect they look fake.

AJAX

You know what, it doesn't make sense.

GOTTLIEB

I assure you, it happens, ergo it makes sense.

FRANK

I guess I can't argue with that. Yet I feel like I want to.

AJAX

No, I'm talking about LSD, that doesn't make sense.

FRANK

How so?

AJAX

Well, it's lysergic acid diethylamide, right?

FRANK

Correct.

AJAX

And lysergic is one word, right?

FRANK

Yes.

AJAX

Right, so why the S? It should be LAD. Lysergic. Acid. Diethylamide. LAD. Why the S?

GOTTLIEB

Blame the Swiss, they invented it.

AJAX

It makes no sense.

FRANK

I hate to admit it but the man has a point.

AJAX

It should be LAD.

GOTTLIEB

It's LSD.

FRANK

Yeah, it is LSD. It makes no sense but it is. It can't be changed.

AJAX

What is it, Ly Sergicacid Diethylamide? Sergicacid? What happens to the A? Just dropped? It's bullshit.

FRANK

Let it go, Ajax. You can't fight history.

AJAX

Maybe it makes sense in Swiss.

GOTTLIEB

German.

AJAX

I thought you said it was Swiss?

GOTTLIEB

They speak German.

AJAX

I knew that. I knew that.

GOTTLIEB

Lyserg säure diethylamid. Säure. German for acid.

FRANK

Ahhhhhh. Another mystery bites the dust.

AJAX

I liked it better when it didn't make sense.

FRANK

That explains a lot.

AJAX

So what's a good dose? Human male, two hundred pounds. Two twenty.

FRANK

You'll feel it at fifty micrograms.

GOTTLIEB

A hundred is a standard test dose.

AJAX

That's micrograms.

FRANK

Yup.

AJAX

Which is...

GOTTLIEB

Millionths of a gram.

AJAX

Millionths. It's just insanely potent.

FRANK

It really is. It's astonishing.

AJAX

And what do you reckon this guy's up to now?

FRANK

He's about halfway through his third glass of pinot noir and she's made a pretty good dent in that vial. I'm going to say a good thirteen hundred mics anyway.

GOTTLIEB

I agree. I was going to say twelve hundred to be conservative.

FRANK

Could be fourteen, fifteen.

AJAX

Give me that bastard vial.

(Ajax leans over and grabs a vial from a nearby table. He pulls out the eye dropper and squirts the whole thing into his mouth.)

FRANK

That was one of the most irresponsible things it has ever been my dubious privilege to witness.

AJAX

What did I get?

GOTTLIEB

Easily two thousand.

AJAX

Yeah baby. If this amateur can handle thirteen hundred...

FRANK

Not to be pedantic, but it is yet to be established whether or not he can handle it. Does it look to you like he's handling it, Gottlieb?

GOTTLIEB

Well, he's paid pretty good money to be alone in a room with what I think we'd all have to agree is a strikingly beautiful woman wearing what I think we'd have to call unnaturally exciting lingerie...

FRANK

Right.

GOTTLIEB

...and I would estimate the last time he thought about his penis was forty five minutes ago.

FRANK

And then only to see how far he could stretch the skin out on it sideways for a laugh.

AJAX

All right, all right. Well he's touching her now.

GOTTLIEB

Yes. He appears to be smelling her left knee. It's been seven minutes and there's no sign of stopping. He is just sniffing away, sort of in slow motion.

FRANK

Time will be distorted for him. It probably only seems like a few seconds to him.

GOTTLIEB

True.

FRANK

She's so patient. Look how she runs her hand through his hair while he smells her. So gentle. She's a good woman, our Belle.

AJAX

Slightly diabolical, but good.

GOTTLIEB

Sure you won't join us in a martini, Frank?

FRANK

No thanks. I hate to be a wet blanket but it seems like somebody ought to be keeping up appearances around here.

GOTTLIEB

Are you sure?

AJAX

I don't feel anything yet. I'll definitely need another martini. Where's the pot that cop gave us? I'm going to roll a joint.

(Ajax finds a bag of marijuana and proceeds to roll a joint.)

FRANK

You are not smoking that in here.

AJAX

Awww, dad, please?

FRANK

I'm serious. These are cramped quarters, you're not filling this space with pot smoke. This is a work environment.

AJAX

Yeah? What are you gonna do? Take your toxins and go home?

GOTTLIEB

Ajax.

AJAX

What?

GOTTLIEB

Do not light that thing. Please. Have a little consideration.

AJAX

Why don't I feel anything?

FRANK

It's been what, a minute? You have the attention span of a three year old.

AJAX

How long should it take?

GOTTLIEB

About twenty minutes to the first rush. Although it could be quicker with the amount you just sucked back. I strongly advise patience. You're going to be flying for about twelve hours.

AJAX

Twenty minutes! Hey, what's she doing now, making phone calls?

FRANK

Obviously.

AJAX

Why the hell is she making phone calls?

FRANK

Why shouldn't she? Mr. Smello doesn't mind what she does.

GOTTLIEB

She can make phone calls. The phone is covered.

AJAX

Ooh man, I do think I'm feeling something here. It's kind of a swoon. Wow. Nice.

FRANK

Tapped? The phone is tapped?

AJAX

No, of course not Frank, we'd never do anything like that, not without a warrant. Not unless we really, really wanted to, in which case we'd promise never to do it again.

FRANK

You fellows certainly have a certain way to do things. Tapped the girl's phone.

GOTTLIEB

Well, technically it's our phone. We bought the house.

AJAX

I didn't know that!

GOTTLIEB

You don't know everything.

FRANK

So much for old Hank Stimson. "Gentlemen don't read each other's mail," he said.

GOTTLIEB

Stimson was a bit of an idiot.

FRANK

Stimson was a patriot.

AJAX

It's only bad if it's other people doing it to us. It's OK when we do it because we're good. Maybe I don't need this joint after all. You gentlemen are starting to look and sound like melted wax.

FRANK

I don't know why I'm bothered about the phone. We're sitting here watching her on hidden cameras.

AJAX

She'll gossip, you know she will. "Oh hi Dolores, guess what, I'm just over here prostituting, and it's so innnnnninteresting, I've given this guy the most innnnnninteresting drugs the government gave me, isn't that innnnnninteresting?" Just wait. You'll see.

FRANK

So what are you going to do, shoot her?

(Ajax glares at him with a strange smile.)

GOTTLIEB

Settle down, settle down. Incidentally, it's not true about the elephant.

FRANK

What elephant?

AJAX

Yeah, what elephant? Wait. I think I see it.

GOTTLIEB

Poor thing. He was given a large dose of LSD, large even for an elephant. About three hundred milligrams, which of course would be three hundred thousand mics.

AJAX

Wow. So two thousand isn't that much.

FRANK

An elephant weighs what, two, three tons?

GOTTLIEB

This one was seven thousand pounds. By body weight, a human-equivalent dosage would have been nine thousand micrograms. But do we go by weight? By metabolic rate, the dosage would be four thousand mics. By brain size, less than a thousand mics. But yes, it was an excessive dosage. Even I would grant you that.

FRANK

So what happened to him?

GOTTLIEB

He died. That much is true.

FRANK

How?

GOTTLIEB

He went into seizures and respiratory failure. Respiratory distress, that's the only way you can die from LSD, and it takes an enormous amount.

AJAX

Can you believe we're on a planet? In space? With elephants?

FRANK

I'd say three hundred thousand mics qualifies as an enormous amount.

GOTTLIEB

But that's just it, it wasn't the LSD that killed him.

FRANK

Then what?

GOTTLIEB

Well, I'd say it was far more likely the massive dose of thorazine and pentobarbital sodium they gave him to try to help him.

AJAX

I do want this joint. Who's got a match?

FRANK

Gottlieb, have we got any thorazine and pentobarbital sodium we could give to Ajax?

AJAX

Oh, relax. Tell you what. I'll make a deal with you. I won't light this up, if you'll join us in one lousy martini. I want to make a toast. Let's get this partnership off to a better start. Come on. It might make your face look less stretchy.

GOTTLIEB

You can't force a man to drink, Ajax.

AJAX

True. You can force him to drop acid, but with drink it's tricky. Come on, Frank, what do you say? Don't make me light this thing. I really don't want to, but...

FRANK

Straight up, very dry, four olives.

GOTTLIEB

Four!

AJAX

Now we're talking.

FRANK

Nutrition.

(Gottlieb makes him his drink.)

AJAX

OK, all right then, a toast, and this is in honor of Frank Coleman. Frank, in all seriousness, it's an honor to work with you, so here's my toast: To science!

GOTTLIEB

To science!

FRANK

This isn't science.

GOTTLIEB

Oh, Frank, don't be like that.

FRANK

It's not. It's not science. I don't know what it is but it's not science. Maybe it's...maybe it's art.

GOTTLIEB

I like it!

AJAX

To art!

GOTTLIEB

To art!

FRANK

To art.

(They clink glasses.)

ACT 2: SCENE 1

*Jack Coleman sits alone in his kitchen, reading from a piece of paper, practicing his poetry. Whenever he stops to correct his words, he crosses out and scribbles on his piece of paper.*

JACK

Meat loaf, meat loaf. Meat loaf, big oaf, street dope, ski slope, heat stroke. Ugh. It's a meat loaf show for a TV glow and you wash your hands off while the wind spins the world and sands in the hourglass drift off...

(Jack stands up, picks up a jazzy little cap and puts it on his head, adjusts his clothes, starts to act the part.)

JACK (CONT'D)

Yeah, sands drift off like hobos pissed off on the railroads and my dad thinks that he knows where his car goes but to me it all shows the death throes of the bozos who close the rose and smell the nose by any other name they chose, ok, is this good or terrible.

(He leans over the table and does some scribbling, then resumes his posing. Just before he starts again, he picks up some sunglasses and puts them on for extra attitude.)

