

Alchemy Antiques

A Full Length One Act Play

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*“Beauty is our weapon against nature;
by it we make objects, giving them limit, symmetry, proportion.
Beauty halts and freezes the melting flux of nature.
All objects are alive, they have voices,
they speak of their history and interrelatedness.
And they are all talking at once!”*

Camille Paglia

*“There is no need for me to keep a skull on my desk,
to stand with one foot on the ruins of Rome,
or wear a locket with the sliver of a saint’s bone.
It is enough to realize that every common object
in this sunny little room will outlive me --
the carpet, radio, bookstand and rocker.
Not one of these things will attend my burial,
not even this dented goosenecked lamp
with its steady benediction of light.”*

Billy Collins

CHARACTERS:

(a minimum ensemble of six actors: two men and four women)

DOCTOR TUCKER DANES, an auctioneer and former physician

CHELSEA HARRIER, bidder #15, a young tattooist

SONYA SPROCKER, bidder #24, a museum curator

ROSANNE POMSKY, bidder #37

VIOLET POMSKY, Rosanne's sister

MONIQUE MALINOIS, bidder #40, a collector of antiques

OWEN SPITZ, bidder #52, a taxidermist

WARDEN JOAN BASSET, a prison supervisor

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD, a prison psychiatrist

SYPHILISSA, a woman covered with inflamed sores

DRAGOS DRAGOMIR, an antiques dealer

LUMINISTA, an ancient gypsy

NOTE: Doctor Tucker Danes, Monique Malinois, Owen Spitz, and Warden Joan Basset have Southern American accents; Chelsea Harrier, Sonya Sprocker, Rosanne Pomsy, Violet Pomsy, and Doctor Elaine Shepherd have non-regional American accents; Dragos Dragomir, Luminista and Syphilissa have Eastern European accents.

SUGGESTED DOUBLING:

Monique Malinois / Warden Joan Basset / Violet Pomsy / Syphilissa

Rosanne Pomsy / Doctor Elaine Shepherd / Luminista

Owen Spitz / Dragos Dragomir

TIME:

1975, the ancient past, and possible future

PLACE:

A stylized set represents an auction barn in Brunswick, Georgia; a prison cell in Lowell, Florida; an apartment in New York City; a forest in the Carpathian Mountains; and various auction houses.

(The distant howling of hounds is heard on a summer evening in the rural outskirts of Brunswick, Georgia. Dim lights reveal the interior of an auction barn where five bidders are seated among the audience, clasping their numbered cards: CHELSEA HARRIER (#15), SONYA SPROCKER (#24), MONIQUE MALINOIS (#40), ROSANNE POMSKY (#37), and OWEN SPITZ (#52). On stage is the auctioneer, TUCKER DANES, who stands beside a careworn trunk, clasping a list of its contents.)

TUCKER

The last lot of the evening is a steamer trunk of odds and ends from Alchemy Antiques which closed last May when Monty Tervuren passed away at the ripe old age of ninety. The hinges are rusty, but inside are the following treasures: Monty's vintage fedora festooned with mothballs; a portable Victrola with fifty-three vinyl records; the remains of his taxidermy collection which includes six ravens, a bat, cat, and iguana that exudes a slight odor; an obsolete tattoo set with a box of needles; a silver plated hand mirror with the mirror missing; four Rosenthal china plates, all cracked; one Dresden poodle, slightly chipped; a faded silk parasol; and a dusty bolt of blue velvet. So shall we start the bidding with an even hundred dollars?

(The FIVE BIDDERS stand, holding up their cards.)

TUCKER

One hundred and fifty? Two hundred; two hundred and fifty? Do I hear three hundred?

(MONIQUE (#40) seats herself.)

TUCKER

Three-fifty? Do I hear four hundred? Four-fifty? Five hundred?

(OWEN (#52) sits, and TUCKER points to the three remaining BIDDERS as he speeds up his bidding calls.)

TUCKER

Five hundred and fifty; six hundred, six-fifty; seven hundred, seven-fifty; eight hundred, eight-fifty; nine hundred, nine-fifty! Shall we up the ante to one thousand? One thousand, one hundred, one thousand, three hundred, one thousand, five hundred, one thousand, eight hundred; two thousand! Two thousand, three hundred; two thousand five hundred; three thousand, three thousand, five hundred; four thousand, four thousand five hundred; five thousand, five thousand, five hundred; six thousand, six thousand, five hundred! Do I hear seven thousand? Eight thousand? Nine thousand? Ten thousand!

