

Fry of the Day

a play by Marge J. Buckley

ROLES (in order of appearance)

SALESMAN / TRUCKER
LABRADOR JONES
JACK
THUNDERPISTON / ALESKEI YAKOLEV
LASERBEAM / SASHA
DEEP VOICE
TREE
AUDIENCE PLANT / MOUNTAIN LION
DOCTOR / THERMOMETER
SMARTPHONE
DECAYING ANIMATRONIC COWBOY
RECRUITS
PHOTOGRAPHER

Roles may be further doubled or stacked to your liking.

(Curtain.)

(LABRADOR JONES stands at a riverbank. He is nude except for a cowboy hat, beneath which he wears a realistic wig. SALESMAN stands nearby. They both stare at the water.)

(Two minutes of silence. The SALESMAN jerks his head to look at LABRADOR JONES.)

SALESMAN

you should...

or anyway at least I'd say you oughta:

you oughta put your hands in front of your genitals.

(LABRADOR JONES takes off his hat and covers his genitals with it.)

LABRADOR JONES

like that?

SALESMAN

see, that serves a dual purpose:

first, it's got a certain style.

a sexy style.

LABRADOR JONES

sssssssexy!

SALESMAN

and secondly, if you get attacked by any you-know-whats...

well,

i'd sooner lose a finger than my down-below.

LABRADOR JONES

orchiectomy.

SALESMAN

also, you'll be needing a better haircut.

(LABRADOR JONES throws his wig into the river.)

SALESMAN

they've gotta have an image in their heads, right?

when they hear your name.

an outline;

it's called silhouette theory.

(LABRADOR JONES steps behind a curtain and becomes a silhouette.)

SALESMAN

that's how you know you've won.
when the sight of your mere shadow gets attention.
good, bad.
it doesn't matter.
now what's your name?

LABRADOR JONES

you know my name.
I'm Labrador Jones.

SALESMAN

will you be Labrador Jones in a hundred years?
or will you be:

FORGETTABLE????

LABRADOR JONES

noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

(LABRADOR JONES dies behind the curtain.)

SALESMAN

and that,
my darlings,
is how you kill a man for good.

(SALESMAN skips offstage.)

(JACK enters. She wears a hoodie, blue jeans, and a backpack. Her hiking boots, THUNDERPISTON and LASERBEAM, can talk. The actors playing the boots are elsewhere onstage, but JACK reacts as if the sound is coming from the boots themselves.)

JACK

it was chilly coming down the south side of Stratton, and Jack wished pretty desperately that she could start over. she was sleepy, a feeling that she often felt at inappropriate times and almost never when she needed rest. her hair was stiff with frozen sweat, and her boots were beginning to protest.

LASERBEAM

give it up!

THUNDERPISTON

you'll never finish the Appalachian Trail, you dink!

JACK

you don't have to be rude about it.

THUNDERPISTON

"you don't have to be rude about it."

JACK

hey!

THUNDERPISTON

so what if you're underachiever with no money and a family who hates you?
at least you don't have to have a foot inside you all the time.

JACK

I wasn't born with resources, you motherfucker.

THUNDERPISTON

on the hand, at least I know how to hold down a job.

JACK

are you really gonna let your twin speak to me like this?

LASERBEAM

yeah.

JACK

Jack's boots weren't being very nice to her. and yes, she was preparing to forfeit the Appalachian Trail and just wander off into the forest. she had nowhere else to go and nothing to do but camp. all of the other hikers she met out on the trail had supply drops and hotel rooms and support systems and cash. Jack decided the whole Appalachian Trail thing was a crummy scene, so she figured she'd just live in the Vermont wilderness until her supplies ran out and then she'd get a job as a trucker.

THUNDERPISTON

Thunderpiston was an excellent boot, who always had interesting things to say.
once, when Thunderpiston was chilling out in the shoe closet-

(JACK stomps her foot.)

THUNDERPISTON

ow.

(The sun begins to set. A TREE enters and stands there. JACK sits down and reveals an enormous bag of trail mix. She eats.)

LASERBEAM

there was plenty of theoretically democratic voting back then.

(JACK moves to stomp her foot.)

LASERBEAM

wait, don't stomp me!

this is really important context that the audience will need to understand the rest of the play!

(JACK relaxes.)

LASERBEAM

like I was saying,

there was all kinds of voting,

but since rich people were allowed to vote twice,

three times, even, for the really loaded,

it just wasn't a fair system.

(LABRADOR JONES enters, foaming at the mouth. He wears khakis and carries an axe.)

LABRADOR JONES

I will not be

FORGETTABLE!!!

(LABRADOR JONES drops the axe and stares at it for forty-five seconds. When he looks back up, his face is streaked with tears.)

LABRADOR JONES

or will I?

LASERBEAM

Laserbeam had figured out the perfect form of governance.

the boot called it "globalized neopacifistic openism", and it worked like this:

DEEP VOICE

details redacted.

LASERBEAM

it was just when Jack's favorite boot was contemplating Article IIIV,
which again brilliantly stated that every-

DEEP VOICE

this information is redacted.

LASERBEAM

-that a mountain lion sniffed out her pack.

(JACK crouches and picks up a nearby branch.)

LASERBEAM

oh, we still need a mountain lion.

(JACK points to LABRADOR JONES.)

JACK

what about him?

LABRADOR JONES

no.

JACK

please?

LABDRADOR JONES

I'm busy.

JACK

with what?

LABRADOR JONES

I can't talk about it.

JACK

you're not even busy, you're just standing there staring at an axe.
that's not part of my scene.
we just need you to be a mountain lion for like, half a page of dialogue.

LABRADOR JONES

why not her?
she's also just standing there.

TREE

I'm playing a tree.
watch!

(TREE becomes even more of a tree.)

JACK

the actor playing the tree can't do it because someone needs to be a tree.
come on, just be the mountain lion.

LABRADOR JONES

no.

JACK

alright, asshole.
whatever.

LABRADOR JONES

I don't have to help you.
that's my prerogative.