JACK (CONT'D)

Yeah close the rose, smell the nose, name they chose, and my middle class remit is a big hit...

(Enter Kit Coleman. She stands and watches her son for a minute. He does not realize she is there.)

JACK (CONT'D)

...no doubt about it, sit and fritter and hit with glitter from the pit that's well lit and do our bit to hit the catcher's mitt but it just don't fit and my middle class parents won't admit they're sitting in a pile of...

KIT

Hello.

JACK

Mom!

KIT

Um, so, you, um...

(Jack removes his sunglasses and his jaunty cap.)

JACK

Yeah, I was just kind of, working on something, and, um, so, how long have you been standing there?

KIT

I just got here really. So, working on your poetry?

JACK

Yeah. There's a sort of a competition coming up, not really a competition but sort of a showcase. Anyway I have to come up with something really good.

KIT

Is your father home yet?

JACK

Nah.

KIT

I see. So, you'll be doing your poetry in public?

JACK

Yeah. Public performance.

KIT

Oh, well that's exciting. I would never get up in front of a bunch of strangers and reveal anything as personal as that.

JACK

As what?

KIT

As poetry! I couldn't do it, I'd be too nervous. Are you nervous?

JACK

Me? Nah. I mean, yeah, a little.

KIT

Well that's natural.

JACK

Actually I'm scared shi...witless.

KIT

Well, you'll be fine, I'm sure. You're certainly putting in the work. That's the main thing.

JACK

Yeah. I suppose so.

KIT

So. What's your poem going to be about, Jack?

JACK

My poem? Well, it's just kind of a stream of consciousness riff on, I don't know, mainstream values, you know.

KIT

Uh huh. What do you mean?

JACK

Me? Oh you know, just, I don't know, materialism, you know.

KIT

I see, I see.

JACK

Yeah? I mean, you do?

KIT

Well, sure. No. Not really. But I'm proud of you Jack.

JACK

Thanks Mom.

KIT

What sort of places do people go to to do this kind of poetry?

JACK

You know, places. Poetry hangouts.

KIT

Jack, I want you to tell me the truth. Are you going to be doing your poetry in some sort of speakeasy?

JACK

A speakeasy!

KIT

That's what I said, and I want you to tell me the truth.

JACK

OK Mom. I will. I'll tell you the truth. Whew, this is harder than I thought, but, well, the truth is...maybe you should sit down, Ma.

(She sits, looking worried.)

KIT

OK, OK. Go on.

JACK

Mom, the truth is, well, the truth is that there haven't been any speakeasies for like twenty years.

(There's a slight pause and they both laugh hard.)

KIT

Oh, you naughty boy.

JACK

Speaking of which, where were you hanging out in 1933?

KIT

(Still laughing)

Stop that.

JACK

I'll bet you were in a speakeasy! I'll bet that's where you met Dad!

KIT

Your father wouldn't be caught dead in a place like that! And neither would I. I wouldn't have known where to find one!

JACK

All right, all right, I guess I'll have to take your word on that one.

KIT

(Getting serious.)

Jack, are you OK?

JACK

Me? Yeah, sure. What do you mean?

KIT

I don't know. I guess I just want to hear that you're OK.

JACK

I'm OK.

KIT

You know, your father....your father loves you very much.

JACK

Sure.

KIT

He really does, Jack.

JACK

OK. I know.

KIT

I know he wishes he could spend more time with you. He doesn't always know exactly what to say.

JACK

Sometimes it seems like he's not allowed to say anything.

KIT

I know.

JACK

So how are you doing?

KIT

Me? What do you mean?

JACK

I mean are you OK? Are you OK being married to the big man of mystery?

KIT

Don't you worry about me. Your father does his best for this family and for this country.

JACK

Translation: this conversation is over.

KIT

Jack...

JACK

No really, it's OK ma. You worry about me, I worry about you, OK? Dad loves us, we love dad. We're all right. Right?

(Kit gives her son a big hug.)

KIT

I really am proud of you for your poetry.

JACK

Thanks ma.

KIT

Well. I'd better get the meatloaf on. Your father might actually come home soon!

JACK

You never know!

ACT 2: SCENE 2

*Belle's room. Belle sits on the edge of her bed while Frank paces around.*

BELLE

You're just a bundle of nerves, aren't you honey?

FRANK

Me? Not at all.

BELLE

OK. It's just you're wearing a hole in my floor over there.

FRANK

No, no I'm not. See?

(Frank stops pacing and adopts a forced casual standing pose.)

BELLE

That's much better. You're the picture of relaxation.

FRANK

Thank you.

BELLE

You can sit down here next to me, you know. I promise not to excite you unduly.

FRANK

Think I'm afraid to sit down?

BELLE

Yes.

FRANK

Nonsense. It's not like that at all.

BELLE

Of course not. You just prefer standing around awkwardly.

FRANK

Exactly. It's my personal preference.

BELLE

You're afraid. Afraid, afraid, afraid. Scaredy cat!

FRANK

Am not!

BELLE

Well, why don't we both stand then?

(Belle stands up and moves in close to Frank, brushing up against him and looking into his eyes.)

FRANK

I'll sit.

(Frank sits on the bed. Belle shakes her head and then sits down next to him, leaving a respectful distance between them.)

BELLE

There. Now isn't that better?

FRANK

Yes, that's fine. Perhaps you are wondering why I've come.

BELLE

The question did cross my mind but I figured you'd get to it in time.

FRANK

It's just that, well, I guess you could say I was concerned about you.

BELLE

Why Frank, I'm touched.

FRANK

Don't make fun.

BELLE

I'm not making fun.

FRANK

I'm just wondering how it's going, the experiments, how you're feeling about it. Whether you're still OK with it.

BELLE

Oh that.

FRANK

What else?

BELLE

Oh nothing. I thought for a second there maybe you had gotten it into your head you wanted to rescue the fallen woman and take her away from all this.

FRANK

You are making fun.

BELLE

No I'm not.

FRANK

So, is everything all right? Have you had any second thoughts about it?

BELLE

Well, the drug seems all right.

FRANK

You've tried it yourself?

BELLE

Well a girl gets curious.

FRANK

And what was it like?

BELLE

It's a trip, Frank. The world gets all kind of warped and you kind of feel like you're finally seeing things for the way they are. It's a laugh I guess.

FRANK

Interesting. And your clients?

BELLE

Well it certainly changes the quality of our time together.

FRANK

I imagine so.

BELLE

I guess I'd say the nervous ones get more paranoid, the funny ones laugh their heads off, the thinkers go all thinky. But I haven't had anyone go jumping out the window on me or anything yet.

FRANK

Knock on wood.

BELLE

Right. So how about you? Have you learned anything?

FRANK

Good question.

BELLE

Does that mean no?

FRANK

No. Research is a sort of long and winding road sometimes.

BELLE

Sounds like no to me.

FRANK

OK. It's no. So far. Nothing very useful. Which actually in itself is useful.

BELLE

If you say so.

FRANK

If I didn't believe that, I'd be the one going out the window.

BELLE

Well you go on believing then, honey.

FRANK

I'll try.

BELLE

So who do you really work for?

FRANK

Well, Belle, as I said when we met, it's the government.

BELLE

But not the Department of Health.

FRANK

No.

BELLE

Because you guys just don't seem like doctors somehow. More like some kind of cross between cops and crooks.

FRANK

Yeah, well, enough about us, we're a very dreary topic. What I want to know is how you're doing, how you're dealing with this.

BELLE

What do you mean?

FRANK

Your mindset. Your mental health. You're experimenting on people. Are you fine with that?

BELLE

Ha! I'm no worse than you!

FRANK

I know.

BELLE

Aw, I'm sorry, Frank, I didn't mean...

FRANK

It's OK. I'll worry about me later. Right now I'm worried about you. You seem, I don't know, a little blue. I mean, if it's the assignment, I thought...

BELLE

Don't you ever get blue, Frank?

FRANK

Sometimes.

BELLE

Me too.

FRANK

I suppose that makes you human.

BELLE

I suppose it does.

(Belle slides over close to Frank,  
puts her arm around him, fiddles  
with the buttons on his shirt.)

BELLE (CONT'D)

And I suppose you're human too, Frank.

(Frank stands up.)

FRANK

All too human, Belle. I just wanted to come by and make sure  
you were all right. That you weren't feeling coerced into  
anything.

BELLE

No honey. Not coerced into anything. We wouldn't want to do  
anything against our will, would we?

FRANK

No. You take care now.

BELLE

Oh I will.

FRANK

Goodbye Belle.

BELLE

Bye bye.

(Frank pauses before leaving.)

FRANK

One other thing actually.

BELLE

All right.

FRANK

Just, to remind you not to, you know, say anything to anybody.

BELLE

What a peculiar man you are.

FRANK

No, it's just, these fellows I work with, they're funny about their privacy. Really quite funny about it. This work, it's, well, it's a bit touchy. I just wanted to remind you.

BELLE

OK lover boy. I get it. They're a bit touchy.

FRANK

Yeah.

BELLE

OK.

FRANK

Take care, Belle.

(He leaves.)

ACT 2: SCENE 3

*The CIA office. Frank tinkers around with some chemicals and a spray bottle for a while before Ajax enters.*

AJAX

Frankarino! What's grooving, as the kids say?

FRANK

Morning. Just trying a few new compounds to get the aerosol working effectively.

AJAX

Aerosol! Aerosol acid?

FRANK

Yep.

AJAX

Spray it around the room, get everybody tripping?

FRANK

That's the general idea. Put it in a crop duster, get a whole town. Could be a whole new way of war.

AJAX

A whole town tripping. Can you imagine that?

FRANK

I've been trying to.

AJAX

(Indicating the spray bottle)

May I?

FRANK

Certainly not.

AJAX

OK, just asking. Thought you might need a volunteer.

FRANK

Much obliged. It's not ready yet though.

