

PETER: But you don't trust me.

AGNES: Why do you say that?

PETER: Because you lied to me about having children.

AGNES: How do you know that?

PETER: I told you, I pick up on stuff.

AGNES: I didn't lie to you. I don't have any children. I did. I did have a child, once.

PETER: What happened?

AGNES: I lost him.

PETER: He died?

AGNES: No, he disappeared.

PETER: Really?

AGNES: Yes. In a grocery store. Nine years ago. Almost ten years ago.

PETER: How old was he?

AGNES: Six.

PETER: I'm sorry.

AGNES: Got any other questions?

PETER: No.

AGNES: Ask me now if you do. 'Cause I don't want to talk about it again.

PETER: What was his name?

AGNES: Lloyd.

PETER: When did you stop looking for him?

AGNES: Coupla years ago. Except for when I sleep. I still look for him in my sleep.

PETER: Do you ever—?

AGNES: No.

[Beat.]

I did lie to you about one thing. I really do get scared at night. You can stay here again if you want.

PETER: All right.

AGNES: I kinda liked havin' someone else here for a change. Kinda nice.

PETER: I haven't been to bed with a woman for a long time, but I think I could go to bed with you.

[She stares at him, then begins to cry. He stands still, watching her. Finally, she wipes her tears, downs the rest of her drink, stubs out her cigarette, faces him, and extends her hand.]

AGNES: C'mere, boy . . .

[Blackout. Helicopter fades away, traffic dies.]

### SCENE 3

[In darkness.]

PETER: Motherfucker.

[Long pause.]

Motherfucker.

[Long pause.]

You little—

[*Long pause.*]

Come here, you . . .

[*Beat.*]

Fucking . . . motherfucker.

[*Beat.*]

Fuck. Fuck FUCK! FUCK IT, MAN!

[*AGNES wakes, turns on a bedside lamp. PETER is scratching his wrist.*]

AGNES: What's the matter? Is it—?

PETER: Fucking shit—

AGNES: Is it your tooth?

PETER: Fucking bug, a fucking bug bite, fuck this—

AGNES: A bug?

[*PETER snaps on his bedside lamp.*]

PETER: Where are you, you little motherfucker.

AGNES: What kind of bug—?

PETER: Look at these bites.

[*He shows her his wrist.*]

AGNES: Jesus, those look like spider bites—

PETER: No, I felt it a second ago, it's like a bedbug or some shit.

AGNES: Maybe you killed it.

PETER: No, I had it between my fingers, but it squiggled out.

AGNES: Pull back the covers.

[*On his knees, still in bed, PETER pulls back the covers.*]

I don't see it.

PETER: Little fucker, I was just about to fall asleep.

[*AGNES gets out of bed, turns on the bathroom light.*]

AGNES: I don't see it—

PETER: There.

AGNES: What.

PETER: Right there.

AGNES: Where.

PETER: There.

AGNES: Where?

PETER: There, you see it?

AGNES: What.

PETER: The bug.

AGNES: Where.

PETER: Right there.

AGNES: I don't . . .

PETER: Right. There.

AGNES: This?

PETER: No. This. That. There.

AGNES: Where?

PETER: There! Right there, Agnes, it's right there!

AGNES: Hey, don't get all—

PETER: Well, do you see it?

AGNES: I'm not sure.

PETER: Right there. It's really small.

AGNES: I . . . I guess . . . What is that?

PETER: It's a fucking bug.

AGNES: No, I know, what kind of bug?

PETER: Like an aphid.

AGNES: A what?

PETER: An aphid, it's like a, a, a—

AGNES: A bedbug?

PETER: No, well, yeah, kind of, more like a louse.

AGNES: A louse? Like lice?

PETER: Not like head lice. They're more like plant lice.

AGNES: Like a termite.

PETER: No, that's more like a thrip.

AGNES: What's a thrip?

PETER: It's like a termite.

AGNES: Do you mean ticks?

PETER: No, a tick's like a flea, a thrip's like a termite.

AGNES: What's a bedbug like?

PETER: A bedbug.

AGNES: But what is a bedbug?

PETER: A bedbug.

AGNES: I thought it was just a nickname.

PETER: This is an aphid.

AGNES: Plant lice?

PETER: I think so.

AGNES: And they bite?

PETER: That one sure did.

AGNES: Then maybe it's not an orchid or whatever—

PETER: Aphid.

AGNES: Aphid, schmafid, fuckin' kill it already 'n' let's get some sleep.

[PETER pinches the bug between his fingers.]

PETER: Little fucker.

AGNES: That showed him.

[AGNES flops back down on the bed.]

PETER: Hold on. Get up.

AGNES: How come?

PETER: There might be more.

AGNES: There's not any more. We would've seen 'em.

PETER: You almost didn't see that one.

AGNES: Well, it's small.

PETER: That's my point, Agnes, they're small. We might not have seen them.