JACK

I take it you're involved in some kind of parallel narrative about masculinity and power?

LABDRADOR JONES

I don't like your tone.

JACK

oh, sure.
now it's about my tone.

LABRADOR JONES

and, sorry,
is your narrative supposed to reveal some brilliant insight about the culture of American hiking?
is that what counts for art these days?

JACK

you're a douche.

LABRADOR JONES

whore.

JACK
pumpkin-fucker!

(The space is bathed in orange light. The actors playing THUNDERPISTON and LASERBEAM lay out newspaper and rolls a pumpkin onstage. The pumpkin has a hole drilled into it. Sex music plays. Everyone looks at LABRADOR JONES, expectantly.)

LABRADOR JONES
absolutely not.

(The orange light cuts out.)

(JACK turns the pumpkin around. It reads: KILL URSELF.)

ALL *(monotone)*
don't listen to the pumpkin.

(LASERBEAM and THUNDERPISTON remove the pumpkin, newspapers, and axe.)

(JACK points to the AUDIENCE PLANT, who is sitting among the audience.)

JACK
you there.
what are you drinking tonight?

AUDIENCE PLANT
grapefruit juice.

JACK
I love that.
I just love that.
do you want to play a mountain lion in our little performance?

THUNDERPISTON
little?

LASERBEAM
performance?

AUDIENCE PLANT
will I have to sing?

JACK

no.

AUDIENCE PLANT

will I have to dance?

JACK

no.

AUDIENCE PLANT

will I have to burp the alphabet?

JACK

no.

(LABRADOR JONES sneaks offstage.)

AUDIENCE PLANT

will I have to accept that the converging crises of the world around us will lead to a proliferation of mass suffering, and that within a couple hundred years the planet's refugees will outnumber those with safe places to live and enough clean water to drink?

JACK

I mean, generally yes,
but not in order to portray this particular mountain lion.

AUDIENCE PLANT

I'll do it.

(AUDIENCE PLANT clambers up onto the stage. They're wearing a t-shirt which reads "I Was Always Going to Play the Mountain Lion.")

JACK

hey, can we get-

(STAGEHAND enters and hands the AUDIENCE PLANT a massive script and a mask. STAGEHAND exits.)

AUDIENCE PLANT

hang on, let me just skim through this...

(The AUDIENCE PLANT speedreads two hundred pages of text and hurls the script offstage.)

AUDIENCE PLANT
and now I shall become thy lion.

(The AUDIENCE PLANT dons the mask and transforms into MOUNTAIN LION.)

MOUNTAIN LION
mowwwwwwwwwww!
I hunger for snacks.

(MOUNTAIN LION stalks around the stage.)

JACK
Jack decided to make camp for the night.
it was a warm night,
so she wrapped her boots tightly in her only blanket so they couldn't pester her for a few hours.

(JACK wraps her boots in a blanket.)

THUNDERPISTON
mmmmmfhmmmm!

LASERBEAM
fmbleburmmmmmm.

JACK
she looked up at the brilliant, blazing stars and said: 'wow.'
wow.

THUNDERPISTON
hmmmmmmfferrr.

LASERBEAM
woooooooooowmh.

JACK
yeah, wow.

MOUNTAIN LION
do I smell trail mix?
ah, a camper's bag.
yes.
I do smell trail mix.

(MOUNTAIN LION holds up the enormous bag of trail mix.)

MOUNTAIN LION

I am the lion of this mountain!
all shall fear my hunger and my wrath!

(JACK lifts a branch and strikes the MOUNTAIN LION. The MOUNTAIN LION slumps to the ground. Trail mix spills everywhere.)

MOUNTAIN LION

no.
I never thought a hiker would be my end.

(MOUNTAIN LION coughs up blood.)

JACK

wait, no!
I was just trying to scare you off.

MOUNTAIN LION

I thought
that I would have more time.

(The MOUNTAIN LION dies.)

(LABRADOR JONES runs in.)

LABRADOR JONES

I've just had:
I've just had a stellar
the best ever idea.
red carpet.
we should get a red carpet.
for my campaign.
we can roll it out right here.
or we could, if it wasn't for all of this trail mix.

JACK

Jack left the mountain lion's corpse right there in the middle of the Appalachian Trail,
prime for some trust-fund bisexual to stumble upon in the course of learning an empty,
short-lived lesson.

Jack left the trail and headed west,
which we'll represent by having her walk offstage.

right...
now.

(JACK exits.)

LABRADOR JONES
wait, you forgot your dead mountain lion and your lumpen bundle!
ah, whatever.

LASERBEAM
hmmmpppppmmmm!

LABRADOR JONES
how strange: a talking bundle.

(LABRADOR JONES steps gingerly over the dead MOUNTAIN LION.)

LABRADOR JONES
it's a good thing I didn't agree to play the mountain lion.

(LABRADOR JONES crouches and tenderly unwraps the blanket to reveal the two boots.)

LABRADOR JONES
boots.

(He holds up THUNDERPISTON. The actor portraying THUNDERPISTON crosses to the boot, which they will now operate as a puppet.)

LABRADOR JONES
what a beautiful boot.

THUNDERPISTON
thank you.
they call me Thunderpiston.
stomp-stomp-ka-POW!

(LABRADOR JONES holds up LASERBEAM. The actor portraying LASERBEAM crosses to the boot, which they will now operate as a puppet.)

LASERBEAM
I am Laserbeam.
zap-zap-buzz.

LABRADOR JONES

nice to meet you, Thunderpiston.

Laserbeam.

I'm Labrador Jones.

they're gonna be calling me the next George W. Bush, on account of my hanging chad.

ah, shoot.

I was supposed to say that earlier when I was performing nudity.

anyway.

hi.

THUNDERPISTON

hi, Labrador Jones.

LASERBEAM

'sup?

LABRADOR JONES

I've never met a talking boot.

much less two.

LASERBEAM

you called Thunderpiston beautiful, but you didn't call me beautiful.

LABRADOR JONES

you're beautiful too, but in a harder way to define.