AJAX

OK. But there is acid in there?

FRANK

Yes.

AJAX

Have you seen the new file on the Soviet methods? Amazing stuff.

FRANK

No, where's that?

AJAX

Right there.

(Ajax points to an area behind Frank. When Frank turns to look, Ajax grabs the spray bottle, sprays it into the air, and starts furiously sniffing it for all he's worth. Meanwhile Frank holds his breath and tries to wave it away from his nose.)

FRANK

It's like working with a child.

AJAX

Aaaaaaah. Odorless, tasteless. Breakfast of champions.

FRANK

I really wish I hadn't put the botulinum toxin in there. In four minutes you'll be writhing on the floor in agony, foaming at the mouth, and I'll have to clean you up.

AJAX

Erm, you...

FRANK

No, not really. But you really should be careful. Reckless insanity will only get you so far, my friend.

AJAX

You should talk.

FRANK

What do you mean?

AJAX

Oh, nothing.

FRANK

Ajax.

AJAX

Unauthorized visits to clients, divulging inappropriate information...it's reckless! It's insane!

FRANK

I don't need anyone's permission to go where I like in this country, pal. Glued to the one-way mirror then were you?

AJAX

Just a lucky coincidence. Now, had you actually gotten it on with her, I'd have respectfully closed one eye.

FRANK

That is truly heartwarming.

AJAX

Still, are you sure you're not getting a little too close to the client there Frank? You know, seriously, emotional involvement in this line of work, it's recklessly insane.

FRANK

Nothing personal about it. I was just ensuring the integrity of the experiment. Checking her mental state.

AJAX

Which was?

FRANK

She's all right.

AJAX

A little blue maybe?

FRANK

Go to hell.

AJAX

Because we've got drugs for that you know, and we're keen to test them. Hey, you know what this room needs? A high end sound system. And a paint job. How drab is this place?

FRANK

It's drab all right but I'm not sure I'd trust your interior design sense, personally.

AJAX

Ouch! You should give me a chance. A wall-sized mosaic of swirling color over here, maybe some of those interlocking M.C. Escher lizards all over that wall there.

FRANK

Sounds tasteful. Listen, do you know if Gottlieb is coming by the office today?

AJAX

Doubt it. He's got his Nazis today.

FRANK

His what?

AJAX

Nazis! They're a real treasure trove of information.

FRANK

Time out. Gottlieb is interrogating Nazi scientists? Is he dosing them?

AJAX

No but what a good idea. Oh I don't know. Nazis on acid? Could get political. They're invited guests. Hell, they're on the payroll.

FRANK

Seriously?

AJAX

Here comes the halo again.

FRANK

Nazis. That's setting the moral bar a little on the low side.

AJAX

True. That's probably why he had to warm up by going out to dinner with General Ishii.

FRANK

General Shiro Ishii? As in Unit 731 Shiro Ishii?

AJAX

That's the guy. A real pioneer in the fine art of live vivisection and injecting people with horrifying diseases. Yeah, Gottlieb had him out to dinner just last week. Finds him absolutely fascinating. Which he is, let's be honest.

FRANK

Jesus christ.

AJAX

May I remind you that your entire career has been dedicated to the pursuit of mass casualties by biological and chemical means.

FRANK

We need to understand these things in case they fall into the hands of those with less scruples.

AJAX

Fewer. And you believe that, that's adorable.

FRANK

We're not all cynics, mister.

AJAX

Oh please. One of us here is truly comfortable with our weaponry and one of us isn't, that's all. By the way Frank, you smell fantastic.

FRANK

Yeah. Thanks.

AJAX

No really, you smell great. Is that cologne? Granted, the acid is kicking in. This may sound strange, but may I touch your face? It has a rubbery glow.

FRANK

I'd prefer you didn't.

AJAX

That's fine.

FRANK

Excellent.

AJAX

Tell you what, I'm going to go see about that sound system.

FRANK

You do that. I've got some actual work to do.

AJAX

That's why you get the big bucks, Frankie. That's why you get the big bucks.

ACT 2: SCENE 4

*Coleman dining room. Meatloaf.*

KIT

Has everyone washed their hands?

FRANK

Yes ma'am. Jack? Soap and water?

JACK

Oh yes, ninety nine and forty four one hundredths percent pure Ivory and all great Neptune's ocean.

FRANK

Classic advertising baloney and Hamlet. Nice combination.

JACK

Macbeth actually.

KIT

Well, you're doing better than me. I can't tell one Ibsen play from another.

(Jack and Frank look at her.)

JACK

Ummmm...

KIT

I'm kidding, I'm kidding!

JACK

OK. You had me going there for a second.

KIT

Tennessee Williams, gosh, you think I'm uneducated?

FRANK

Har de har har.

JACK

Dad, why baloney? Surely you're not impugning the integrity of the American advertising community. Surely they couldn't say it was ninety nine and forty four one hundredths percent pure if it wasn't true.

FRANK

Certainly not. It's just it's the other fifty six one hundredths that'll kill you.

KIT

Everybody's a cynic!

FRANK

Just the voice of experience darling.

JACK

I always suspected knowledge led inevitably to cynicism. Thanks for the confirmation. I'll remember that.

FRANK

Well. It's only true ninety nine and forty four one hundredths percent of the time.

JACK

Ah, so it's the other fifty six one hundredths that'll save you.

FRANK

Sure.

KIT

Anyway, Jack has other word games to worry about tonight, don't you Jack?

JACK

Yes I do. Not that I'm actually worried.

KIT

No, of course not.

JACK

I'm not!

FRANK

What's going on?

(Jack rolls his eyes.)

KIT

Jack's in a poetry competition. You knew that dear.

JACK

Showcase.

FRANK

Ah yes. That's tonight?

JACK

Yes.

KIT

He's been practicing very hard.

FRANK

Hmm. It's already seven o'clock son. I'm not sure I think this is a terribly good idea. Just where is this competition going to be?

JACK

Showcase.

FRANK

What?

JACK

It's not a competition. It's a showcase.

FRANK

Fine, so where is it? Where's this beat poetry business done, some kind of speakeasy?

KIT

Frank, please, there haven't been speakeasies for twenty years.

FRANK

I see. I see.

JACK

It's a jazz club, Dad.

FRANK

A jazz club! Oh no, oh no no. I hardly think you're going out to a jazz club on your own. A jazz club! Listen to this!

JACK

Calm down, Dad. It's just not that exciting.

KIT

Frank, we've known about this for weeks. I've told him it's all right.

FRANK

Oh have you? Do I get a vote? Is this a democracy?

JACK

Here we go.

FRANK

Well I vote no, OK? Do you have any idea what goes on in jazz clubs?

JACK

They play jazz?

FRANK

I don't need your comedy here Mr. Comedy Man.

JACK

They do poetry too, Dad, it's pretty shocking stuff. Music, poetry. Next thing you know they'll put pictures on the wall.

FRANK

Listen, I know more than you think about what goes on in the world out there. I know all about these jazz hipsters and their mary jane and their heroin.

JACK

I promise not to let Mary Jane do any heroin Dad.

FRANK

Oh very funny. Very very funny.

KIT

Frank, it's important to him. He's been working so hard. You've known for weeks. It's not fair to say no now, just as he's about to go out the door.

JACK

Dad. Please.

FRANK

I'm sorry. The answer is no.

JACK

I'm going.

FRANK

No you're not.

(Jack stands up, grabs his jacket,  
and heads for the door.)

KIT

Good luck Jack!

JACK

Thanks Mom!

FRANK

You get back here! Hey! No drinking! Hey!

(Exit Jack.)

KIT

Well.

FRANK

See how he minds me? I tell you that boy trembles with fear at my every word.

KIT

I thought you might just run after him and tackle him to the ground.

FRANK

Dignity, my darling. Always dignity.

KIT

It's going to be fine, you know. We should encourage him to explore his talents. It's good that he's going.

FRANK

I suppose so. What's his poem about anyway?

KIT

Middle class hypocrisy.

FRANK

Excellent.

KIT

Yes. In any case, we do have an evening alone now. Glass of wine?

FRANK

Best idea I've heard all day.

(She pours a couple of glasses.)

KIT

There we are.

FRANK

Now we're talking.

KIT

So. How's work going?

FRANK

Kit, I...

KIT

Just kidding. I know the rules.

FRANK

I'm sorry.

KIT

So what shall we talk about then? Nothing at all? It was lovely weather today wasn't it?

FRANK

Why'd you marry me?

KIT

(Teasing)

You know, for the life of me I can't remember.

FRANK

Aw, don't do me like that babe.

(Kit massages his shoulders.)

KIT

It may have had something to do with these shoulders.

FRANK

Oh that's nice.

KIT

See, I'm nice sometimes.

FRANK

Sometimes. Oh, and my darling?

KIT

Yes?

FRANK

Just one question, not that I ever doubt you. I just want to make sure.

KIT

Shakespeare, Frank.

FRANK

Right. Good. Just checking.

(Kit slaps him playfully in the back of the head.)

ACT 2: SCENE 5

*The CIA office, the decorations for which have gotten increasingly psychedelic. Frank works on his test tubes alone. Gottlieb enters.*

GOTTLIEB

Frank, how goes it?

FRANK

I don't know. Fine.

GOTTLIEB

Ah. Good.

(Long pause.)

GOTTLIEB (CONT'D)

Oh no. Uh oh.

FRANK

What's the matter?

GOTTLIEB

The alarm.

FRANK

What alarm?

GOTTLIEB

Can't you hear it?

FRANK

I can't hear anything.

GOTTLIEB

It's the Unhappy Camper Alarm. Yes, there's no doubt. I can hear it a mile away. It's clanging away all right. Who could it be though? Could it be you Frank? Are you an unhappy camper?

FRANK

You're a hell of an amusing fellow sometimes Gottlieb.