[AGNES gets up, lights a cigarette, fixes the freebase pipe. PETER strips the blanket and sheets from the mattress. During the following, they take turns hitting the pipe.]

AGNES: Oh, Jesus Christ, if I knew—

PETER: Look at my wrist. Do you want to wake up in the morning and find this?

AGNES: I am awake, and it is the morning.

[PETER inspects the mattress, closely.]

They travel in packs or something?

PETER: Packs?

AGNES: You got reason to suspect if you find one there's others with him?

PETER: Makes sense. And you're assuming it's a him, some rogue aphid on his travels, instead of some matriarchal type with a big brood somewhere.

AGNES: What's "matriarchal"?

PETER: Did you ever watch *Big Valley*?

AGNES: Sure.

PETER: Barbara Stanwyck?

AGNES: Yeah.

PETER: Like her.

AGNES: Oh . . .

PETER: This is clean. Give me the fitted sheet.

[She hands him the sheet and he inspects it.]

AGNES: You want a drink?

PETER: Do you?

AGNES: Might as well.

PETER: You drink a lot.

AGNES: Fuck off.

PETER: I didn't mean it in a . . . pejorative sense.

[She shoots him the finger, raspberry included.]

I drink a lot, too.

AGNES: So maybe you shoulda said, "We drink a lot," in a pejorative sense.

PETER: Okay. We drink a lot.

AGNES: You want one?

PETER: Sure.

AGNES: Where'd you learn to talk like that anyway?

PETER: From books.

AGNES: In school.

PETER: I didn't go to school.

AGNES: College.

PETER: School. I was homeschooled.

AGNES: No shit.

PETER: My father didn't believe in school.

AGNES: He musta done a good job, throwin' around words like "matriarchal."

PETER: Well, I learned that from *Big Valley*. Here, this's clean. Give me the top sheet.

[*He throws the fitted sheet onto the bed and takes the top sheet from her to continue his inspection. The air conditioner comes on.*]

AGNES: You got a nice body.

PETER: So do you.

AGNES: It's better lookin' without clothes on.

PETER: I agree.

AGNES: You know how some folks look nice with clothes on, but you get 'em naked, they're a big disappointment.

PETER: Yeah.

AGNES: Why'd you say you weren't much for the ladies?

PETER: It's true.

AGNES: Coulda fooled me.

PETER: You're different.

AGNES: How am I different?

PETER: You don't speak the codes.

AGNES: How long's it been since you was with a woman?

PETER: I don't know. A few years.

AGNES: You musta got a bad one.

PETER: I just decided it wasn't worth it anymore.

AGNES: What wasn't? I mean, how do you mean—?

PETER: You have a center, right? I mean, a place, inside, that's just you, that hasn't been spoiled. I think it's important to try to keep that place sacred, in some sense, on some level, but sex, or relationships, they cloud that space. Or they cloud me, I guess, and make it difficult to be just me and not to have to worry about being someone else. I sound like some big asshole, don't I?

AGNES: No. I like to hear you talk.

[*She touches him, maybe even embraces him. He turns away.*]

PETER: Hand me the blanket.

[*He tosses the top sheet back on the bed and she gives him the blanket.*]

AGNES: You musta missed gettin' laid.

PETER: Not really. You have a lot of energy in your seed. Not you, one does. A man does.

AGNES: Don't you even jack off?

PETER: Huh-uh.

AGNES: Jesus . . .

[*The phone rings. Once, twice.*]

PETER: Aren't you going to answer it?

AGNES: Huh-uh.

PETER: Why not?

AGNES: It's Goss.

PETER: You were Goss once.

[*She doesn't respond. PETER answers the phone, drops his voice.*]

Hello?

[*Beat.*]

Hello?

[*PETER jerks the phone away from his ear and hangs up.*]

AGNES: Goss.

PETER: I don't think so.

AGNES: What'd they say?

PETER: Just static.

[*PETER resumes his inspection of the bed, spots another bug.*]

There you go. See?

AGNES: Where?

PETER: There.

AGNES: I'm sorry, where again?

PETER: Right there.

AGNES: Squish him.

PETER: There you go again. How do you know it's not the super-mother aphid and she's carrying a million eggs?

AGNES: What the hell are plant lice doin' in my place?

PETER [*whilst squishing*]: Biting me, for one thing.

AGNES: I have to get the place sprayed.

PETER: I'll do it. I'll buy some stuff tomorrow.

AGNES: Fuck that, it's their room, they should spray it.

PETER: But someone will have to come in here.

AGNES: Damn right.

PETER: Well . . . you do what you want, but I wouldn't . . .

AGNES: How come?

PETER: Hand me the pillows.

[*He tosses the blanket back on the bed and she gives him the pillows. He strips the pillowcases.*]

AGNES: How come?

PETER: Never mind.

AGNES: No, what?