LASERBEAM

I can't tell if you're being rude.

THUNDERPISTON

Labrador Jones, do you have a life's passion?

LABRADOR JONES

it's not exactly a passion,

but I'm running in the big election.

THUNDERPISTON

don't you think it's weird that county sheriff is an e-

(The actor puppeting THUNDERPISTON trips over the MOUNTAIN LION.)

THE ACTOR PLAYING THUNDERPISTON

god damn it, can we get this fucking mountain lion out of here?

I swear to-
and what is this, trail mix?!
this is why you don't skimp on a decent stage manager.

(THE ACTOR PLAYING THUNDERPISTON points to the booth.)

THE ACTOR PLAYING THUNDERPISTON
yeah,
I'm talking to you, asshole!

(STAGEHAND and JACK enter. They drag the MOUNTAIN LION offstage and sweep up the trail mix.)

THE ACTOR PLAYING THUNDERPISTON
thank you.
now where-

(THE ACTOR PLAYING THUNDERPISTON becomes THUNDERPISTON again.)

THUNDERPISTON
don't you think it's weird that county sheriff is an elected posi-

(LABRADOR JONES wraps THUNDERPISTON back in the blanket.)

THUNDERPISTON
mmmmhshhhhhfffff!

LABRADOR JONES
just-
just don't ask that question again, okay?
and we won't have a problem.
I'm gonna talk to the other boot for a little while,
and then if you can promise to be good I'll let you back out.
okay?
okay.
I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings when I said you were beautiful in a way that's hard to define.

LASERBEAM
thank you.

LABRADOR JONES
I'm just really stressed out with all of this election stuff.

LASERBEAM

why are you running if its stressing you out?
listen, man:
I know some stuff about politics.
politics is supposed to be fun.

LABRADOR JONES

you couldn't possibly understand.

LASERBEAM

you could not be more wrong.
I have studied under the great political scientists of our generation.
I went to the William Humbler University for Talking Footwear.

LABRADOR JONES

I'm not talking about political science.
I'm saying I want nothing more than to be free of this election.
I don't want to run at all.
but I have these visions.

LASERBEAM

what kind of visions?

(While he speaks LABRADOR JONES begins to gently unwrap THUNDERPISTON.)

LABRADOR JONES

visions of the future.
they come upon me at the touch of cloth or the whiff of something strong.
they come at random,
usually two or three times a year, although;
sometimes I will get a rush of them in days,
and once I went four-and-a-half years without a single vision.
I thought they were gone, but no:
the brush of a young woman's lips upon mine brought them rushing harshly back.
the world around me disappears in a flash and I am gripped by a certain truth.
I see scenes which come to pass.
deaths, accidents, heartbreaks, moments of transcendent beauty.
I saw my sister's death years before it happened,
and I did everything in my power to prevent it,
yet still she was stabbed with a pair of rusty scissors,
in a filthy basement at a blackjack table beside an extremely drunk Daniel Day Lewis.
do not misunderstand me, boot:
I have no wish to be elected sheriff, and yet I have no choice.

LASERBEAM

couldn't you just not run?

(LABRADOR JONES kisses THUNDERPISTON.)

LASERBEAM

remind me what you're polling at?

(JACK enters.)

JACK

she used the internet like a mirror, then,
 after the hiking gave out and the woods gave way to a highway
 and she found her way west,
 to Columbus, Ohio.
 she would spend all of her time at the public library,
 drifter she was,
 third spaces be they slim.
 she would sleep often in the shelter,
 sometimes in a tent,
 occasionally with a wealthy woman who paid her one thousand dollars for oral sex,
 kept her for to spoon through the night,
 and who expected her to be quietly gone by eight o'clock a.m.
 nice work, if Jack could get it.
 but the web had caught her in its sticky threads, and it would not let her go.
 she would type things, Jack,
 that's me,
clackety-clack, like *this*, like *that*,
 like "hashtag free the X",
 "hashtag divest from Y",
 things like "shit on a cop today,"
 things like "shit your pants in a cop car, today,"
 things like "who will shit on a cop today?"
 things like "bigfoot wants my tradwife cream-pie."
 and the like,
 and she would sing and she would upload her song
 and it would be a madness song like
tell me what you're after, big machine
make me feel safe and maketh me clean,
tonsil sores and mongering fear throughout the streets
nightmare life be happy now
linger in defeat!
 and it would get so, so many clicks, and so many likes.

LASERBEAM

**tell me what you're after, big machine
make me feel safe and maketh me clean,
tonsil sores and mongering fear throughout the streets
nightmare boot be happy now
linger in defeat!**

THUNDERPISTON

**tell me what you're after, big machine
make me feel safe and Thunderpiston clean
tonsil sores and mongering fear through the boots
bootmare night be booty now
linger in defeat!**

JACK

she would contribute further content there in the library to the web,
typing.

type: "handjobs now, today!"

type: "don't give cake to Kellogg scabs!"

type:

well, you get the picture.

type: "you get the picture!"

and then she got bored, surprise surprise, of Columbus, Ohio.

type: "rename Columbus!"

but nobody would, so again she shipped out west.

(JACK exits.)

LASERBEAM

I always knew democracy was an illusion.

LABRADOR JONES

democracy is not an illusion.

LASERBEAM

oh.

I didn't realize your visions had electors.

LABRADOR JONES

they're-

my visions do not **make** reality.

they show it.

LASERBEAM

what's the difference, Labrador Jones?

LABRADOR JONES

quiet, shoe.

LASERBEAM

I am no mere shoe.

I smell legislation on the wind.

I have ridden with the Angels of Socialism before the-

DEEP VOICE

redacted.

LABRADOR JONES

sure.

(LABRADOR JONES does some push-ups.)

THUNDERPISTON

calisthenics, huh?

just what the doctor ordered.

(DOCTOR enters. She carries a package.)

DOCTOR

that ain't what the doctor ordered.

this

is what the doctor ordered.

(She slides the box across the floor. LABRADOR JONES picks it up.)