(Bidder SONYA (#24) seats herself, leaving only
CHELSEA (#15) and ROSANNE (#37)).

TUCKER

I don't suppose you'd care to reveal which item you deem to be so precious? Did the mirror belong to Madame Pompadour? (*pause, no response*) Is that iguana a bygone species? (*pause*) Well then, shall we try for eleven thousand? Eleven thousand, five hundred; twelve thousand, twelve thousand, five hundred; thirteen thousand, thirteen thousand, five hundred; fourteen thousand; fifteen thousand; eighteen thousand; twenty thousand! Do I hear twenty-one thousand? Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-five, twenty-seven, thirty thousand! Do I hear thirty-one thousand, thirty-three, thirty-five, thirty-eight, forty thousand! Forty-two, forty-three, forty-five, forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty thousand!

(CHELSEA (#15), suddenly stands on tiptoe, shouting.)

CHELSEA (#15)

Fifty-five thousand!

(ROSANNE (#37) responds, also shouting.)

ROSANNE (#37)

Fifty-six thousand!

CHELSEA (#15)

Sixty thousand!

ROSANNE (#37)

Sixty-one thousand!

CHELSEA (#15)

Seventy thousand!

ROSANNE (#37)

Seventy-one thousand!

CHELSEA (#15)

Seventy-nine thousand!

ROSANNE (#37)

Eighty thousand!

(CHELSEA (#15) sits.)

TUCKER

Eighty thousand...? Going once, going twice, sold to bidder number thirty-seven for eighty thousand dollars! And that, ladies and gentlemen, concludes the bidding for today! *(to Rosanne)* Now Ma'am, will you please step on up here to claim your treasures.

(ROSANNE approaches the stage followed by SONYA who eavesdrops. MONIQUE and OWEN also approach, while CHELSEA remains at a distance.)

TUCKER

(offering a handshake) Congratulations, Ma'am! We accept cash, checks, and credit cards, and if you need to make arrangements for the shipping of the trunk, I can recommend several reputable companies.

ROSANNE

(writing a check) I think I can manage.

TUCKER

I don't suppose you'd care to divulge the particular item of value?

ROSANNE

I'm afraid not.

TUCKER

Well, I'm flummoxed. Given the fact that Alchemy Antiques rarely sold items worth more than a hundred dollars.

ROSANNE

I'm sorry, I really don't know.

TUCKER

You mean you just bid eighty thousand dollars and you don't know what for?!

ROSANNE

That's right; I'm representing a client who instructed me to purchase the trunk.

SONYA

Forgive me for interrupting. *(to Rosanne)* Would you mind telling me your client's name and address?

ROSANNE

I'm sorry, but he's a private collector who prefers to remain anonymous.

SONYA

Then please give him my card so he can contact me. *(to Tucker)* Can you tell me who will be receiving the proceeds from the sale?

TUCKER

Monty's grandson who will be pleasantly surprised since my estimate was considerably lower. Truth be told, this is the largest sale this auction's ever had, and given the current state of our coffers, it comes at a most opportune time, yes, indeed.

SONYA

Might I have his phone number?

TUCKER

I was only given a street address, but I'll tell you what: I'll give you the address if you'll tell me what in heaven's name you deemed so valuable?

SONYA

The tattoo set. It was used by the Nazis to tattoo the crude numbers on the forearms of prisoners during the Second World War.

TUCKER

Really? Now why on earth would Monty have that?

SONYA

After the prisoners were liberated, he confiscated the set and used it to cover their tattooed numbers changing them into flowers, animals, and various designs. My name is Sonya Sprocker, and I represent the Bucharest War Memorial Museum. We were given a grant to secure the set, but it was obviously insufficient. *(to Rosanne)* I assume that's what you were bidding on as well.

ROSANNE

As I said, I was only told to purchase and deliver the trunk and its contents.

TUCKER

So was Monty a prisoner?

SONYA

He was a Romanian Romani more commonly known as a Roma gypsy. His real name was Dragos Dragomir, and yes, he was a prisoner.

TUCKER

Lord, I had no idea.