PETER: No, I shouldn't have said anything.

AGNES: What?

PETER: It's your place, I don't mean to interfere—

AGNES: But why wouldn't I want someone to come in here? Goddamn it, I knew you was a con. Why didn't you tell me when—?

PETER: I've never been to prison. I'm just . . . look, I'm kind of . . . I've got some people after me, that's—

AGNES: Who's after you?

PETER: It's a long story.

AGNES: If you're stayin' here, I need to know.

PETER: It's for your own benefit. I don't want to drag you into it, that's all.

AGNES: Drag me into what?

PETER: Agnes, please—

AGNES: Drag me into what?

PETER: I'm just not comfortable telling you.

AGNES: You don't trust me. I don't know you from Adam. I'm layin' here naked next to some stranger, and you don't even trust me enough—

PETER: I trust you. That's not—

AGNES: Come on, man—

PETER: I just don't want you to get hurt, can't you—?

AGNES: I'll take my chances.

PETER: I won't.

*[He tosses the pillows down, starts putting on his clothes.]*

AGNES: So you're goin'.

PETER: I should.

AGNES: Where?

PETER: I'll be fine.

AGNES: All right, then fuck off.

*[He dresses silently. She puts on a robe, takes a seat on the bed.]*

You may think it's easy for me to just take you in here, okay, but I ain't the kind of woman who just goes from man to man. Fact is, it's been quite a while since I had anyone to get . . . to get close to. Y'hear what I'm sayin'? Not that I need another man, I need a man like I need a hole in the head, but I just get . . . I get damn lonely sometimes. It was kinda nice to have someone—

*[PETER heads for the door. AGNES picks up the clock radio, heaves it at him.]*

Son of a bitch!

*[The radio misses him, strikes the door. She runs into the bathroom, slams the door behind her. PETER stands for a moment, listening to her sobs coming from the bathroom. He leaves the motel room.]*

*Empty room. The air conditioner cuts off. Silence. Twenty seconds.*

*PETER reenters. He crosses to the bathroom, stands at the closed door. During the following, the helicopter buzzes again, gradually gets louder.]*

PETER: I got in some trouble . . . with the Army. I was stationed at Sakaka . . . the Syrian Desert, during the war. The doctors came in and really worked us over with shots and pills, ostensibly for inoculation, but . . . there was something else going on, too. A lot of the guys got sick, vomiting and diarrhea, migraines, blackouts. One guy had an epileptic seizure; he'd never had one before. A couple of guys went AWOL. I never found out what really happened to them. I started having weird thoughts, too, and feeling . . .

sick. They shipped me home, put me in a hospital at Groom Lake. They started running these tests. They had every kind of doctor you could imagine, probing at me, jabbing me, asking me all kinds of weird questions, feeding me more pills. They wouldn't let me go. They kept me there . . . years, I don't know, four years? Those fucking doctors were experimenting on me.

I went AWOL. I was a lifer, too. I didn't have anywhere to go. They don't respond too well to some drugged-up guinea pig just taking off. I don't know that I'm not carrying some disease with me, some contagion. Jesus, you know that's how they start, typhoid, Legionnaires' disease, some government screwup, AIDS with those fucking monkeys in Africa. They're after me. These people don't fuck around, Agnes.

I shouldn't have told you that. But I needed to tell somebody. And I do trust you. I don't think you're just some simpleton I can take advantage of. I know we haven't known each other very long, but . . . I like you, Agnes. I don't want to go . . . I don't want to go . . .

*[The bathroom door slowly opens and AGNES comes out, wrapping herself around PETER. They hug.]*

AGNES: Don't leave me . . .

*[She spies something in his hair, picks it out, studies it. He sees it, too. The helicopter gets even louder, approaching.]*

Peter . . . ?

*[Blackout.]*

## ACT TWO

### SCENE 1

*[Lights up on PETER. He sits cross-legged in front of a child's footlocker where he has set up his "lab": a kiddie chemistry set, with microscope, magnifying glass, petri dishes, glass slides, and vials. The weapons of a bug war surround him: cans of bug spray, from the cheap, over-the-counter items to the industrial tub with a metal spray hose; fly strips, hung from the ceiling, the lamps, the painting; roach motels, in the corner, on the table, by the fridge, under the bed; a flyswatter. On the floor, beside the bed, is a stack of assorted childhood items: crummy toys, chewed-up crayons, some clothing.]*

*The traffic continues to drone outside. A Latino couple a few doors down are having an argument, barely audible through the walls.*

*At rise, PETER pricks his finger with an X-Acto knife and squeezes a few drops of blood into a petri dish. He then carefully slides the cap from another petri dish, removes a captive bug, drops it into the petri dish that holds his blood, and quickly covers it. After giving the dish a cursory inspection with the magnifying glass, he jots a few notes in a journal, then examines the dish under the microscope.*