DOCTOR

your boots are going to have to leave the room.

doctor-patient confidentiality.

LABRADOR JONES

you heard her.

(LASERBEAM and THUNDERPISTON exit.)

DOCTOR

open it.

(LABRADOR JONES opens the box.)

LABRADOR JONES
it's just a bunch of thermometers.

DOCTOR
that's right.

JACK
why did you-

(The DOCTOR grows three feet taller and her eyes turn red.)

DOCTOR

THERMOMETERS ARE MY GREATEST PASSION

....

THE THERMOMETER OR AS I SOMETIMES LIKE TO CALL IT
THE THERM-O-METER
MEASURES HEAT
AND LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING
IT'S GETTING HOTTER EVERY DAY

(The DOCTOR becomes a THERMOMETER. She holds her breath until her whole face turns red, then she falls over. Mercury seeps from her head. LABRADOR JONES steps over her body.)

LABRADOR JONES
someday your kids are going to want to know:
where were you when Labrador Jones was elected sheriff?

THERMOMETER
...politics....won't always....be...inspiring....

(The THERMOMETER dies.)

LABRADOR JONES
air conditioners, cars, cookies
the finger lakes, kittens, whoopee cushions.
look, there are great problems in this area
and we won't solve them by pussyfooting around.
but first I'm gonna clean up these streets.

(LABRADOR JONES drags the THERMOMETER offstage.)

(SASHA and ALEKSEI YAKOLEV enter. They look and talk like cowboys but they have the hearts and souls of Russians. A forest grows around them.)

SASHA

well I'll be.

if it ain't Aleksei Yakolev.

didn't think we'd see you around these parts ever once again.

when the hell did you turn back up?

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

every day after breakfast.

a walk clears the mind

and it's my favorite time of year when the leaves start goin' all yellow and red and such.

SASHA

papa tells me you'll be leavin' again soon.

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

that's right, Sasha.

there's a man down in Henderson's Creek claims to know the secret to livin' forever.

he keeps it in a box in the attic.

I intend to shake his hand.

SASHA

what's the secret?

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

I don't right know.

but according to legend,

it's been four hundred years and he ain't keeled over yet.

SASHA

you don't really believe that, Aleksei Yakolev.

you ain't half as dumb as that.

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

darn tootin'.

you'd have to be a fool.

SASHA

you're the brightest, most intelligent man I've ever met.

I could listen to you talk for hours.

that's right, i could.

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

you flatter me.

I may not be half as a dumb as you're afraid i am
but I'm certainly not a third as smart as you seem to want me to be,
and i'm only three-fourths as smart as my momma kept tellin' me I was.

(Two full minutes of silence.)

SASHA

everyone here is so stuffy and bored all the time.
if I have to listen to that Boris Mc'Phearson talk about his cows for another minute
I'll put papa's rifle in my mouth and pull the trigger, I swear I will.

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

aw you can't do that, Sasha.

SASHA

and why the hell not?
unless i can get married to somebody half as interesting as-
well. I'll be here forever.

(Two more full minutes of silence.)

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

your papa invited me to this here ranch
because he thought the countryside would calm me down,
but I'm afraid I get more anxious every time the sun rises on this godforsaken place.
you're right, Sasha.
this is a boring, sad place to live, and I have no intention of ever coming back.
I'll be very sorry to say goodbye to you in a few days time, but as for the rest,
I could eat bricks.

SASHA

for a whole hour you scratch, and that makes your bites bleed.

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

i have another announcement to make, Sasha.

SASHA

what's that?

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

I've chosen to stop drinkin' and to stop gamblin'.

SASHA

you're right, Aleksei Yakolev.
you're not a third as smart as I'd like you to be.

ALEKSEI YAKOLEV

there are elves living in these woods.
I've seen 'em.

(SASHA punches ALEKSEI YAKOLEV in the jaw.)

(JACK enters, wearing the DOCTOR's clothes.)

JACK

the jawbone also known as the mandible

(SASHA and ALEKSEI YAKOVLEV fuse together to become a jawbone that moves up and down in time with JACK's speech.)

JACK

also known as the hinge station was discovered in late 16th century France
by a horticulturist named Jacques Fitzpatrick, he learned it on the web,
when he accidentally ate all of his plants and realized that there must be a mechanism
whichtofor caused his mouth to open and close with enough force to masticate ipso facto
“grind up”
the plant matter.
sea urchins have jaws with five-part symmetry.
street urchins have jaws with horizontal symmetry.

(The jawbone finds a resting position.)

JACK

these are the human teeth, in order of my favorite:
mandibular canine, maxillary canine, maxillary central incisor, maxillary lateral incisor,
mandibular first premolar, maxillary first premolar, mandibular lateral incisor, feline,
feline part two, maxillary second premolar, maxillary first molar, maxillary second molar,
mandibular first molar, maxillary third molar, mandibular central incisor,
mandibular second premolar, mandibular second molar, mandibular third molar,
and wisdom teeth.
water is not light the way that air is.

(LABRADOR JONES enters.)

LABRADOR JONES

I would like to be a kinder person:

more generous

more loving

more affectionate

the townsfolk need to see their sheriffs sharing love.

they crave warmth,

even if they don't know it.

(LABRADOR JONES leaps into the jawbone. It chews him up. The jawbone morphs into a sphincter.)

JACK

once the food has been properly digested, of course:

(LABRADOR JONES is excreted from the sphincter. It is a laborious process. Afterwards, a thyrsus is excreted from the sphincter. This is easier. LABRADOR JONES raises the thyrsus.)

LABDRADOR JONES

for a whole hour you scratch

JACK

and that makes your bites bleed!

(LABRADOR JONES and JACK exit.)

(Suddenly, the Russians/jawbone/sphincter once again become THUNDERPISTON and LASERBEAM, alone onstage. They talk as fast as possible.)

THUNDERPISTON

are you absolutely sure?

LASERBEAM

it's the only way out of the situation, sir.