SONYA

With current surveillance technology, we can track surviving refugees -- even some who changed their names. Your newspaper obituary mentioned that Mister Tervuren was once a tattooist, and given his age and what we discovered to be a fabricated identity, we were quite certain he was Dragos.

TUCKER

Well, a man has a right to reinvent himself, but why Monty? Sounds like he was one of the good guys.

SONYA

He was among many on both sides who wished to escape their pasts. People tend to think Germany was the sole perpetrator of the war, but Romania had its share of regrettable alliances, and the Romani were considered expendable by both countries. After Dragos set up shop, he tattooed survivors at no cost.

TUCKER

Then you should know Monty was well liked here in Brunswick. Women were quite smitten by his old world manners. Some of us knew he was a tattooist before he took up antiques. In fact, he once showed me an album of his handiwork. His specialty was...

TUCKER

...dogs.

CHELSEA

Dogs,...

CHELSEA

...cats, reptiles and roses.

(TUCKER and SONYA turn to greet CHELSEA who has moved near enough to eavesdrop.)

TUCKER

Well, hello, young lady. Did you know Monty?

CHELSEA

I was his apprentice.

TUCKER.

Now how in heaven's name can you be Monty's apprentice? He gave up tattooing before he moved here and he lived here for nearly forty years. Frankly, my dear, you don't look a day over twenty.

CHELSEA

I knew him, and I'll find him.

TUCKER

Well, darlin', in case you weren't listening, your mentor passed away. I'm afraid he died in a fire, and I ought to know since I was his physician and helped identify his remains.

(ROSANNE approaches, waving a sheet of paper.)

ROSANNE

Excuse me, but I'm afraid there's a problem: I have a list of all the items in the trunk, and several appear to be missing.

TUCKER

Really? What items?

ROSANNE

A pocket watch, a pair of leather gloves, and a bag of marbles.

TUCKER

The doors to this barn are locked, but vagrants have been known to sneak in through the windows and help themselves. So tell me, how did your client get that list?

ROSANNE

I have no idea; I was only told to check the contents.

TUCKER

Well, you tell your client that we're just a simple, uninsured country auction with minimal security, but if he writes out a claim, I'll pass it to the police in Brunswick.

(MONIQUE MALINOIS and OWEN SPITZ approach ROSANNE.)

MONIQUE

Hello, I was wondering if you might consider selling the Dresden poodle? I'm a collector and don't mind a few chips.

ROSANNE

I'm sorry, I've been instructed to deliver the entire contents.

OWEN

Hi there, I'm Owen Spitz, Monty's taxidermist, and I was hopin' to buy back some of my handiwork. Please give your client my card. Do you need some help movin' that trunk?

ROSANNE

Yes, thanks, my van's parked out back.

(ROSANNE and OWEN leave with the trunk, followed by SONYA and MONIQUE, while CHELSEA lingers.)

CHELSEA

Hey, Doc, would you mind if I slept here tonight?

TUCKER

You're not serious?

CHELSEA

Yeah.

TUCKER

Well now, darlin', there's a decent bed and breakfast only a mile down the road.

CHELSEA

No thanks. I could sleep on that bench in the back.

TUCKER

If you had the money to bid on the trunk, then surely you can afford a room for the night.

CHELSEA

I'd rather stay here with the dead.

TUCKER

(pause) So you see the dead, do you?

(CHELSEA points her finger at the audience.)

CHELSEA

Right there.

TUCKER

Well, we attract all sorts. Do they care to introduce themselves? I've been a doctor here for nearly thirty years so maybe I know them.

CHELSEA

(pause, pointing) There's Gordon Pembroke who hung himself; there's Edna Bedlington who fell off a boat and drowned; Glen Wheaton drove his Ford Mustang into a parked trailer; a girl named Julie who...

CHELSEA

...overdosed.

TUCKER

Overdosed...

TUCKER

...on heroin. That's enough! My god, girl, what in heaven's name are they doing here?

CHELSEA

Watching us, but Miss Bedlington said you're a thief. She saw you steal the watch, the gloves, and the marbles.

TUCKER.

Damnation! I didn't think they'd be missed, and hell, old Monty was a friend so he wouldn't mind. Is Monty out there?

CHELSEA

No, but Beatrice Bouvier said you're a drunk and your license to practice medicine was revoked for operating while...

TUCKER

Suspended! Not revoked! Suspended! And you tell Biddy Bouvier to mind her own damn business! I delivered those babies and they were fine -- two perfect butterballs. People still call me doctor, and I assist the county coroner.