GOTTLIEB

I am. I am insanely amusing. But then I get all serious when I get worried. And now I'm all worried about you, Frank.

FRANK

I'm touched. Really, I am. Would it be too paranoid of me to wonder if there wasn't the slightest undercurrent of menace in your voice?

GOTTLIEB

Too paranoid? I don't know. How paranoid is paranoid enough?

FRANK

You're the expert. You tell me.

GOTTLIEB

Well, how about you tell me what's bothering you and then we can decide how paranoid everyone should be?

FRANK

You want to know what's bothering me?

GOTTLIEB

I do.

FRANK

Yeah? You really want to know?

GOTTLIEB

I absolutely positively would like to know.

FRANK

Nazis, Gottlieb. Nazis bother me.

GOTTLIEB

Nazis bother you.

FRANK

Yes.

GOTTLIEB

You're bothered by Nazis.

FRANK

I am.

GOTTLIEB

I see.

FRANK

Do you?

GOTTLIEB

I do.

(There is a period of silence while Frank continues his work and Gottlieb watches, nodding his head. Finally Gottlieb breaks the silence.)

GOTTLIEB (CONT'D)

Do you want to talk about it?

FRANK  
Talk about what?

GOTTLIEB  
Nazis.

FRANK  
Not really.

GOTTLIEB  
You don't like talking about Nazis.

FRANK  
No.

GOTTLIEB  
Oh. OK. Well, nice work on the LSD aerosol, by the way. Very promising. Is that what you're working on now?

FRANK  
Yep.

GOTTLIEB  
Yep.

(More silence as Frank works away and Gottlieb nods his head. FRANK stops working, starts to speak, stops, keeps working.)

(More silence.)

(Frank again starts to speak, stops. Keeps working. Finally he does throw up his hands and speak.)

FRANK  
Well I mean, what the hell are we doing in bed with the goddamned Nazis?

GOTTLIEB  
Ah. Well, since you asked. It's not just us, you know. The rocket people obviously. The surveillance people.

FRANK  
The human experiments people.

GOTTLIEB

Look, they did what they did. It was bad.

FRANK

Bad, he says!

GOTTLIEB

It was horrible. It was heinous. That's us speaking as normal human beings, people with morals.

FRANK

Right.

GOTTLIEB

But, it's also true, however repugnant we find their actions, from a purely scientific or medical point of view, if there's some benefit to be gained, if we can learn from what they did...

FRANK

Learn from them? Like what? How better to torture people?

GOTTLIEB

Learn anything about the human body, the human mind...if we can learn something to help the free world, then we are obliged, as moral people...

FRANK

Oh nice, as moral people.

GOTTLIEB

Yes, as moral people, we're obliged to...

FRANK

To wine and dine and employ the bastards?

GOTTLIEB

To use what means are available to learn what can be learned.

FRANK

Oh, that is beautiful. Just beautiful. Sounds like a beautiful evening out. Nice restaurant, a rare chateaubriand, and some ice cold atrocities.

GOTTLIEB

We're scientists, Frank.

FRANK

Cold and clinical.

GOTTLIEB

When need be. Yes.

FRANK

And is that your only interest?

GOTTLIEB

What do you mean?

FRANK

I'm wondering about your personal sympathies, actually. What did you do during the War, Herr Gottlieb?

GOTTLIEB

That's dirty, Dr. Coleman. I was born in this country and I'll die for this country.

(Long pause.)

FRANK

You're right. That was dirty. I apologize. I'm sorry.

GOTTLIEB

Forgiven.

FRANK

I got carried away. It was stupid of me.

GOTTLIEB

Folk dancing.

FRANK

Beg pardon?

GOTTLIEB

That is what I did during the War.

FRANK

Folk dancing.

GOTTLIEB

I tried to enlist but they wouldn't have me. My club foot.

FRANK

I see.

GOTTLIEB

I took up folk dancing as a way to compensate for the disability. It helped me very much. Of course, I also worked for the old OSS, before it became the Agency.

FRANK

Good for you.

GOTTLIEB

I still folk dance. You should try it some time. It's wonderful fun, and excellent exercise.

FRANK

Perhaps I will.

GOTTLIEB

You could come with me some time. Perhaps even this evening.

FRANK

Ah. Well, thank you, thank you very much. This evening wouldn't work though. Perhaps not this evening. I'll take a rain check though.

GOTTLIEB

Oh, all right. Suit yourself.

FRANK

Well. Anyway. Where's old Ajax, anyhow? Out causing mayhem I suppose?

GOTTLIEB

Well, after dosing the coffee machine in the cafeteria this morning, he went to monitor the prison project.

FRANK

He dosed the what? Never mind. I don't want to know. What's the prison project?

GOTTLIEB

Oh, we've got some volunteers over there.

FRANK

Volunteers? Inmate volunteers?

GOTTLIEB

Sure. Some of them have been tripping for over seventy days straight now. Fascinating.

FRANK

We're dosing prisoners?

GOTTLIEB

Volunteers, sure. And then I think he was going to visit our Belle.

FRANK

Belle? What's he visiting her for?

GOTTLIEB

I believe he was concerned to hear that she was depressed.

FRANK

Son of a bitch.

ACT 2: SCENE 6

*Belle's room. Ajax in his underwear, getting dressed, whistling. Belle sits disheveled and unhappy on the edge of the bed. She sips a glass of water.*

AJAX

What a wonderful world it is, don't you think? I mean think about it. All those beautiful girls. Girls are beautiful, wouldn't you agree, Belle? They're so pretty to look at -- and you don't have to just look at them, you can touch them and all sorts! How fantastic is that? It's wonderful, Belle, it's a wonderful world.

(He touches her hair and She pushes him off. She grabs her brush and starts brushing her hair.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Frank was right, you're depressed. There's something so beautiful about a sad-looking woman. You know what it is? It's poetic. It's artistic. It is. Beautiful, sad woman. You're like a goddamned painting sitting there like that. I mean, you know, by a really good painter, not some hack, I'm talking about a painting by a great master, a Renoir. Do you like Renoir, Belle? Do you go to museums much? There are some great Renoirs in the city, you should check them out. Or hell, you could just look in the mirror!

(MORE)

## AJAX (CONT'D)

Just look in the mirror all sad like that and squint your eyes so you're a bit feathery. Presto. Instant Renoir.

(Ajax holds up his hands to make a frame and looks at Belle through it, squinting. She gives him the finger.)

## AJAX (CONT'D)

Gorgeous. Instant Renoir. We could just install you in a museum. We should do that. You could be a sort of live action Renoir. They do that sort of thing these days, oh sure. Absurdist art. These installations these days, you can do anything. You could sit there and dispense acid in the museum and people could sit there and watch you change colors. We could have food delivered to you three times a day. Do you think you could eat food poetically? Not many people can. Problem is, all the chewing and swallowing.

(He does a grotesque, loud pantomime of chewing and swallowing.)

## AJAX (CONT'D)

Try as you might, and you can be pretty goddamned dainty, you can dab at your lips with your little hanky or whatever, but chewing and swallowing is just pretty disgusting when you get right down to it. It looks ugly. It sounds ugly. Horrible thing to smell. Horrible. Ever watch people eat, Belle? Me neither. Why would we? Who wants to see that? Nobody. Have you ever wanted to strangle somebody just because they were chewing so loud? I have. Hell, I have strangled people for that reason. Oh sure, down in Guatemala, this ugly bastard, a fine drug runner but hoo weeee, I mean u.g.l.y., and we're flying some shit up into Texas and this guy is chomping on some goddamned rice and bean tortilla, I mean sloppy chomping, know what I mean, spit flying, mouth open, schlomp chomp chomp chomp chomp and I just lost it. I've got him by the throat and his eyes are bugging out and I'm screaming at him "Chew mouth! Chew mouth!" Oh, it was funny. In retrospect. At the time, I was in a real rage. I dumped his body out of the plane somewhere into the goddamned Rio Grande. We had to get a new runner but jesus that man could chew.

(Belle sips more water, then grabs a sewing kit and a skirt.

She lingers over a small pair of scissors and narrows her eyes at Ajax before starting sewing the skirt.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

What's the matter with you? I'm totally kidding about the Guatemalan. You should have seen the look on your face. Christ, what kind of guy do you think I am? I'm not saying I never killed a fellow. In this line of work? It's a lot of things, you know, but it's not teaching kindergarten, right? It's not rescuing wounded animals or whatever is it? A guy's gotta do what a guy's gotta do, right? But no, I never strangled anybody over chewing. Thought about it, sure. Thought about it many times.

BELLE

You're a sick man.

AJAX

You're sitting there thinking about stabbing me to death with a little pair of sewing scissors and I'm a sick man. You like sewing? I could never do that. I can't sew on a button, I wish I could. Know what I mean? I know seven different ways to kill a man silently with my bare hands, thirteen ways if you count small knives, I know how to beat a polygraph test, I can speak four languages, I can sneak contraband through customs in dozens of countries, and that's without agency cover, but I pop one button and I'm helpless. Helpless! I pop one button and I'm looking for my mother, you know what I'm saying? So I really admire that, the ability to sew. I really do. But still, you know what, with all the skills, all the talents in the world, what's it worth, you know? What's it worth in the end if you're just depressed?

BELLE

Who says I'm depressed? You should worry about yourself.

AJAX

No no no, I strongly disagree. We must worry about others. You know, that is what is so wrong with the world today. Everyone worrying only about himself. Everyone so selfish. Nobody caring about his neighbor. You know what they say, Belle, ideals begin at home. Is that what they say? They say something like that. The point being we have to look ourselves in the eye and say hey, can I live with myself today? And if I'm not even worried about you, my answer is no and I mean that. I care. Sue me.

(MORE)

## AJAX (CONT'D)

You're depressed, and denying it is only going to isolate you and make you more depressed. But there's no reason to be depressed. Check that. There are always reasons to be depressed, and I'm sure yours are as good as anyone's. No, what I mean is, there's no reason to suffer the effects of depression. Not in this day and age. I've got drugs your local pharmacist can't even dream about.