(LASERBEAM hands THUNDERPISTON a clipboard.)

THUNDERPISTON

I'm not certain that I can say this.

LASERBEAM

I don't know what to tell you, sir.

Polkey, Greenberg, Smith. they all agree.

THUNDERPISTON

I'll be crucified out there.

LASERBEAM

no, no.

this is what the people want from you.

this is what they need to hear.

we've done focus groups. phone banks. we're positive.

THUNDERPISTON

please don't make me do this.

LASERBEAM

I'm sorry, sir.

one day you'll understand.

THUNDERPISTON

Gretchen:

you've been with me for fifteen years now and never once,
never once have I doubted your loyalty.

you know that.

so I am asking you, not only as a colleague but as a friend:
is there something that you are not telling me?

LASERBEAM

no, sir.

THUNDERPISTON

very well.

bring in the cameras.

(The cameras are brought in.)

THUNDERPISTON

there should be a word for when
you're feeling a familiar feeling
that you haven't felt in a while
and it's making you feel very comfortable
and a little sad.

LASERBEAM

it's time, sir.

THUNDERPISTON

very well.

LASERBEAM

and three. two.

(LASERBEAM mouths 'one.')

THUNDERPISTON

good evening, friends. citizens.

I have done you a great disservice.

I have made an important mistake.

and I have something to confess:

Mother Earth is pregnant for the third time,

and she did not consent to what I did to her.

(A shreddy guitar lick. Powerful rock music.

JACK becomes a tree. The tree burns, shrivels, turns to ash.

THUNDERPISTON dances a little jig around the stage.

THUNDERPISTON puts on a wig.

LASERBEAM sneezes.

JACK shakes off the ash.

a SMARTPHONE dances around.

Woah-oh-oh.

LASERBEAM sneezes again.

Hey hey hey.

JACK puts on a fedora.

THUNDERPISTON eats something gross.

Leap frog is played. Disputes are had and resolved peacefully.)

THUNDERPISTON

I used to believe I was more a lover than a fighter.

now I believe I must have changed my mind!

even the best pair of boots can't have a heart,

but every disciplined bootsmith knows how to make a boot that can freakin' kick.

(A kicking-centric dance piece.)

LABRADOR JONES

men have to be

or have to have...

what am i saying?

um,

platonic love? support? giving, sharing
is very special in this time and place.
the American male's compassion
is a-
it's like, an, um,
it's like a hydrangea, right?
if you water it,
okay,
I'm going somewhere with this metaphor-
and you,
uh,
put it in the sun
it will blossom, right:
and others will see it
and plant their own
and if you do not
and i'm speaking to men
it will wither up and die
and you will be culpable
for all the prisons and all of the wars.

(JACK pulls LABRADOR JONES into her.)

JACK
you're the little spoon

LABRADOR JONES
okay.

JACK
do you like that?

LABRADOR JONES
yes.

JACK
good.

(A boot flies across the stage from one wing to the other.)

*(JACK pulls LABRADOR JONES into her so powerfully that his ribs become a part of her body.
LABRADOR JONES tries to squirm away in pain.)*

JACK

it's okay. it's okay.

LABRADOR JONES

you're trying to absorb my ribs!

JACK

nobody needs their ribs!

the future is a bright one.

we shall become invertebrates.

LABRADOR JONES

but-

(a DECAYING ANIMATRONIC COWBOY enters.)

DECAYING ANIMATRONIC COWBOY

w-w-w-w-w

welcome to the plbbbbhhhhh

cowboy cccccccc

cowboy computer graveyard!

where plbbbbbbbbb

all yer' fttttt

rootin' tootin'

splloosh

p-p-p-p-p-p-p-

at high noon!

(A classic western song and an electronic dance song are played over top of each other.)

(All of the actors become DECAYING ANIMATRONIC COWBOYS. They dance. Crazy lights. Drugs. It's a party. The party ends.)

(LABRADOR JONES stands in line in front of a line of RECRUITS. He's hungover from the party.)

LABRADOR JONES

recruits!

you've been assembled for one mission,

and one mission alone.

you're going to be dropped behind enemy lines with only your combat knives.

you're going to be dressed as enemy civilians (and yes, their civilians are enemies, too):

you're going to find their camps

you're going to insert your knives into the flesh of their buttocks
 you're going to carve in a figure-eight pattern
 you're going to peel their buttocks loose, stuff them in your military-issue laundry bags,
 bring those buttocks back to me,
 across the rolling sea
 and I'm going to sell their buttocks to plastic surgeons on the black market.
 I'm expecting you to make a big show of it, alright?
 you're gonna holler and yell and spill a lot of blood out there.
 they will dream about us
 when they close their eyes:
 American boogeymen coming for their buttocks, is that clear?
 I said is that clear?

RECRUITS

clear, sergeant Labrador Jones, sir!

LABRADOR JONES

I want those butts,
 and you're gonna give 'em to me.

(Music.)

(LABRADOR JONES leads the RECRUITS in a training exercise, teaching them how to properly remove somebody's butt.)

(The music distorts and devolves into air raid sirens, helicopter noises, machine gun fire, and shouting.)

(The training becomes a brawl.)

JONES

fight if you have to!
 kill anyone you can, watch your fifty-fives,
 but do not forget the mission:

I

Want

Those

Butts!

(JACK enters and clicks a button on a remote. The brawl freezes.)

JACK

so that's how it happened.

when I got home that day,
 my family had vanished, their luggage gone,
 except, of course, for my father.
 my father was still there,
 but his buttocks had been ripped from his body.
 I could see straight through the jagged holes to his leg bones,
 which were matted with gristle of purple and red.
 and he was just...look, he was dead.
 but still, he was moaning. pitiful.
 my father had begun every day by doing one hundred squats in our backyard.
 the irony was not lost on me,
 and that's what I'm here to talk about today: irony.
 I'm Jack-the-dual-protagonist, and this is my Ted Talk.
 how does one begin to explain irony?
 well, there are three main types of irony.
 the first is known as dramatic irony,
 which is best understood as when the audience sees other worlds
 other planets
 where life is different,
 where there are no human beings to stop the natural flow of progress;
 there are no children to listen playing;
 there is only water moving rock
 fire razing wood
 their dancing is slow
 but oh, how they dance.