CHELSEA

But you're a drunk.

TUCKER

Well, I take a drink now and then -- speaking of which...

(TUCKER removes a flask from his pocket.)

TUCKER

Care to join me? It's fine Tennessee whiskey.

CHELSEA

No thanks.

TUCKER

(lifting his flask) To the deceased! So are they voyeurs lurking everywhere? Do they see us buck naked?

CHELSEA

Yeah, but they seem to like it here.

TUCKER

Well, auctions appeal to folks still clinging to the past, but I thought the dead were drawn to a light, then flown up the celestial flue.

CHELSEA

Not everyone sees the light, and some turn away.

TUCKER

So can they be of assistance to the living? Can they tell us where to place our wagers or how to find true love?

CHELSEA

They hardly ever speak, but Miss Bouvier calls you “a troubled soul.”

TUCKER

Ha! That’s true enough. I thought I was destined to spend my life tending the sick and dying. Instead I’m selling the flotsam they leave behind, most of it frivolous junk, though some things are truly precious -- like Monty’s gold watch. (*lifting the watch from his pocket*) That’s quite a gift you’ve got there, young lady. So do you hang out a shingle to console the grieving?

CHELSEA

No way. The dead are as pathetic as the living, as clueless as they were alive.

TUCKER

Well, hell, I’m a skeptic, so this is a night of revelations. Now tell me, are they curious about you? Don’t they want to know why a pretty gal like you became a tattooist?

CHELSEA

They don’t give a shit, but since you asked: When I visited the Florida keys, I walked into a tattoo parlor in Marathon. There was a kid waiting for his brother, so I sketched a cobra on one of his arms and a mermaid on the other. The tattooist was sufficiently impressed and asked me to become his apprentice. In America, he called himself Monty but to me he was always Dragos. We were supposed to meet here after I sold my shop.

TUCKER

You had your own shop?

CHELSEA

Yeah, my last customer was an optician who wanted a third eye on his forehead. I would have added a monocle if the bastards hadn’t come to arrest me.

TUCKER

Arrest you...?

CHELSEA

I was tried and sentenced to death. *(pause)* I know you don't believe me, *(gesturing to the dead)* but your friends want to hear all about it.

(A distant howling is heard as CHELSEA strolls into the past, taking a seat in her prison cell. SHE continues speaking while removing her jacket, exposing tattooed arms as WARDEN JOAN BASSET and DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD enter).

CHELSEA

The night before my execution, a shrink showed up with the warden asking to,...

CHELSEA

...explain the procedure.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Explain the procedure...

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

...to Miss Vallhund.

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

I already have -- several times.

CHELSEA

Yeah, it takes four men to kill me: they'll buckle the belts, attach the electrodes, and before that, a barber shaves my head.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Is that really necessary?

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

Afraid so. It reduces resistance and minimizes burning.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

And strips the prisoner of her dignity.

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

Not this prisoner. In any case, electrocution was her preference. She could have chosen lethal injection, which would have been more appropriate.

CHELSEA

Ha, ha! The party starts when they pull the switch and the current makes me piss myself. It might even make my eyeballs pop so they land on my cheeks.

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

I'm told you'll be on call for the duration, but I assume you won't be witnessing...

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Oh, I'll be there. I wouldn't miss the cold, premeditated murder of a young woman for all the world. She's obviously ill, possibly dying; it should make a difference.

(CHELSEA slumps in her chair.)

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Oh, dear...

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

Relax,...

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

...she's asleep. She does that, just nods off, sometimes mid-sentence.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Is there anything I should know that isn't in her files?

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

The trouble is she's so damn mean and duplicitous, we're not inclined to chat. All anybody knows for sure is that six young men made the mistake of walking into her shop. Three died in a hospital in Gainesville, and the guy who testified shot himself. They just located the other two in a morgue in Orlando.

(The distant howling is heard.)

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

I understand they were part of a gang.

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

Yes, but they weren't violent or threatening, so why didn't she just refuse to tattoo them?

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

The swastika is a deeply offensive symbol of oppression. It evokes very emotional responses.

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

That's what the defense claimed, but she's not even Jewish.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

She claims she's a gypsy; they were also imprisoned, and she had a Sephardic grandmother on her father's side.