BELLE

No thanks.

AJAX

Don't be like that. What do you think I came over here for? I heard you were depressed and I brought you the cure. Check out these beauties!

(He produces a bottle of pills from his pocket and takes one out.)

BELLE

I don't want your drugs.

AJAX

Take the pill, babe. It'll make you feel better.

BELLE

I feel fine.

AJAX

Take the pill!

BELLE

No.

(He pushes the bottle into her hand and she throws it across the room.)

AJAX

I thought you might feel that way. That's why I put some in your water.

BELLE

You lousy bastard.

AJAX

Relax! It's not acid or anything, just a little something for depression. I'm just trying to help!

BELLE

Get out. Get out!

AJAX

I'm gone, I'm gone. Take care of yourself. Try to cheer up and don't operate any heavy machinery. Oh! Almost forgot!

(He takes some cash out of his pocket and leaves it on her table. He winks at her and exits.)

ACT 2: SCENE 7

*Jack, alone downstage, head down. Stage dark except for spotlight on Jack. He is dressed like a 1950s hipster, with a little French cap on his head and a colorful scarf, unlit cigarette dangling out of his mouth.*

*Offstage, an announcer's voice introduces Jack (can be taped or performed off stage).*

ANNOUNCER

All right, all right, how about this young man, what an impressive debut, won't you please snap your fingers like crazy one more time for Mr. Jack Coleman.

(Jack raises his head and looks out at the audience. He removes the cigarette from his mouth, sniffs it along its length, clearly savoring the smell, then tucks it behind his ear and bows.)

JACK

Thank you.

(He holds out his hands, smiles, encouraging the audience to show appreciation.)

JACK (CONT'D)

Thank you. Thanks a lot. Thank you very much.

ACT 2: SCENE 8

*CIA office. Gottlieb files some papers, sits down, makes some notes. Ajax bursts into the room as if hiding from someone, then begins to act casual.*

AJAX

Oh. Hi Gottlieb. Yeah. So. What's going on?

GOTTLIEB

(Not looking up.)

Is there a mess?

AJAX

A mess?

GOTTLIEB

Yes, Ajax. A mess. A situation created by you requiring my emergency intervention to prevent a larger catastrophe. Is there a mess?

AJAX

Why would you say such a thing?

GOTTLIEB

Is there a mess?

AJAX

No, not at all. I mean, not really.

GOTTLIEB

Have you been dosing the cafeteria again?

AJAX

The whole cafeteria?

GOTTLIEB

Any of the cafeteria.

AJAX

A couple of guys. Plus, not just the cafeteria. Couple other places.

GOTTLIEB

How many total?

AJAX

Twenty, twenty five guys. I'm guesstimating.

GOTTLIEB

I see. And?

AJAX

Most of them are fine! Completely fine!

GOTTLIEB

And the others?

AJAX

I'm not the only one dosing people around here you know.

GOTTLIEB

Oh, I know.

AJAX

I'm simply the de facto leader, the visionary, if you will. Following you, of course.

GOTTLIEB

What's the situation?

AJAX

It's just, one of the guys, an emotionally feeble guy, got a little nervous.

GOTTLIEB

A little nervous.

AJAX

Yes, and he did a bit of sort of running around.

GOTTLIEB

A bit of sort of running around.

AJAX

Yeah, running around the hallways.

GOTTLIEB

Mm hm.

AJAX

And screaming.

GOTTLIEB

Running and screaming.

AJAX  
Yeah, a bit of running and screaming.

GOTTLIEB  
And.

AJAX  
And he left the building.

GOTTLIEB  
He left the building.

AJAX  
Voom. Out the door.

GOTTLIEB  
Still screaming?

AJAX  
And running.

GOTTLIEB  
And.

AJAX  
Well, he got out on the highway and he...

GOTTLIEB  
On the highway?

AJAX  
Yeah, I guess he thought he was being chased. So he goes darting across two lanes of busy traffic to get to the median out there, you know?

GOTTLIEB  
Yeah.

AJAX  
And he's just cowering there, terrified, screaming. He thought the cars were monsters. Big eyes coming at him. Crazy!

GOTTLIEB  
Out there on the highway.

AJAX  
Yeah!

GOTTLIEB  
Outside the CIA offices.

AJAX  
Exactly!

GOTTLIEB  
Ajax.

AJAX  
What?

GOTTLIEB  
I'd like you to tell me something.

AJAX  
Sure.

GOTTLIEB  
I'd like you to tell me he's not still out there.

AJAX  
Oh! No, he's not still out there.

GOTTLIEB  
Where is he now?

AJAX  
He's back inside.

GOTTLIEB  
Not running around.

AJAX  
No, no. We got him back in, calmed him down pretty much, sat him in a safe room.

GOTTLIEB  
Not screaming.

AJAX  
Just, you know, a little bit, sometimes.

GOTTLIEB  
I see.

AJAX  
Especially when, you know, he sees me.

GOTTLIEB

So, he's...

AJAX

Recovered situational awareness pretty well now, yeah. He's come down quite a bit. And it seems he, uh...

GOTTLIEB

Blames you.

AJAX

Very much so.

GOTTLIEB

Is he looking for you now?

AJAX

Very much so.

GOTTLIEB

I see. So you just ducked in here to stay out of his way.

AJAX

Well I don't want to agitate him unnecessarily.

GOTTLIEB

A good thought.

AJAX

Thanks.

GOTTLIEB

At last. Well, if he comes in here we can tranquilize him.

AJAX

Oh, right, now I almost hope he comes in.

GOTTLIEB

Anyway. How'd it go with Belle?

AJAX

The treatment has commenced.

GOTTLIEB

Good. Shame to lose an asset like that, but when they start talking...

AJAX

The girl's a talker. I told you so.

GOTTLIEB

Be interesting to see what happens with the new cocktail anyway.

AJAX

Yeah. We should get her on the electroshock too. Girl is depressive.

GOTTLIEB

Indeed.

AJAX

I'm really interested to see what happens to her frontal lobe activity with a head full of candy and a few strong jolts of...

(Enter Frank Coleman.)

FRANK

Gentlemen.

AJAX

...electricity. Hey Frank, we were just talking about your girlfriend.

FRANK

Don't start with me.

GOTTLIEB

Yeah, don't start with him.

AJAX

I'm not starting with anybody. I just wanted to let you know, I dropped in on Belle.

FRANK

I heard.

AJAX

Great girl, but depressive!

FRANK

Depressive?

AJAX

Well, you noticed it yourself.

FRANK

I think "depressive" is overstating the case a little.

AJAX

Not at all! The girl is morose. She's not the same bouncy gal we fell in love with. I'm really concerned, to be honest with you.

FRANK

What are you up to?

AJAX

Nothing! Oh, I gave her some anti-depressants, sure.

FRANK

Anti-depressants? What kind of anti-depressants?

AJAX

I don't know, mixed bag, a Gottlieb special. Honestly, the girl was so down in the dumps, it would have been cruel not to.

FRANK

So is she still breathing?

AJAX

Ouch!

GOTTLIEB

OK you two, keep it civil, will you, have a little respect. After all, you're in the presence of a man who personally spoke to the President of the United States earlier today.

AJAX

You spoke to Ike? I like Ike.

GOTTLIEB

I did indeed. I was at a White House briefing and he turned and spoke directly to me.

AJAX

What'd he say?

GOTTLIEB

He said if I could get to retirement without him hearing a single peep about me or what I do, he'd personally guarantee I got the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

FRANK

And if he did hear about you?

GOTTLIEB

He said he'd personally cut my nuts off and press them to a wall with a hot iron.

AJAX

Ike!

GOTTLIEB

Say, tell me, are you excited, Frank?

FRANK

About what?

GOTTLIEB

LSD aerosol goes operational this weekend.

FRANK

Is that confirmed?

GOTTLIEB

Yep. We've set up a series of parties, invited a bunch of, what do you call them, hepcats. This will really expand the range of subjects.

FRANK

Hepcats.

GOTTLIEB

Yep.

FRANK

What's a hepcat?

GOTTLIEB

You know, hipsters. Bebopsters. Young people who adopt the slang and sartorial style of the jazz musician, who have a notoriously relaxed attitude towards cannabis and sexuality. Bohemian, delinquent, sarcastic.

FRANK

Uh huh.

GOTTLIEB

A dualistic worldview divided not between free world and Communist but between existentially aware and square. Often embracing racial diversity, inducing a self-imposed poverty, rejecting jive talk from the fuzz, that sort of thing.

FRANK

Kids.

GOTTLIEB

Well, yes. Hep kids. But don't worry. Ajax will attend as chaperone.

FRANK

Thank goodness. You're giving me all kinds of information today that will help me sleep well at night.

GOTTLIEB

Frank, if you're having trouble sleeping, I've got all sorts of...

FRANK

No thank you.

AJAX

Wanna come?

FRANK

To the hipster parties?

AJAX

Sure! It'll be fun.

FRANK

I'll pass. I'm not hipster enough to blend in.

AJAX

Oh, sure you are...

FRANK

And neither are you for that matter. But I do wish you luck. Try not to damage anyone. Which reminds me, be careful out in the hallways today. Full of crazies, running around screaming. Know anything about it?

AJAX

Nope.

FRANK

Thought not. Silly question.

ACT 2: SCENE 9

*Stage dark except for spotlight on Ajax, alone downstage. He is dressed as a hipster, but where Jack earlier pulled it off reasonably well, Ajax does not. He looks like a CIA agent in an obvious disguise. He smiles broadly, and sprays an aerosol can around.*

*Bebop music plays. Ajax tries to groove to it, with poor results.*

AJAX

Yeah baby. Dig it. Dig it. Hey babe, you're a barbecue on legs, a real crazy hepcat, yeah. You boiling my cabbage girl. Pull up a flop and chill your chat. Who you calling moose eyes? You leaving me weak at the knees. That vibrates me man, feel it?