(THUNDERPISTON enters, chased by LASERBEAM.)

LASERBEAM
 would you say that everyone is a stranger somewhere?

THUNDERPISTON
 sure.

LASERBEAM
 a visitor, then.

THUNDERPISTON
 yeah.

LASERBEAM
 an alien?

THUNDERPISTON
draw, motherfucker.

(THUNDERPISTON and LASERBEAM both draw finger pistols.)

LASERBEAM
there is nothing either good or redeeming about you, sir.

THUNDERPISTON
I wouldn't be so sure.

LASERBEAM
I felt that tug!

THUNDERPISTON
well, that didn't mean you had to go running off acting like an idiot,
did it?

LASERBEAM
I felt it in my soul.

THUNDERPISTON
that ain't gonna be this town's problem.

LASERBEAM
you felt it, too,
didn't you?
do you remember how we always used to get take-out near the bay?
on the first Friday of every third week we'd go to that greasy place with the bread.

THUNDERPISTON
my mother used to call it a "heart attack on a platter."

LASERBEAM
it was the only place open during Hurricane Petunia.
the owners lived right upstairs so they didn't have to use the roads.

THUNDERPISTON
or the trains.

LASERBEAM
I can't imagine it's still there.

THUNDERPISTON
have you looked?

LASERBEAM
must be gone by now.

THUNDERPISTON
but you haven't looked.

LASERBEAM
nobody ever looked for that place.
they just stumbled in.

THUNDERPISTON
I wanted this to be more fun.

LASERBEAM
what?

THUNDERPISTON
one of us shootin' the other one.

(JACK and LABRADOR JONES put finger phones to their ears and begin to speak in unison.)

JACK + LABRADOR JONES
so Tim's reading all of these that are going into the e-book,
and he's also working to research this, kind of, multimedia-
work, yes I'm working on innovative...they are teaching processes;
really it's kind of innovative, yeah so yeah yeah,
I think it needs to be said it needs to clarify that he used this in what I'm assuming-
taking his musical journal as he explains it journalism, analyzing speech, dissect it,
not only innovative using language as much as a timeline
pretty much
shows the whole storytelling, yes
exactly, it allows the audience to work along stop at different points if they want to ugh
okay so public research here
a big part of Tim's mixture of musical journalism and multimedia tool format that he's
created to teach, basically analyzing p-
rhetorical mumble mumble it might have mumble mumble:
um, I think Korea.
I'm writing a mumble, my my my ex-husband, Tammy right,
but I think I would say the argument, the purpose, and-

(Lights go down on JACK and LABRADOR JONES.)

LASERBEAM

it could've been more exciting.

THUNDERPISTON

that's what I mean.

LASERBEAM

I got a bottle of gin in my sack over there.
we could liven it up.

THUNDERPISTON

I'm trying not to drink so much any more.

LASERBEAM

it's strange to be back with old friends.

THUNDERPISTON

lifelong.

(Sad music.)

LASERBEAM

I'm a better shot than you.
unless you got any better.

THUNDERPISTON

I didn't.
but it really just matters who shoots first.

LASERBEAM

I'm probably not going to be able to pull the trigger at all.
you, I'm not so sure.

THUNDERPISTON

you shouldn't be.

LASERBEAM

are you sure you don't want a little gin?

THUNDERPISTON

twenty years.

god damn you, you goddamn idiot.

(THUNDERPISTON fires. LASERBEAM snatches the bullet out of the air, loads it into their finger pistol, and shoots THUNDERPISTON, who dies. LASERBEAM goes catatonic.)

LASERBEAM
our train has derailed.
we have no sympathy.
get out of here!
we have no way:
our towns are ghost towns.

(A PHOTOGRAPHER enters.)

PHOTOGRAPHER
line up, boys!

(The RECRUITS enter, each carrying a buttock.)

PHOTOGRAPHER
say cheese, boys!

RECRUITS
cheeseboys!

(The RECRUITS pose with the buttocks. The PHOTOGRAPHER starts taking pictures.)

PHOTOGRAPHER
excellent, excellent.
you're gonna be on the cover of Time magazine!
you fabulous sons of whores, say cheese again!

RECRUITS
cheese again!

(JACK enters.)

JACK
no,
no more of this loser-grade military-film pastiche garbage!
get out of here.

(JACK ushers the PHOTOGRAPHER and the RECRUITS off-stage.)

JACK

okay, ew.

Jack made it to Minneapolis, another library,

Hennepin County,

and she smashed a few more brilliant takes into the void.

“gaslighting is so daddy.”

“let fiber artists drive drunk!”

“is Patrick Star a rape apologist?”

“I only bottom for Catholic transvestite priests.”

“even the best pair of boots can’t have a heart.”

“how many conservative politicians do you think enjoy she-male porn?”

“can’t stop thinking about Ted Jojo Siwa Cruz.”

“the internet is just twenty two totally cute puppies and three very ugly cats
and one nondescript lizard and half of a ham hock.”

stuff like that.

(LABRADOR JONES enters carrying a bucket.)

JACK

and here’s what it would look like if I were the sheriff instead of Labrador Jones.

(The stage is washed in pink light.)

LABRADOR JONES

could you explain to me, ma’am,

why you had me paint the town pink?

JACK

I don’t have to explain myself to such a one as you.

LABRADOR JONES

it’s just that i’ve never heard of a pink town before.

certainly not way out here in the American Southwest, where men are men.

JACK

a pink town.

a carnation pink town:

like a flower rising from the dusty earth.

there will be more bread.

more cake.

LABRADOR JONES

in what way?

JACK

in a general way!

there shall be more production of bread and a higher output of cake!

LABRADOR JONES

bread is very pleasant.

I would like that very much.