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

Yeah, but look at her: she's just a kid and the war's been over for thirty years.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Not for everyone. Her parents may have lost relatives in the camps.

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

Maybe, though her lawyer couldn't prove it. She's one cold customer, and I'll tell you what's really strange -- what's been happening at night. In fact, it's already started; stick around and you'll hear for yourself -- the howls from hell.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Wolves...?

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

Dogs! As a trainer myself, I make sure this prison has the best canine corps in the system. We've got pit bulls, dobermans, rottweilers, and every last one has to be chained and muzzled or they'll run to her cell, yapping their fool heads off! It starts at a distance, then comes closer, and when it peaks, look out the window: every stray within a five mile radius is standing outside, howling themselves hoarse. Then suddenly it stops, the dogs settle down, and life goes on like nothing's happened. I'm telling you it's the creepiest damn thing I've ever seen -- scares the bejesus out of the prisoners.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

What's Chelsea doing during this?

WARDEN JOAN SHEPHERD

Just sitting till the howling peaks; then she stands up and joins in. Believe me, Doctor, there's not a soul in this prison who doesn't want her gone. I'm told the Feds want you to find out how many people she's infected. She's destroyed her records, and apparently no one's been able to get her to talk.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

And she certainly won't be talking when she's dead, now will she? Sometimes I think civilization in this country hasn't evolved one whit!

WARDEN JOAN BASSET

You're wrong, doctor; this is the first time we've executed a woman. For this county, it's an historic moment. Now I'll leave you two alone. *(pointing)* There's cameras there and there, and three armed guards within ten feet. Just holler if she bites.

(WARDEN BASSET departs as CHELSEA awakens.)

CHELSEA

Has the bitch dyke left? *(pause)* Who are you? My usual shrink won't even open the fucking door.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

I was sent by people who feel your case merits more investigation, that you should try to appeal.

CHELSEA

No thanks.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

There are others who fear that with you gone they'll never know the number of people you infected and how.

CHELSEA

The "how" is obvious: I contaminate the ink and prick the bastards. My specialty was dogs and horimono dragons.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

I've seen your dragons and was very impressed. *(pause)* Apparently, you have access to a pathogen related to paralytic rabies.

CHELSEA

Yeah, my victims end up frothing at the mouth before slipping into comas.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

I assume they were mostly men.

CHELSEA

Pathetic dip shits who need to be inscribed to remember who the fuck they are -- I ought to know, ha, ha! My usual shrink says tattoos are a way of owning art that's uncollectible, a form of self defense against a world that puts price tags on everything. Where is she anyway? -- the usual shrink.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Doctor Chow asked me to take her place. I specialize in cases of vicarious trauma, people whose relatives suffered in wars and passed on their anxieties. We're discovering that the experience of parents, even great-grandparents could affect the molecular DNA in sperms and eggs so certain traits, even memories might be transmitted.

CHELSEA

No shit? So granny's death camp fucked up my molecules.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Possibly. That and your granny's culture, social status -- even her diet.

CHELSEA

Then it's a good thing her gene pool's ending with me, but when I croak, I'll get a great reception. My clients are waiting with open arms, though I plan to hang around a few decades longer.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

You don't seriously believe you'll survive electrocution.

CHELSEA

If I said it, I think it, but why should you care?

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Because Doctor Chow and I believe that being asked to tattoo swastikas was tantamount to assaulting you, which is why you need to appeal.

CHELSEA

No thanks. Besides, I've tattooed plenty of sterile swastikas, but there was this moment when...

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

What...?

CHELSEA

When I tattooed one too many. He was a mean ass skinhead who showed me a sketch as if I'd never seen the design. Can you fucking believe he didn't know it was called a swastika?! He said it was popular with guys who believed in the white man's right to rule the world. Then suddenly it wasn't enough to hate the bastard; I had to put him out of his misery.

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

(pause) So far your particular poison has died in each victim, but there's fear it might become contagious since it doesn't just copy itself, it mutates and evolves. It's called "viral drift".

CHELSEA

Oh, it's drifted all right. Would you believe it's drifted from the future to the past? No, of course not, so what's the point of this discussion? Either change the subject or stop wasting my time!

(The howlings reach a shrill crescendo as CHELSEA leaps up to join them.)

CHELSEA

Yooowwwwlllllll!!!!

(The howls cease, and CHELSEA faints to the floor.)

