

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.*

*A knock on the door. PETER turns, hesitates, crosses to the door, listens. Another knock. Then a scraping sound. PETER stares at the door-knob as it slowly turns. The door opens and GOSS enters, a lock pick in his hand.]*

PETER: Can I help you?

GOSS: No.

*[GOSS closes the door, throws his hat across the room, flops on the bed, kicks his boots off.]*

PETER: Agnes isn't here.

GOSS: No shit. Where is she?

PETER: The liquor store, I think.

*[PETER resumes his work at the lab. GOSS slowly becomes aware of the insecticides, et cetera.]*

GOSS: Y'know, if I was a roach, I believe I'd take the hint.

*[PETER does not respond.]*

Where's the TV?

PETER: I don't think she has one.

GOSS: We had one. Nineteen-inch RCA. Sure-touch tuning. I bought it with money I made drivin' a sausage truck. I drove twenty hours a day sometimes so I could feed my wife and my kid. You ever done anything like that?

*[No response.]*

Who doesn't have a TV? How're you supposed to know what's goin' on in the world? Jesus, we might get invaded by Martians or somethin'. They could be evacuatin' the whole dang city right now 'n' you and me's sittin' here with our thumbs up our butts.

PETER: Could be.

*[GOSS spots the child's things by the bed.]*

GOSS: Who got this stuff out?

PETER: I did. For the microscope.

GOSS: Uh-huh.

*[GOSS takes a little boy's shirt from the pile, unfolds it. Smells it.]*

Y'little shit . . .

*[He tosses the shirt back on the pile.]*

You might want to put this stuff up before Aggie gets home. She won't like it.

PETER: Right.

*[GOSS sidles up next to the lab, fiddles with stuff.]*

GOSS: Whatcha workin' on?

PETER: I'm—don't touch that, please—I'm just looking at something.

GOSS: Whatcha lookin' at?

PETER: A bug.

GOSS: A bug.

PETER: Yes.

GOSS: "Yeth." You know who you remind me of?

[Beat.]

You know who you remind me of?

PETER: Who do I remind you of?

GOSS: Guy I knew in the pen.

PETER: In the pen.

GOSS: I just did a deuce for armed robbery.

PETER: I see—

GOSS: Anyways, I knew a guy there named Porterfield. You ain't related, are you?

PETER: I don't believe so.

GOSS: "You don't believe tho."

PETER: No.

GOSS: You know what we called him?

[Beat.]

You know what we—?

PETER: No, what did you call him?

GOSS: Mrs. Porterfield. You kinda remind me of him.

PETER: Oh.

[GOSS looks through the microscope.]

GOSS: What the fuck am I lookin' at?

PETER: A bug. In my blood.

GOSS: In your blood.

PETER: Yes.

GOSS: "Yeth." I don't see no bug.

PETER: It's very small.

GOSS: I bet it is. You're pretty much just jackin' off here, ain'tcha?

[Beat.]

Why don't you answer me when I ask you a question?

PETER: I thought it was a rhetorical question.

GOSS: Y'know what I'd do if I thought you was fuckin' with Agnes?

PETER: Something gruesome, I imagine.

GOSS: "Thomething gruethome."

PETER: Look, I don't know who you are, and I don't know—

GOSS: You don't know who I am? Didn't we meet in here just a couple of weeks ago?

PETER: Yes—

GOSS: D'ja forget me that quick?

PETER: No.

GOSS: I remember who you are.

PETER: Right, my point is, I don't want any trouble with you—

GOSS: We ain't gonna have no trouble.

PETER: Good.

GOSS: But I'm stayin' here for a while, so you're gonna have to find somewheres else to do your li'l experiments.

PETER: I don't think you want to stay here.

GOSS: I don't. Why don't I?

PETER: The place is crawling with these things.

GOSS: With your li'l bugs?

PETER: We're infested.

[GOSS takes in the room, studies PETER.]

GOSS: I believe you are.

[The door opens and AGNES and R.C. enter.]

Whatdja bring me?

[GOSS gets up, hugs and kisses R.C.]

GOSS: How you been, girl?

AGNES: You let him in here?

R.C.: Been better, I suppose—

PETER: He picked the lock.

GOSS: Mustache tickles a little bit.

R.C.: That's okay.

GOSS: No, I meant yours.

AGNES: You can't stay here, Goss.

GOSS: That's okay, I just need a place to hang my hat for a couple of days. [To R.C.] Hey, what's that gal's name you used to run with?

R.C.: Lavoice.