(Ajax does a full body vibration for a few seconds.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Yeah, it vibrates me, man, straight from the fridge, dig it? Hey, I don't mean to dominate the rap. Hey you! Hat boy!

(He pulls out a piece of paper from his pocket and squints at it.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Yeah, you look like you got jack rabbit blood, know what I'm saying? Yeah, that's cool, man. Yeah you look like they'll have you sniffing Arizona perfume, man, know what I'm saying? Taken off the payroll baby. Keep running baby, don't let the man get you! The man is square!

(He sprays more of the aerosol around the room, then sprays some right in front of his own face and eagerly sniffs it up.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

This shit? Air freshener, man, air freshener. No! Hey! Shut that window! Why you keep opening that window, man? Yeah it's hot in here man, don't you dig the heat? It's hot like a...

(He squints again at his piece of paper.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

...like a New York sidewalk in July baby. Like a New York sidewalk in July.

(He bops arrhythmically to the music for a while.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Me? I don't work for no man, man, your roof is leaking. I got no job. I'm not down with that jive, man. Nope. I'm free. Free to run for president, baby, get me? Copping a bit? Me? Copping a bit?

(He frowns and scans his piece of paper.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Oh! Copping a bit! I ain't copping no bit, Daddy-O. Dig this. If anyone here is a bit copper it's you, you're the one copping the bit. You're bad news, pallio, bad news!

(He hangs his head for a time, and when he looks up, he's crying.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

I'm crying! Dig it! I'm crying like a baby! Woooooo hooooo! Oh my god it feels great! I'm actually crying! What a feeling! You were so right, I was copping a bit. You know what I am? Lonely! Yeah I said it! All of you people hate me. I can see it in your faces. You! Look at me. My god, the hatred! The hatred! I can feel that. Oh my god, it feels cold, it's actually frightening. I'm actually frightened. You're all just watching me, leave me alone!

(He hides his face with his hands, then swings his arms around violently as if to clear space around himself before looking around.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Why everybody splitting the scene, man? This is the scene, cats, right here! Hey!

(He sprays more aerosol, hoping it will bring people back. He becomes panicky.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Don't leave me alone here! Hey don't! Don't tell me to get a hold of myself, I'll get a hold of you, Daddy-O! I know where to stick knives so you can't even scream. Go ahead, go piss off.

(He keeps bopping strangely to the music, crying and bopping. The music stops abruptly. Ajax freezes, looks up.)

ACT 2: SCENE 10

*Split stage, low to moderate lighting on both halves: On one half, the Coleman house, where Frank and Kit sit and play cards.*

*On the other half: CIA office, where Belle sits, frightened. Electrical wires extend from various points on her body to a box with switches. Gottlieb places a black hood over her head.*

*Lights dim on CIA half, rise on Coleman half.*

KIT

(Looks at her watch)

Fifteen.

FRANK

Huh?

KIT

Fifteen minutes.

FRANK

I'm sorry?

KIT

Since you last spoke. I've been timing you.

FRANK

Ah.

(Lights dim on this half of the stage.)

(Lights rise on the the other half of the stage, as a tape loop of Belle's voice begins to play a message repeatedly)

BELLE ON TAPE:

My mother...never loved me...I wanted my father...My mother...never loved me...I wanted my father...

BELLE

Stop it.

GOTTLIEB

Not just yet.

BELLE

That's not what I said.

GOTTLIEB

Ah but it is.

BELLE

It's all chopped up! Stop it!

GOTTLIEB

Not just yet.

(Lights dim on this half and rise on the Colemans)

KIT

I might as well be sitting here with a cardboard cut-out for all the conversation we have lately.

FRANK

Kit, I...

KIT

Sorry. Never mind. That wasn't fair.

FRANK

Yes it was. Listen, I...

KIT

Please. It's all right. It's your job. I knew it when I married you. I'm sorry. Really.

FRANK

Kit, I...

KIT

It's just...I know you're protecting the country, I just wonder sometimes, you know, what's the country for? What's it for, in the end? Isn't it so people can have families and just, be normal?

FRANK

Yeah, I mean, I...

KIT

Is this normal? Is this our normal?

(Lights go dim on this half of the stage and rise on Belle and Gottlieb. The tape loop plays again.)

BELLE

Just make it stop. Make it stop.

GOTTLIEB

Don't you recognize yourself? You must face it or you will never get better.

BELLE

You're sick. You're a sick man.

(Gottlieb turns a dial and Belle gasps in pain.)

GOTTLIEB

But I am not the sick one, my dear. I am not the depressive.

(He turns the dial again and Belle screams.)

GOTTLIEB (CONT'D)

There we are. You mustn't worry. We can completely rebuild you.

BELLE

Stop the tape. Please. It's not what I said. You edited it.  
Stop the goddamned tape. This is insane.

GOTTLIEB

But first we have completely to break you down.

BELLE

You can't just do this to people.

GOTTLIEB

I can. It's my job. You shouldn't resist so much.

BELLE

Just let me go. Let me leave. Why can't I just leave?

(Lights go dim on this half, lights  
come up on the Colemans.)

FRANK

What do you want me to do?

KIT

Maybe just quit?

FRANK

Can't.

KIT

Yes you can! We'll be fine, we can get other work, we can...

FRANK

It doesn't work like that babe.

KIT

Of course it does! You quit, and you get a normal job. You  
think I care about the money?

FRANK

I said it doesn't work that way!

KIT

Look at you. Listen to you.

(Frank breaks down and cries,  
burying his head under his hands.)

KIT (CONT'D)

Baby. Look at you. Just look at you. What's gone wrong? We can fix it baby. You and me, we can fix it.

FRANK

I don't know if I can.

KIT

Not you, baby. We. We can do it. This job you're doing, there's something wrong with it. It's not for you. Just leave. They can't stop you from leaving. Just leave.

FRANK

You make it sound so simple.

KIT

It is simple, baby. It is simple.

FRANK

You almost make me believe it. Honey where's Jack? Shouldn't he be home by now?

KIT

He'll be late. He told us in advance. We said it was OK.

FRANK

Did we?

KIT

Yes. We did.

FRANK

But where is he?

KIT

One of his poetry friends' house. Some sort of hipster party or something.

FRANK

A what?

KIT

A hipster party. You know, hipsters? Hep cats? You're just not with it, are you Daddy-O? You must be square.

FRANK

A hipster party. Oh my god.

ACT 2: SCENE 11

*CIA Office. Frank sits at a table with Gottlieb and Ajax. A bottle of Cointreau and several glasses are on the table.*

GOTTLIEB

Well gentlemen, it's been an eventful few days and I think it's time we took a step back and had a bit of a retreat from the daily grind of it all. Frank, how goes it? Good weekend?

FRANK

Not really.

GOTTLIEB

Um, OK. What's up there?

FRANK

Well, among other things, I have reason to believe my son has been experimenting with marijuana.

AJAX

(Theatrically gasping)

No!

FRANK

Yes, Ajax. It may be a big joke to you but I don't find it terribly amusing right now. He smelled like Mary Jane when he came home Saturday and he's been going to these jazz club events and just, god knows what else he's getting into.

AJAX

Mary Jane? Mary Jane, Frank?

FRANK

All right, you tell me what the cool word is for it these days, sunshine. You're the hep cat, right?

GOTTLIEB

At ease, soldier. There's plenty of time for getting at each other's throats.

(Gottlieb pours out a round of drinks.)

GOTTLIEB (CONT'D)

In the ancient manly tradition dating back I'm sure to the early Mesopotamians, let us begin the proceedings with a raising of fraternal glasses and a moistening of our respective lips.

AJAX

Frank.

FRANK

What?

AJAX

This is where you're supposed to object and say it's too early or it's unprofessional.

(Frank takes his glass and drains it, staring at Ajax for the duration.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Ha ha. Made you drink.

(Gottlieb refills Frank's glass.)

FRANK

So. What is it that we have left to talk about?

GOTTLIEB

Frank, Frank, Frank. Your problem is you're a genius. Like all geniuses, a bit touchy. And things have been a little rough lately.

FRANK

Please don't talk to me like I'm a four-year-old.

AJAX

Oh stop, even Gottlieb wouldn't dose a four-year-old. Would he? Would you, Gottlieb? OK he might.

(Frank stares into his glass, clearly alarmed.)

FRANK

Is there something in this drink?

GOTTLIEB

Does it feel like there is?

AJAX

Already?

FRANK

I feel a little woozy. If you've dosed me...oh jesus you have, haven't you. You bastards.

(Frank stands up; he's unsteady on his feet.)

GOTTLIEB

Sit down, Frank.

FRANK

Oh my god. My head.

GOTTLIEB

How about some folk dancing?

FRANK

What?

AJAX

I'll pass.

GOTTLIEB

Oh come on, it'll do us good, we'll loosen up.

(Gottlieb gets up and does a hobbled but enthusiastic sort of folk dancing on his club foot.)

GOTTLIEB (CONT'D)

Come on! Join in! It's easy!

FRANK

I'm not seeing straight.

AJAX

I'm not sure I'm seeing this either if it makes you feel any better.

GOTTLIEB

Folk dancing! It's the best thing for you! Come on!

AJAX

You knew this was coming sooner or later.

FRANK

Oh my god. What have you done to me? The walls,  
they're...bending in here...

GOTTLIEB

No takers? None?

AJAX

I think our man here is a bit past it actually.

(Gottlieb stops dancing and becomes  
serious, sits down.)

GOTTLIEB

This isn't the sort of program a person can just give up on,  
you know. The problem is that it's very sensitive.

AJAX

Frank, you've got to see these pictures.

(Ajax produces some photos and  
hands them to Frank.)