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD

Chelsea...? Can you hear me? Wake up! *(taking her carotid pulse)* Oh, god -- guard! Guard! Call an ambulance!!

(DOCTOR SHEPHERD departs as CHELSEA stands, returning to the present, approaching TUCKER in the barn, continuing her story.)

CHELSEA

I only pretended to faint 'cause no way was I ready to get zapped to zombieville. They drove me to the hospital and before daylight, I bolted, depriving the citizens of Florida of their mean ass ritual. Then I ran like hell to a house where I robbed the maid, changed clothes, then hitched a ride on a truck filled with key limes and kumquats.

TUCKER

Well, that's quite a story, but frankly, darlin', I don't care who you are, I still can't let you sleep here. I don't even know your name.

CHELSEA

I'm Chelsea. Tomorrow you'll drive me to New York.

TUCKER

I'll what...?!

CHELSEA

You heard me. (*pointing to the dead*) They told me you live alone, and your next auction is three weeks from now.

TUCKER

I'll be happy to drive you to the bus station, but no way am I driving all the way to New York!

CHELSEA

You owe me! I'm the one who raised the bidding!

TUCKER

I assumed you had the money.

CHELSEA

I have twelve dollars and change.

TUCKER

You realize that's highly unethical.

CHELSEA

So is stealing! Look, I know you have the address -- Park Avenue, right?

TUCKER

That's nearly nine hundred miles -- two days of driving!

CHELSEA

So what? There's nothing to stop you.

TUCKER

Except common sense! Besides, the truck needs oil; I'd have to pack...

CHELSEA

We'll leave at noon; that gives you plenty of time.

TUCKER

What is it you want exactly? The tattoo set?

CHELSEA

A reunion. He's regenerated by now.

TUCKER

Regenerated...?

CHELSEA

Accelerated replication. He's become his younger self, so you'll hardly recognize him. We're from the same clan, but we're not like blood sucking vampires who get stuck in the bodies they had when they croaked.

TUCKER

I see, so what exactly are you?

CHELSEA

Time-torquing gypsies who've been through shit you can't imagine. There's not many of us left, and we usually don't regenerate till we're at least fifty -- except for Dragos who wanted to experience extreme old age. He must have really liked being Monty and living here.

TUCKER

Now that's the first thing you've said I know to be true. Monty loved this town, and he loved antiques, always kept his shop stock polished and pristine.

CHELSEA

I just hope he's okay. I wouldn't be here myself if it weren't for my canine genes which is how I outran the guards.

TUCKER

(pause, he sighs) Well, darlin', I think you're mad as a March hare on mushrooms. You know, there's nothing you've told me about the dead that isn't in the public record, and you could guess I was a thief, but you don't really know me from Adam. Truth be told, I'm a depressive dipsomaniac and a failure at just about everything.

CHELSEA

Not friendship. The dead here are fond of you, and Dragos will be glad to see you again, especially when you return his watch, his marbles, and gloves.

TUCKER

Glove! There was only one. *(taking out the watch)* I must admit the watch is a marvel: it keeps perfect time, chimes the sweetest tune, and when I tuck it in my pocket, I swear my heartbeat's regular and I don't sweat buckets -- even in this god awful heat.

CHELSEA

That's 'cause it comes from the future. So when are we leaving?

TUCKER

(pause) You'd trust an alcoholic thief with a rickety truck to drive you to New York?

CHELSEA

I can drive as well.

TUCKER

Oh, swell. *(pause)* Not that I'm consenting, but will our deceased friends be joining us? It's a small truck.

CHELSEA

Maybe. They can stack, fold, and shrink so they fit into pockets, but when I want them to get lost, they roll into dust balls and sink through the floors.

TUCKER

So are some of them our ancestors, decked out in bustles and buckskins?

CHELSEA

No, I only see the recently dead, and they don't hang out for long.

TUCKER

That's all very interesting, but darlin', I still don't want you sleeping here. Let me drive you to the B and B. I'll pay, and no offense, but you look like you could use a bath and a good night's sleep. I'd invite you to my place, but I have cats.

CHELSEA

Please, let me stay. It feels good to be in a barn after living in a cell. You can pick me up in the morning when you're ready. *(pause)* Trust me, I promise: no fires or wrecking the merchandise.