GOSS: That's it, goddamn it, I been tryin' to think. She's a character. You remember that time she took a crap off the balcony over at Mickey's place 'n' hit that police car?

R.C.: Yeah—

GOSS: Lordy, I never laughed so damn hard in my goddamn life.

R.C.: The pork party.

GOSS: Was that the pork party? It was, wasn't it? Hey, you remember that, Aggie?

AGNES: Jerry—

GOSS [cracking up, to PETER]: Mickey'd cooked up this big can of pork, like you get in the Army. Some drunk asshole started throwin' it all over the place, and by the end of the night, there's Mickey passed out in the corner of the kitchen . . .

[He becomes too tickled to talk. Weeps with laughter.]

. . . and he's got this big pot turned upside down on his head, pork all over his shirt . . .

[Cracks up even worse. He staggers into the bathroom, grabs tissue, comes back out, trailing tissue behind him.]

. . . he couldn't stand up 'cause the Congoleum linoleum was so greasy—

AGNES: Jerry.

GOSS: I had some pictures of that—

AGNES: Get out.

GOSS: I told you, darlin', I just need a coupla weeks to—

AGNES: I want you outta here.

GOSS: Wait a second, I was just—

AGNES: Now.

GOSS: You throwin' me out?

AGNES: Yeah. I'm throwin' you out.

GOSS: Okay.

[*During the following, GOSS casually puts on his boots, grabs his hat.*]

I just misunderstood. I thought I was gonna stay here for a while, but now I see that's a bad idea. What with you bein' infested and all.

[*Beat.*]

I won't lie to you, Aggie. I'm disappointed. I'd hoped for a little more from you, but I don't guess I have a right to expect that.

[*Swivels to PETER.*]

And I owe you an apology. I had you figured all wrong. Here I was thinkin' you're some kind of weirdo freeloadin' cokehead . . . but I didn't know you was takin' such good care of Aggie. Keepin' them bugs away from her . . . that's important. I appreciate it.

[*GOSS is at the door, finally.*]

I'll be around.

[*GOSS leaves.*]

PETER: Come here and look at this.

AGNES: Jesus . . .

PETER: Come here.

[*AGNES grabs the freebase pipe, hits it. R.C. goes to the phone and dials.*]

AGNES [to R.C.]: You believe that?

PETER: I need you to look at this now, please.

AGNES [to PETER, re microscope]: You found it.

R.C. [*into phone*]: Yeah, police department, please—

[*PETER leaps to the phone, jerks it out of R.C.'s hand, slams it down.*]

What the fuck—

PETER: What do you think you're doing?

R.C.: I was callin' the cops.

PETER: Don't do that.

R.C.: Agnes—

PETER: Don't ever do that.

[*PETER returns to the microscope.*]

R.C.: It's B & E, pure and simple. He violated his parole, his restrainin' order—

PETER: Agnes, will you—?

R.C. [to AGNES]: Have him put away, don't mess around with him—

AGNES: It just ain't that easy.

PETER: Agnes. Please.

[AGNES goes to the microscope, looks in.]

Do you see it?

AGNES: What?

R.C.: Agnes—

PETER: You see the bug?

AGNES: Yeah, I . . .

PETER: Can you tell what it's doing?

R.C.: Agnes—

AGNES: Not really . . . it's so . . .

PETER: It's feeding.

AGNES: On what?

PETER: My blood. It's feeding off my blood.

AGNES: So . . . you're sayin' . . .

PETER: Jesus, I'm saying it's feeding off my blood. It's a parasite.

[R.C. peeks in the microscope, doesn't comment.]

AGNES: We knew that, though.

PETER: No, we knew they were biting. Bugs bite for different reasons.  
These are biting for food.

R.C. [*re pesticides, et cetera*]: None of this shit's working.

PETER: They're immune to the sprays. I thought they might be coke bugs, but I couldn't find any in Agnes's stash.

R.C.: What are coke bugs?

PETER: They're the bugs you sometimes find in cocaine.

R.C.: Cocaine doesn't have bugs.

PETER: The DEA sprays the larvae on the coca plantations in South America, Central America. They're genetically engineered to survive the purification process. If they can't wipe out the drugs, they want to wipe out the users. You don't know about this? That's hard to believe—

AGNES: That's why you only do the freebase.

PETER: Yes, it boils them away.

AGNES: Thanks for tellin' me.

PETER: They don't get to all of it. You don't have them, I told you. I checked. Believe me, if you had them . . .

R.C.: You've had 'em before?

PETER: You ask a lot of questions.

AGNES: Maybe we should take these to a lab somewhere.

PETER: A lab. What for?

AGNES: Find out what they are.