I'm just saying maybe we didn't have to paint the whole town p-

JACK

pleasant, yes!

that's what I'm saying.

we shalt engage the bakers and set them to their task,
and then you shall also paint pink the bread.

LABRADOR JONES

but if we paint the bread, it won't taste-

JACK

-don't say it-

LABRADOR JONES

-quite as good-

JACK

you scoundrel!

it shall be done regardless.

the people want their bread to look pleasant,
and they careth not the taste.

(Music. JACK exits. LABRADOR JONES follows her, painting a trail of pink on the ground behind.)

(LASERBEAM enters, dancing and happily dragging an American flag through the paint. THUNDERPISTON enters from the audience. They shout over the music.)

LASERBEAM

Thunderpiston! hey!

Thunderpiston!

THUNDERPISTON

Laserbeam!

LASERBEAM

what'd you have for lunch today?

THUNDERPISTON

plain bread! you?

LASERBEAM

a bag of old pretzels!

THUNDERPISTON

nice!

LASERBEAM

wanna destroy this flag with me?

THUNDERPISTON

yes!

(LASERBEAM and THUNDERPISTON destroy the American flag. They're having fun. The song cuts out abruptly. THUNDERPISTON steps forward.)

THUNDERPISTON

do you know why they call me Thunderpiston?

it's not about my affinity for rainstorms or my sexual prowess.

they call me Thunderpiston

because my parents opened a dictionary, flipped to two random pages,
and stuck together the first words they pointed to.

(THUNDERPISTON throws their body [the boot] at LASERBEAM.)

LASERBEAM

what the fuck, Thunderpiston?

THUNDERPISTON

I didn't deserve this terrible name.

LASERBEAM

that's not my fault!

THUNDERPISTON

I don't care who's fault it is:

I just wanna be mad at someone!

(THUNDERPISTON stomps offstage.)

LASERBEAM

“am I crazy, or was that a talking boot?”

“yup.”

“huh.”

(LABRADOR JONES enters.)

LASERBEAM

hey.

LABRADOR JONES

queer.

well,

I’m a bisexual man but I think I’d be willing to give up men forever for a woman who pegs.

(LABRADOR JONES exits. The play falls asleep.)

(JACK, LABRADOR JONES, LASERBEAM, and THUNDERPISTON assemble. They reenact the following dream sequence as they describe it, using found-object-props.)

JACK

last night I had a dream

LABRADOR JONES

(we were inseparably intertwined)

JACK

I was standing on top of a train
hurtling through time

LASERBEAM

one hundred days a minute

THUNDERPISTON

my cheeks ready to peel right off my face
it was early winter and the wind stung
but I could feel your legs beneath the sheets
clean-shaven.

I was going to die
a tunnel way up ahead.
going to lop my head clean off.

LASERBEAM

I pressed my body to the roof of the train.
this is it, I thought,
and when i get up there,

(They all point to heaven.)

THUNDERPISTON

or perhaps down there,

(They all point to hell.)

JACK

someone in charge will ask me
“what did you do with your life?”

LABRADOR JONES

“I fucking wasted it!”

JACK

the train took a sharp right turn
just before the tunnel
unexpectedly
and another world lay before me

LASERBEAM

it was
a temple
sort of
a religious cavalcade of structures
an Other-y thing with beige pillars of stone.
carved into them were pictures I couldn't make out,
but it was all fenced off
chain link and barbed wire
caution tape

JACK

the train stopped.

THUNDERPISTON

suddenly i was on the ground,
surrounded by archaeologists.

LABRADOR JONES

tweedy men in suspenders and bankchaps,
eager to show me the light.

JACK

“our budget has been slashed
no no not slashed
entirely gutted
totally cut
the sheriff’s to blame:
this isn’t part of The Great America,
so you have to see inside before they tear it down.”

(As JACK continues to speak, the others close in around her. She becomes claustrophobic.)

JACK

and I wanted to see inside!
believe me, I did:
but the only way in was a tunnel
underground
and I got ten rungs down the ladder
before I could feel the walls closing in on every side of me
I could barely move
I cried out for help
please-
please!
pull me out
pull me out!
and they wouldn’t,
so i kicked myself awake
made a little moan
hoping to wake you too
but you kept sleeping
so I wrapped my leg around yours
breathed myself back into reality
and thought about breakfast.

(The actors curl up comfortably. Memes are shown to the audience.)

(It snows.)

(The dining car of a train headed west. JACK, LABRADOR JONES, THUNDERPISTON, and LASERBEAM are sitting around a table. Every once in a while, the train lurches a bit. There is a

giant bowl of New England clam chowder and four spoons. As they speak, they take turns drinking ladlefuls of chowder.)

THUNDERPISTON

of course of course of course:

New England clam chowder is the greatest of the clam chowders.
no one could disagree!

JACK

not a soul could disagree!

though i must admit:

I enjoy the occasional Manhattan clam chowder, as well.

LABRADOR JONES

mummy, poppy.

I have to take a tinkle.

THUNDERPISTON

not until we finish this scene!

I mean the soup, my dear.

I mean the New England clam chowder, my dear.

JACK

be a good little yankee and eat your New England clam chowder.

they may not have New England clam chowder in Henderson's Creek.

I daresay:

there's almost no chance at all, being so far from New England.

LABRADOR JONES

yes poppy.

yes mummy.

but I've really got to tinkle!

THUNDERPISTON

they say the Chesapeake Bay will be making a full comeback.

JACK

do they?

THUNDERPISTON

oh yes.

JACK
how delightful.

THUNDERPISTON
now we don't have to feel quite so guilty when we eat our breakfast crabs.

JACK
oh, the breakfast crab.
a sign of wealth, a sign of health.
and as my father always said, god rest his soul, the-

THUNDERPISTON
that man was a fool.
always gambling and drinking.

JACK
indeed, indeed.
a fool.

LABRADOR JONES
indeed indeed a fool!

JACK
shut up, child!
eat your New England clam chowder,
or I'll shave a frowny face into the side of your head, you blithering disappointment!

LABRADOR JONES
okay.