FRANK

What is this?

AJAX

Don't you recognize her?

FRANK

Belle?

GOTTLIEB

(Looking deeply into Frank's  
eyes.)

How do you feel, Frank?

FRANK

What is this? What did you do to her?

GOTTLIEB

Oh, it was nothing. A little therapy. She's fine

AJAX

She's fine, Frank.

FRANK

This is...this is insane.

GOTTLIEB

That's exactly what she said. But you're both wrong.

FRANK

Why would you do that?

GOTTLIEB

How does it make you feel, Frank?

FRANK

Stop saying my name.

AJAX

Hey Gottlieb, do you remember that guy we had once, a Commie, big tennis player I think...

GOTTLIEB

(Laughing out loud)

Yes! Yes!

AJAX

...yeah, and we injected him with, what was it?

GOTTLIEB

Oh! I don't even know! I don't think any of us knew at that point!

AJAX

Right! I think it had actual dog piss in it!

GOTTLIEB

Yes!

AJAX

And the guy just...his eyes, right, they just...and then he, it was like, poop, he just kind of keels over!

GOTTLIEB

Right!

(Gottlieb and Ajax laugh hard.)

AJAX

Oh my god I thought I'd die laughing. Ahhh, those were the days though, eh? Those were the damn days.

FRANK

Shut up! Just shut up!

GOTTLIEB

Look at me, Frank.

FRANK

No!

GOTTLIEB

Just look at me.

(Gottlieb makes wavy hand gestures  
in front of Frank's eyes while  
staring at him intently.)

FRANK

Get away from me. Oh my god. Oh my god.

AJAX

You didn't just give him acid, did you?

GOTTLIEB

No.

AJAX

It's got BZ in it too doesn't it?

GOTTLIEB

Among other things.

AJAX

You devil!

GOTTLIEB

Frank, you're so concerned about everything. You can't go off  
telling people things you know.

FRANK

My skin is peeling off, oh jesus.

(Frank falls to his knees downstage  
and tears at his hair. Lights dim  
except for a spot on Frank, but the  
others remain on the stage and  
their voices can be heard. A  
lighting and sound designer can  
have fun here.)

AJAX

Have you told anyone anything, Frank?

GOTTLIEB

Who have you told, Frank?

AJAX

You can talk to me, buddy. Who's in the loop?

GOTTLIEB

Who, Frank? Who have you told?

AJAX

He's not reacting well.

GOTTLIEB

No.

AJAX

Just tell us, Frank. Just tell us.

GOTTLIEB

Have you told anyone, Frank? Have you talked? Have you spoken?

AJAX

Did words come out?

FRANK

No!

ACT 3: SCENE 1

*The Coleman household. Kit sits alone knitting for a while, then Frank enters. He is clearly not himself. Disheveled. Disoriented.*

KIT

Frank! Where have you been? I've been so worried!

(Frank glances at her but does not appear to recognize her. He paces the room, examining everything, as if looking for something.)

KIT (CONT'D)

Frank? Frank what's wrong? What are you doing?

(He ignores her. Just keeps pacing and searching, pacing and searching. Finally Kit blocks his way and grabs him by the shoulders.)

KIT (CONT'D)

Frank! Stop it! What's the matter? Talk to me!

(Frank looks at her as if seeing her for the first time.)

FRANK

I've made a terrible mistake.

KIT

What mistake?

FRANK

It doesn't matter now.

KIT

What are you talking about?

FRANK

(Suddenly laughs)

It's a mistake! I've made a big mistake, that's all. A terrible mistake. Where is my wallet?

KIT

Your...what?

FRANK

I have to get rid of that wallet. I hate that wallet. I need to find it and get rid of it.

KIT

What are you talking about?

(Frank stops, grabs Kit by the shoulders, looks her deeply in the eyes, and smiles. He speaks gently.)

FRANK

I'm just talking about a wallet, my darling. It's just a small thing, nothing to worry about. I need to find it and destroy it. You understand. Do you?

KIT

What?

FRANK

You do, don't you? You understand.

KIT

You want to destroy your wallet.

FRANK

Yes! Yes, exactly. It's black. It has my identity in it.

KIT

Yes, your identification.

FRANK

My identity. And some cash. It's all poison. I need to get rid of it. I knew you would understand. You would, wouldn't you?

KIT

Umm, did you look in your pocket?

(Frank reaches into his trouser pocket and pulls out his wallet.)

FRANK

Yes! I knew you would understand.

KIT

Honey, just sit down, just sit down with me here, all right? Just sit down.

(He sits and frowns.)

KIT (CONT'D)

There. Um. Are you hungry? I've made dinner. I can warm it up.

(He still sits and frowns, like he doesn't hear her.)

KIT (CONT'D)

Frank, please talk to me. Please tell me what's going on.

(Suddenly he looks up at her, once again like he's seeing her for the first time.)

FRANK

Kit! Thank goodness you're here. Kit, I've made a terrible mistake.

KIT

What mistake, honey?

FRANK

It doesn't matter.

KIT

Can't you talk to me at all?

FRANK

They would know. If I told you, they would know.

KIT

Who would know?

FRANK

You wouldn't be safe. They would know.

KIT

(Stroking his hair.)

Oh, Frank. What have they done to you?

FRANK

Shhhhh. I think they're listening.

KIT

Who's listening?

FRANK

There's something I have to do, babe.

KIT

What is it?

FRANK

I want to destroy my wallet.

ACT 3: SCENE 2

*CIA office. Gottlieb alone, at the typewriter, for a time. Enter Frank Coleman.*

GOTTLIEB

Frank! How are you? I think you had a bit much to drink at our little gathering the other day. My fault I'm afraid. I encouraged it.

FRANK

Everything's OK now.

GOTTLIEB

Is it?

FRANK

Yes. I got rid of the wallet.

GOTTLIEB

Sorry?

(Frank looks around as if to make sure nobody is listening, then goes up close to Gottlieb's ear.)

FRANK

The wallet. I got rid of it. Yeah.

GOTTLIEB

Whose wallet, Frank? What wallet?

(Again Frank looks around, checks the room, then speaks confidentially.)

FRANK

Mine. It was my own wallet. But it's gone now.

GOTTLIEB

You got rid of your wallet.

FRANK

Yes.

GOTTLIEB

OK. And now everything is OK.

FRANK

Yeah.

GOTTLIEB

OK. And, uh, why did you get rid of your wallet, Frank?

FRANK

To be perfectly honest, I've been kind of fixated on it.

GOTTLIEB

Interesting.

FRANK

Yes. It had a malign presence.

GOTTLIEB

Did it?

FRANK

Oh yes. You could feel it.

GOTTLIEB

So naturally...

FRANK

I had to get rid of it.

GOTTLIEB

You had to get rid of it.

FRANK

I put all the contents in about twelve different trash cans.

GOTTLIEB

Good plan.

FRANK

Yeah, and then the wallet itself, I ripped it in half.

GOTTLIEB

I think that was wise.

FRANK

Yeah. I had to use my teeth.

GOTTLIEB

Did you?

FRANK

It was hard to do.

GOTTLIEB

I believe it.

FRANK

It was a real leather wallet. One hundred percent leather.

GOTTLIEB

Nice.

FRANK

Or maybe it was ninety nine and forty four one hundredths percent leather -- it was close!

GOTTLIEB

Close enough for the blues, eh?

FRANK

Yes! But you have to watch out -- it's that other fifty six one hundredths that'll get you!

GOTTLIEB

Right you are!

FRANK

It'll get you, Gottlieb! Mark my words! It will *get* you!

GOTTLIEB

I'm sure it will.

FRANK

I was in Germany once.

GOTTLIEB

Is that so?

FRANK

(Confidentially)

I was there on official business.

GOTTLIEB

Oooooh.

FRANK

We were testing drugs on volunteers.

GOTTLIEB

I know.

FRANK

Real volunteers, Gottlieb. American servicemen.

GOTTLIEB

Yes.

FRANK

It was pretty experimental.

GOTTLIEB

Go on.

FRANK

There was one young man there. He couldn't have been more than twenty one. A young man. Handsome. Somebody's handsome young son.

GOTTLIEB

Is this going to be a sad story, Frank?

FRANK

Yes.

GOTTLIEB

I thought so.

FRANK

I was the one who injected him. It was a mixture that included botulinum and Brucella suis. We were testing resistance. It wasn't supposed to, ahhh...

GOTTLIEB

But it did, didn't it.

FRANK

Yes. He...it wasn't a good death. I probably shouldn't mention it. It was a horrible death.

GOTTLIEB

It's not your fault.

FRANK

You weren't in the room with him.

GOTTLIEB

I've been in rooms.

FRANK

Yes.

GOTTLIEB

I'm afraid you may have slipped off the old bus here Frank. You're troubled. You've become very depressed and paranoid. Forgive me, I'm being honest.

FRANK

Yes.

GOTTLIEB

Let me put this bluntly, if I may, so we're absolutely clear here: you've lost your mind.

FRANK

(Shouting)

Gottlieb!

GOTTLIEB

What?

FRANK

It's OK now. It's gone.

GOTTLIEB

Ah. The wallet?

FRANK

Gone goodbye.

ACT 3: SCENE 3

*The Coleman household. Jack is there alone, practicing his poetry. He is dressed in his hipster clothes and appears to be out of his mind on drugs. He explores the space with his hands, smiles and laughs for no apparent reason, and so forth.*

JACK

Lies. Bunch of lies that I despise, though he tries them on for size, I surmise the demise of the surprise.

(He laughs and looks closely at his own hands.)

JACK (CONT'D)

Yeah, yeah. Delirious material for the serious surrealist.

(He sits at the table and examines a fork like he's never seen one before.)

JACK (CONT'D)

Trying to rhyme the sublime crime with a grimy line but there's not enough time to stymie the guy who dropped the dime.