PETER: I know what they are.

R.C.: What are they?

PETER: They're bloodsucking aphids, and we're infested—

R.C.: Y'know, this aphid business—

AGNES [*to PETER*]: What is this?

[AGNES shows PETER her elbow. R.C. gets a closer look, too.]

PETER: It's a burrowing aphid. You have to dig it out.

R.C.: Lemme see . . .

[PETER grabs a safety pin and hands it to AGNES as R.C. studies her elbow.]

Where is it?

AGNES: It's right there.

PETER: On her elbow.

R.C.: Where?

AGNES: You see it? That speck?

R.C.: I can't see shit.

AGNES: Look, just under the skin.

R.C.: I don't see shit.

PETER: It's there.

R.C.: Why can't I see it?

AGNES: It's real itty bitty, you  
really gotta look for it.

PETER: I don't know why. Why  
can we see it?

R.C.: It's under the skin?

AGNES: Yeah. Here, I'll dig it out, you can see it better.

PETER: The place is crawling with them.

[AGNES digs at her elbow with the pin.]

AGNES: Y'know, when I talked to Carl, he said nobody else has even—

PETER: Wait a minute, wait a minute. You talked to who?

AGNES: Carl, the manager. Of the motel.

PETER: Why? Whose idea—?

AGNES: To tell him we were infested with—

PETER: Why'd you tell him that?

R.C.: Why shouldn't she?

PETER: Tell me what you told him. Tell me exactly.

AGNES: I didn't tell him anything that'd get you into any—

PETER: We agreed we weren't going to tell—

AGNES: We're the only ones who've even seen 'em—

R.C. [raising her hand]: I haven't seen 'em—

AGNES: Don't you think that's a little weird? We got people all around  
us—

PETER: So what are you saying?

AGNES: I'm saying . . . it's a little weird—

PETER: You already said that—

R.C.: We saw a doctor.

AGNES: Ronnie . . .

R.C.: She had to know about those sores.

PETER [to AGNES]: Either you don't really grasp the situation here or  
you're just fucking me over—

AGNES: I didn't mention you. I didn't mention anything about—

PETER: What kind of doctor?

AGNES: A dermatologist.

PETER: And what did he find?

R.C.: No bugs.

PETER [to AGNES]: You picked them off.

R.C.: He said they didn't even look like bug bites.

PETER [to R.C.]: Excuse me. Will you please not talk while I address Agnes?

AGNES: He gave me some stuff for a rash—

PETER: Let me see it.

[He finds her purse, pulls out a tube of prescription ointment.]

AGNES: It's just a lotion—

[He throws the tube into the bathroom.]

PETER: They got to you. Goddamn it, if you're a part of this—

AGNES: Maybe we've been hittin' the pipe too heavy—

PETER: This is not a hallucinogen. [To R.C.] Tell her this is not a hallucinogen—

AGNES: I'm just lookin' for some kind of explanation—

PETER: You tell me: Do we have bugs or not?

AGNES: I think so.

PETER: It's not a matter of opinion. An organism just *is* or it *isn't*.

AGNES: Right.

PETER: So . . . *are* they bugs or *aren't* they?

AGNES: *Some* are, I know—

PETER: No, not *some* bugs. Don't give me *some* bugs. *Presence* of bugs, *absence* of bugs. The sign outside says VACANCIES or NO VACANCIES. It doesn't say POSSIBILITY OF VACANCIES—that's understood. Now, do we have bugs or not?

AGNES: Yeah.

PETER: Then your *doctor* is *lying* to you.

R.C.: Peter. Do you have bites like hers?

AGNES: Worse than me. Show her.

[PETER pulls up his shirt. His chest and stomach are covered with sores and scratches. The sores on his stomach are arranged in a large circular pattern. One sore, quite infected, maybe two inches in diameter, marks the center of the circle.]

R.C.: Oh my God . . .

AGNES: Did you put somethin' on that—?

R.C.: And you believe an aphid did that to you?

PETER: I know what did it to me.

R.C.: Aphids can't bite.

PETER: Do you know a lot about aphids?

R.C.: No.

PETER: Do you know anything about aphids?

R.C.: No.

PETER: We do.

[PETER and R.C. are now locked onto each other.]

AGNES: C'mon, y'all, let's, Ronnie, tell him your news. [To PETER] La-voice got custody of her kid. Ain't that great news? Ronnie's gonna be a mother—or an aunt or whatever.

PETER: That's terrific.



AGNES: I just can't believe it, not in Oklahoma.

R.C.: Y'all listen to me now. There ain't no bugs.