TUCKER

(he sighs) Jesus, mother of god, why would I do this? You're so smart, tell me why I'd let you stay then drive to New York when my gut instinct is to toss you out on your sassy ass.

CHELSEA

Because you're under my gypsy spell, ha! Or desperate enough to take risks. Most people I tell about myself back off or call in the shrinks. To me you're a breath of fresh air.

TUCKER

(pause, he sighs) Well, hell, here's a flashlight if you need it.

CHELSEA

Turn off the lights on your way out.

TUCKER

I may change my mind!

CHELSEA

You won't!

(TUCKER snaps off the lights, leaving CHELSEA in the dark, aiming the flashlight and addressing the DEAD.)

CHELSEA

Look, I don't give a shit if you stay, but I'm still among the living and need my sleep. Tomorrow your doctor friend will pick me up and take me to a diner for coffee, biscuits, and a big juicy steak. Then we'll drive to New York and a whole new life!

(CHELSEA turns off the flashlight as tinkling chimes and whirling stars appear, indicating a leap in time to a future auction where TUCKER has donned a bow tie.)

TUCKER

Feast your eyes on this rare assemblage of snuffboxes which belonged to the court jeweler of King George the Fourth. They contained a powdery tobacco sniffed by the aristocrats of England, France, and Spain. Most date back to the eighteenth century and feature enameled portraits of royalty and their pampered pets -- like this head of a foxhound. (*pointing to bidders*) So shall we start the bidding at one thousand dollars? Do I hear one thousand, five hundred? Two thousand? Two thousand, five hundred?

(The auction fades as a luxurious apartment appears decorated with the contents of the auctioned trunk: the blue velvet is swagged into drapes; the ravens and bats are artfully posed along with an umbrella stand containing the parasol. DRAGOS DRAGOMIR, a dashing man dressed in black and wearing the fedora, is seated sipping tea while listening to classical music on the Victrola. VIOLET POMSKY enters and hands DRAGOS a business card.)

VIOLET

There's a woman here to see you.

DRAGOS

(*pause, reading the card*) Send her in.

(DRAGOS stands, removing his hat as SONYA enters and glances around the room.)

DRAGOS

How do you do, Miss?

SONYA

Please forgive me for not calling first. My name is Sonya Sprocker. I'm the American based curator of the Bucharest Memorial War Museum.

DRAGOS

(gesturing to a chair) Please be seated.

SONYA

The auctioneer gave me your address. I'm not surprised to see that you're the one who purchased your great-grandfather's trunk.

DRAGOS

(turning off the record) Yes, I persuaded a friend to attend the auction on my behalf.

SONYA

Since you're his heir, wasn't the trunk yours to begin with?

DRAGOS

I was in mourning and forgot what treasures it might contain, so I foolishly instructed Doctor Danes to auction everything left in the shop. So often we do not know the value of our possessions until the moment we lose them to strangers, leaving black holes of regret in their place. Though I appear young, I am attracted to vintage objects, like this porcelain tea cup. I wonder how many lips have touched its rim? How many eyes have stared at the painted pugs on the bottom. Were they blue eyes, green, or brown? Were they men or women? Beloved or betrayed? Perhaps you would like a cup? Or a glass of wine?

SONYA

No, thank you. *(pause)* Are you willing to sell the tattoo set?

DRAGOS

What will you do with it?

SONYA

Display it in our museum with pictures of Mister Dragomir's tattoos. We want to acknowledge and honor him.

DRAGOS

So he will become a footnote in history -- a cover-up man, old Dragos.

SONYA

I see your resemblance to pictures of him before the war. Did you know him well?

DRAGOS

Do we really know anyone well -- even ourselves?

SONYA

Perhaps not. In any case, I'm not a philosopher, only a curator.

DRAGOS

Well then, Miss Curator, the tattoo set is not for sale.

(Pause as DRAGOS presents a box to SONYA.)

DRAGOS

I donate it free of charge! So take it with my blessing, but remember: a gift from a gypsy is infused with magic, so guard it with your life.

SONYA

Oh, yes, I promise. My colleagues will be thrilled, and you'll be sent a formal letter of gratitude from the Museum Director. Of course, we'd also appreciate more pictures. Do you happen to have any...?

DRAGOS

I am afraid not.

SONYA

(pause, she sighs) I would like to have seen his shop.