(Frank enters the house. He watches Jack, who does not immediately notice him.)

JACK (CONT'D)

I slipped up when I took a trip up the hiccup and a solar flare came out of her hair and went nowhere. Ha.

FRANK

My son.

JACK

My father!

FRANK

Give me another one.

JACK

Another what?

FRANK

A poem.

JACK

Yeah? Uh, OK. I mean, really?

FRANK

Sure.

JACK

OK, give me a word.

FRANK

Down.

JACK

Down, that's deep. OK. Down in the ground, look around, one of us found the echo of a lost sound in an ancient burial mound.

FRANK  
Beautiful.

JACK  
Yeah?

FRANK  
Sure. Give me another one.

JACK  
Give me another word.

FRANK  
Son.

JACK  
Son. OK. Uhh, the stunned son of one who's come undone, weighs a ton, can't outrun the web spun by anyone who never had any fun. Sorry, that was pretty bad. They don't always work.

FRANK  
It was beautiful, my son. You are beautiful, my son. The son of one who's come undone.

JACK  
Awww, dad.

FRANK  
The sky is dry and the car may fly but the stars above are a little too high.

JACK  
Yeah. No. Try another one.

FRANK  
Word.

JACK  
Oh, OK. Uhh, head.

FRANK  
Head. Find the smallest shred in your own head, and pull the thread.

JACK  
Now we're talking. I like that, pull the thread. Unravel the travel.

FRANK

Decode the road.

JACK

Blast the past.

FRANK

The history mystery.

JACK

The, uhh, I can't think of another one.

(They smile at each other.)

FRANK

My son. Jack. I am glad to find you here. Something has gone wrong with me. Many things. I just want...

JACK

It's OK dad.

FRANK

I just want...I...

JACK

Dad, it's OK.

(Frank throws his arms around Jack and hugs him hard. They stay in this embrace for several moments and are still in it as KIT ENTERS.)

FRANK

My son.

JACK

My dad.

(They continue to embrace as Kit watches, happy, sad, beyond words.)

#### ACT 3: SCENE 4

*Belle's apartment. Belle is absent. Frank sits on the bed as Ajax packs equipment into a bag.*

AJAX

Do you want to know what I think, Frank?

(Frank shows no interest.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Right, well, I'm going to tell you anyway. "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite."

(Frank doesn't react; he's not listening. Ajax looks at him and shakes his head sadly.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

William Blake. Huxley is using it as the title of his book. You know Aldous Huxley, the writer? Yeah. Quite an appetite for the mescaline. Know where he got it from? That's right, Frank. Us. He got it from us.

(Ajax pauses to examine some of the equipment he's packing away before stuffing it into the bag.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Good old Belle, eh? We sure stuffed this place full of equipment. You think she ever noticed? You heard from her?

(Frank doesn't answer.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Anyway, I think he's right. Huxley says our minds reduce everything. We don't see everything because we can't deal with infinity. Our minds act as a little filter, a little valve, so all we get is a little sliver of reality, a little sliver we can handle. What do you think, Frank?

FRANK

"I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius; which to Angels look like torment and insanity."

AJAX

Are you a Blake man, Frank? It's very surprising, I have to say. It's not the sort of thing you can predict about someone though is it? Suddenly somebody comes out with some Blake, you're going to be surprised, no? Unless they're always doing it, then I suppose you'd get used to it.

(MORE)

## AJAX (CONT'D)

What are the odds of both of us coming out with some Blake though, huh? What do you reckon?

FRANK

The son of one who's come undone weighs a ton.

AJAX

OK, that's not Blake, right, but I like it. I like that. Ginsberg maybe, or Dr. Seuss. It's good, it's good. Oh, Frank. This type of life we lead, it's not an easy path, eh? Would you agree with me about that?

FRANK

Just let me disappear.

AJAX

What?

FRANK

Let me disappear. Just let me disappear.

AJAX

You want to disappear?

FRANK

Just let me disappear. Gone. Gone goodbye.

AJAX

Well, that's interesting you should say that, Frank, actually. I don't know what you mean by it but it's interesting.

(Ajax sits on the bed next to Frank and puts his arm around his shoulders.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Do you know how I'd like to die?

(Frank looks straight at him but doesn't say anything.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Hydrogen bomb. I'm serious. Not a regular atom bomb, but one of these new ones, an H-bomb. Have you seen the pictures of these things? Ba-BOOM! Fifteen megatons, millions of degrees. We're talking glorious, glorious total instant vaporization. I'm thinking you'd get a split second of awe and then nothing. Talk about gone.

(Ajax stands up and goes to look out the window.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

What a view. Beautiful. Of course, it would take out a lot of other people too at the same time. But what a way to go, huh? A fellow could do worse, no? Wasting away from some disgusting disease? Bleeding to death alone from some painful wound inflicted on you by someone you suddenly identify with? No. No.

(Ajax looks back to check on Frank.)

AJAX (CONT'D)

Have you seen this view, Frank? What a beautiful city this is, no? Yeah, give me the H-bomb any day. That thing would be so loud you probably couldn't even hear it, know what I mean? That's a big boom, Frank, no? A huge boom. What I can't decide is how close to it I'd want to be. Ground zero, of course, that's tantalizing, dead center. Boom. Up with the big mushroom, just whoosh, right? That would probably be the best. But consider for a moment being say two miles away. I don't know, what would it be, four miles? You're still vaporized, but you might have just enough time to look up and see it coming for a couple of seconds. Can you imagine that, Frank? The rush? The world being annihilated in a giant wave coming at you and then whoom, you're gone. That would really be something to see. There would be something so elemental about that, something so beginning of the universe.

FRANK

I have a purple shirt.

AJAX

Do you? Purple? Can I picture that?

FRANK

It's artsy.

AJAX

You're an artsy guy, you could pull that off.

FRANK

I never wore it.

AJAX

Let's wear purple shirts for the H-bomb, what do you say, Frank?

FRANK

My wife. She gave it to me.

AJAX

Do you know what? I just want to say this. I like you, Frank Coleman. I don't even care what it sounds like. I like you. I've always liked you.

FRANK

I haven't liked you very much Ajax. Not very much.

AJAX

I know. But I want you to know it just the same. Come and have a look at this view. Just come and look at this view. Let's look at it together.

(Frank gets up and stands next to Ajax by the window. After a moment, Ajax leaves Frank's side and goes to his bag, the one he's been packing. He pulls out a hammer and stares at it.)

(He walks purposefully towards Frank and raises the hammer.)

(Lights out. Sound effect of a sickening thud, followed by the sound of smashing glass.)

ACT 3: SCENE 5

*Jack is centre stage, holding an entire meatloaf in his hands. He lets go and it lands with a thud.*

JACK

Suicide. That's what they told us at the time. Dad was depressed. And yeah, it's true enough he'd been acting strangely. If you ask me, everyone acted strangely in the 1950s, but OK, he went next-level strange. True, true, true.

But he didn't kill himself. How do I know? This is going to sound a little grisly, but, here it is: I had him exhumed. Yeah.

Mom was horrified.

(MORE)

**JACK (CONT'D)**

She'd been trying hard to get over it, be done with it, you might even say she wanted to bury it and have it stay buried. You can't blame her. But here's the thing. If a story doesn't add up, you can either pretend it does, or you can't.

We were told he went running across his hotel room on the tenth floor and dove through a window. Oh yeah, and the window was closed at the time. And he wasn't alone. There was a guy in the room with him, somebody he worked with, who didn't seem too bothered by the whole thing. He never went out to the sidewalk to see if maybe Dad was still alive or anything. Which seems unlikely, I admit, tenth floor, but apparently the hotel manager went out there and Dad was still breathing, trying to talk, couldn't get any words out. Not a pretty picture. Anyway, Ajax, meanwhile, kicked back upstairs and made a phone call. The hotel switchboard operator said he made a short phone call and said two words: "He's gone." The person on the other end of the line said: "That's too bad." Then they hung up. That was the whole call.

Now, to hurl your body with enough force to smash through a hotel window, you need to get up to a certain level of speed. At this point we've had all kinds of experts think through this thing, and they reckon the room wasn't big enough to allow an Olympic athlete to reach the required speed. And Dad wasn't exactly an Olympic athlete.

Anyway, yeah, I had him exhumed. See what we could see. And we could see a few things the official death report missed. Mainly, what we could see was he had an interesting hole in his skull. Not the cracked sort of thing you get from a big fall. The small round hole sort of thing you get from a hammer hitting you in the head. Maybe right before the same hammer smashes the hotel window and you get tossed out.

Well. There was a lawsuit. They gave us money but they didn't admit anything. They didn't say anything about dangerous secrets or threats of exposure or the need to keep people from talking or throwing them out of windows. They didn't say anything about drugging people or mind control or torture or breaking people down. National security. They did say that a lot. And they said whatever programme Dad was or wasn't involved in, whatever they did or didn't do, if it ever existed it's all over now in any case. I'm sure they couldn't say that if it weren't true. You can either buy it or you can't. If you can, I sort of envy you.

(Enter Kit to side of stage.)

KIT  
What are you doing, Jack?

JACK  
Something dad said once.

KIT  
What was that?

JACK  
Pull the thread.

KIT  
I don't remember him saying that.

JACK  
To me. He said it to me. You find a loose end, you pull on it.

KIT  
OK I get it.

JACK  
Pull the thread. Unravel it.

KIT  
Yes, I get it.

JACK  
It's on us now. Isn't it?

KIT  
You've done well, Jack. Leave it.

JACK  
Trying ma.

KIT  
Let's go.

JACK  
All right.

(Jack takes a step or two towards his mother, then stops.)

JACK (CONT'D)

Tell you one thing though. Judging by the 1960s, I'm pretty sure that whole LSD mind control thing didn't go *entirely* according to plan.

(Cue psychedelic music as Jack and Kit exit and lights fade.)

-- END --