AGNES: C'mon—

R.C.: There ain't no bugs in the microscope, on your skin, *in* your skin.  
In the room. *There ain't no fuckin' bugs.*

PETER: That's odd that you—

R.C.: Peter, I was there, with the doctor. Tell him what he told you,  
Agnes.

AGNES: I don't think we should—

R.C.: He said her sores were "self-inflicted." She's done this to herself,  
just like you. Or you done it to her.

PETER: You think I—

R.C.: I don't know what your deal is. I don't know who you are, or what  
you're all about, and I don't give a damn, but I by God regret the  
day I brought you over here.

AGNES: Ronnie—

R.C.: I can't do nothin' about you, except suggest you get some serious  
medical attention, but I can do somethin' about my friend, and I  
by God intend to.

PETER: Do you? What do you—?

R.C.: Yeah, I'm takin' her outta here, and she'll come stay with me for  
a while.

AGNES: Ronnie, I can't—

R.C.: Try and stop me. I'll reintroduce you to an old friend of yours.

PETER: What does that mean?

R.C.: Somebody's been askin' about you.

AGNES: Who?

PETER: Somebody asking about—

R.C.: Dr. Sweet.

AGNES: Who's Dr. Sweet? What are you talkin' about?

PETER: Think about it. Think about what your friend is doing.

R.C.: You know what I'm talkin' about.

PETER: Yes, I do. [To AGNES] Groom Lake. Your friend is going to turn  
me in.

AGNES: Tell me—

R.C.: He come into the bar askin' about Peter.

PETER: What did he tell you?

R.C.: Not much. I didn't even know you were stayin' here, so I guess I  
didn't ask enough questions. But he's nobody you wanna see, or  
he'da known how to find you.

AGNES: Don't play games with him now—

R.C.: I ain't playin'.

PETER: No. You're not.

AGNES: It's okay, she's not gonna do that—

R.C.: Try me.

AGNES: Ronnie, stop it, you don't mean it—

R.C.: Try me.

PETER: I'm . . . stunned . . . that you think I would try to stop Agnes  
from going with you. I'm only staying here because I was invited.

I don't stay where I'm not wanted, and I certainly wouldn't attempt to keep somebody where they don't want to be. Agnes is an adult. She's free to do as she pleases.

R.C.: I thought you might see it that way.

PETER: As for Dr. Sweet, tell him what you wish. I have no doubt he already knows where I am.

R.C.: Right.

PETER: But as for your contention that there are no bugs . . . I disagree.

[The air conditioner comes on.]

R.C. [to AGNES]: You wanna pack a bag, come stay with me for a while?

[PETER suddenly slaps his neck, brushes at his hair. He staggers backward, slapping at his arms, his face, his hair, his neck, the air in front of him.]

AGNES: Peter, what's—?

R.C.: Jesus Christ—

PETER: Motherfuckers—

[His slapping and brushing become frantic, panicked. He grabs a coat hanger, beats himself with it, spinning in a circle, screaming.]

MOTHERFUCKERS! GET OFF ME, MOTHERFUCKERS!

[AGNES and R.C. jump to their feet, uncertain, wanting to help. PETER goes into a frenzy, scratching, slapping, shrieking.]

AGNES: Peter! Peter!

R.C.: Oh my God—!

[They move toward him. He jumps away.]

PETER: DON'T PUT THEM ON ME DON'T PUT THEM ON ME  
WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS!

AGNES: How can we help you?! R.C.: I'm not doing anything,  
What do we do?! I'm just—!

[He jumps into the corner of the room, spins madly in a circle, hammering his body against the walls.]

AGNES: Peter, God, stop!

[AGNES grabs the blanket, rushes him, wraps the blanket around him, pulls him to the floor. He writhes wildly underneath the blanket and appears to be having an epileptic seizure. AGNES and R.C. hold on to him until the seizure ends and he lies silent, apparently passed out. AGNES suddenly lashes out, pushes R.C. away.]

Who do you think you are? You come in here and try to take away the only thing in the world I have that's mine. Why can't I have one thing? Why can't you leave me with one thing? Get out. Get out of here, and don't ever come back.

[R.C. exits. AGNES hugs PETER, rocks him, soothes him. Blackout. The air conditioner cuts off. Buzz of the helicopter.]

## SCENE 2

[Lights up on AGNES and PETER lying in bed. PETER groans, softly at first, then louder. From this point on, AGNES and PETER often kill bugs, swat them away from their faces, et cetera.]

AGNES: Is it your tooth?

PETER: Yes . . . oohhhh, Christ . . .