JACK
and no texting at the table.

LABRADOR JONES
I'm not!

JACK
don't start-

THUNDERPISTON
oh, I've just had a brilliant idea!
why don't we all put our phones in the New England clam chowder?
that way we can't use them until we've eaten.

JACK
a brilliant idea!

THUNDERPISTON
everybody, phones in the New England clam chowder.

(They all do so, except for LASERBEAM. The others stare.)

THUNDERPISTON
didn't you hear me?

(Silence. LASERBEAM puts their phone into the bowl. They resume eating.)

(They eat in silence.)

ALL
where do the noses go?
oh god oh god
where do the noses go?
big city
blinds closed
big clothes
have pity.

(LASERBEAM dances alone. The rest scatter.)

DEEP VOICE
redacted.
redacted.
redacted.

(LABRADOR JONES enters.)

LABRADOR JONES *(gesturing to nobody)*
these are my friends!

LASERBEAM
uh...

LABRADOR JONES
oh.
where did they go?

(THUNDERPISTON enters.)

THUNDERPISTON

good evening, friends. citizens.
I have done you a great disservice.
I have made an important mistake.
and i have something to confess.
Mother Earth is pregnant for the fourth time,
and this time she's getting an abortion.

(JACK becomes a skyscraper. The skyscraper is demolished with a wrecking ball and becomes a pile of rubble.

THUNDERPISTON tries to dance, immediately twists their ankle, and limps around in a circle.

THUNDERPISTON cuts off an ear. Blood.

JACK rises from the rubble.

LASERBEAM puts on the SMARTPHONE costume and dances around.

Woah-oh-oh.

Hey hey hey.

JACK puts on a floppy sun hat.

THUNDERPISTON eats the ear.

Everyone does calisthenics.)

(Everyone scatters except for LABRADOR JONES and LASERBEAM.)

LABRADOR JONES *(gesturing to nobody)*

these are my best friends!

LASERBEAM

uhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

LABRADOR JONES

oh.

where did they go?

(LABRADOR JONES tries to exit, but is blocked by the SALESMAN, who is barefoot.

LASERBEAM watches.)

SALESMAN

stand to the left.

LABDRADOR JONES

stage left or house left?

SALESMAN
house.

LABRADOR JONES
why?

SALESMAN
there's a draft.

LABRADOR JONES
I don't need protecting from a draft.

SALESMAN
no.
I'm protecting the draft from you.

LABRADOR JONES
I found my life's passion today.

SALESMAN
you can't be sure.

LABRADOR JONES
hey, you're not wearing shoes.

SALESMAN
anyone can wear shoes.

LABRADOR JONES
but you're not.

SALESMAN
you said you found your life's passion today?

LABRADOR JONES
yes.

SALESMAN
belief is a powerful drug.

LABRADOR JONES
yes.

SALESMAN
so what is your life's passion?

LABDRADOR JONES
oh.
it's personal.

SALESMAN
I guess you don't have to-

LABRADOR JONES
I won't.

SALESMAN
but you found one.

LABRADOR JONES
yes.

SALESMAN
allegedly-

LABRADOR JONES
-full force-

SALESMAN
-pay rent-

LABRADOR JONES
-excuse me?-

SALESMAN
I said "pay rent."

LABRADOR JONES
pay rent?

SALESMAN
that's your purpose.
that's all your purpose has ever been, or ever will be.
a life's passion is nothing.

LABRADOR JONES

I'm starting to distrust you.

SALESMAN

is it my bare feet?

LABRADOR JONES

no.

I'm starting to think you're cruel.

SALESMAN

I have to be.

LABRADOR JONES

nobody has to be cruel.

SALESMAN

no, but it's easier.

LABRADOR JONES

what do we do about her?

SALESMAN

run away.

LABRADOR JONES

I can't.

SALESMAN

I really need this.

LABRADOR JONES

no, you don't.

SALESMAN

I really want this.

LABRADOR JONES

you're supposed to be like,
mythic.

SALESMAN

please.

LABRADOR JONES
and now you're groveling.

SALESMAN
you're getting bolder.
that's good.

LABRADOR JONES
I told you.
I found my life's passion today.

SALESMAN
you're getting bolder,
but that won't protect you from what's coming.
it might make it worse.
stand to the left.

LABRADOR JONES
stage left?

SALESMAN
house.

LABRADOR JONES
why?

SALESMAN
there's a draft.

LABRADOR JONES
I don't need to dodge any draft.

SALESMAN
the draft would like to dodge you.

LABRADOR JONES
I feel I must now address a certain rumor: no.
I did not make love backstage to a pumpkin.

SALESMAN
it doesn't matter what you did or didn't do.

LABRADOR JONES
but my purpose-

SALESMAN
you don't have a purpose.

LABRADOR JONES
squiggle.
ow!

SALESMAN
does this hurt?

LABRADOR JONES
everything hurts.

SALESMAN
you don't need to have a purpose.

LABRADOR JONES
but I do have a purpose!

SALESMAN
i hope it turns out well for you.
but i have
such
doubts.

(The SALESMAN exits.)

LASERBEAM
even the best pair of boots can't have a heart.
but we still hold out hope:
a bootsmith with a dream
a bootsmith willing to risk it all, perhaps,
might hook us up with some lungs.

(Music.)

(The SALESMAN enters, strips down, and dresses back up as a TRUCKER. The TRUCKER gets into their sixteen-wheeler and begins to drive.)

(LASERBEAM takes a huge breath. LABRADOR JONES puts LASERBEAM on his foot and exits, lopsided.)

(JACK enters, carrying a bottle of whiskey and hitchhiking. The TRUCKER stops and picks her up.)

TRUCKER
where ya headed?

JACK
Palo Alto.

TRUCKER
I'll take you as far as Henderson's Creek,
then you'll have to find another ride.

JACK
thank you. thirsty?

(They ride. JACK and the TRUCKER pass the bottle of wine back and forth for a while in silence, both staring at the highway. The sun sets.)

(Blackout.)