DRAGOS

Alchemy Antiques was appropriately named. It was originally a shabby hovel crammed with dusty vintage toys and trinkets that was soon transformed into a sparkling treasure trove of marvels. In fact, I plan to continue its legacy by opening a replica here in New York. Of course, I realize that post-modernism, pixilated minimalism, splattered abstractions, et cetera, all have their virtues, but they do not move me. Neither do the geometrics of modern architecture -- all the brutish, boxy monoliths of corporate capitalism.

SONYA

So you prefer castles with towers and turrets?

DRAGOS

With gargoyles, goddesses, and fat cheeked cherubs grasping garlands of lilies. In fact, I am negotiating to lease a shop in a building two blocks east.

SONYA

Will it also be called Alchemy Antiques?

DRAGOS

In gilded Edwardian script! *(pause)* Some philosophers believe that landscapes shape our characters, and I believe the objects we are drawn to shape our souls, objects like this sterling silver pillbox, formed by human hands, expressing its creator's vigor, inventiveness, and addictions. To scorn such objects is to scorn the heart of humanity.

SONYA

It is lovely. Did it belong to Mister Dragomir?

DRAGOS

Yes, he filled it with potent drugs to stimulate his senses. Would you care for a taste?

SONYA

No, thank you.

(DRAGOS pops a pill in his mouth and swallows.)

DRAGOS

(pause) Do you think me decadent?

SONYA

A little, but also generous, and it's a pleasure to meet a man who appreciates the beautiful things of this world.

DRAGOS

You yourself are very beautiful. You must have a husband or lover...?

SONYA

I'm afraid I only have my dog, a vizsla named Luca.

DRAGOS

Then the men you've encountered must be blind, but do not despair; you are still young, your future awaits.

SONYA

So does yours. Are you married?

DRAGOS

Once I had a loving wife, a woman of rare sensitivity, but even the virtuous can become debased. *(pause)* So are you a collector?

SONYA

Not seriously, though I have six pewter trivets and four embroidered footstools. Will Alchemy Antiques sell footstools?

DRAGOS

Of course, and hand carved furniture, exquisite Persian rugs, fine china and crystal, all manner of statuary, especially animals. Mister Dragomir believed our homes should display reminders of the creatures with which we share the earth: stag horns, leopard pillows, peacock feathers, paintings of horses and hounds. In mythology, great hounds guarded the gates to the world beyond, and Mister Dragomir claimed his own had benevolent powers.

SONYA

(gesturing to the animals) Were these also his pets?

DRAGOS

No, only creatures he admired, like this pteropus vampyrus, also known as the flying fox or vampire bat.

SONYA

In Romania there are rumors that Mister Dragomir survived the camps because he was descended from an infamous gypsy vampire, also named Dragos Dragomir.

DRAGOS

Nonsense! The first Dragos Dragomir was a physician who traveled through the Balkans in the late seventeenth century. There was a recurrence of the plague so he experimented with medicinal herbs and plants, venturing deep into the Carpathian Mountains with his dog, Darco. There he met a reclusive gypsy savant who taught him the arcane science of replication, which meant his organs, flesh, and bones were returned to the optimal form and functions of youth. When Dragos returned to his clan, he shared this knowledge on the condition they never reveal the process.

SONYA

What a shame. People would pay dearly for that kind of gypsy magic.

DRAGOS

If you believe in gypsy magic, but where are the gypsies now? Here in American, they've assimilated, but in Europe they're still stigmatized as rootless thieves, beggars, and abductors of blue-eyed children. Of course, even the city of New York has a few clannish Romas selling trinkets and telling fortunes. Would you like to know your future?

SONYA

No, I prefer to be surprised.

DRAGOS

(pause, smiling) Being a museum curator, I assume you prefer the lost glories of vanished worlds to the current onslaught of miseries. Permit me to speculate: *(pause)* Unlike your colleagues, you are not enthralled by electronic innovations; you still read bound books, write letters by hand, and do your shopping in person.

SONYA

Yes, that's true, I much prefer to conduct business with real people.

DRAGOS

And are you "real?" With your pale complexion and violet eyes you could be an apparition.

SONYA

No, I'm afraid I'm real, and so was the young woman who also bid on the trunk. She claimed to be Mister Dragomir's apprentice and kept raising the bidding price, so clearly the trunk and its contents were of great value.

DRAGOS

And worth every penny since it brought you here.

SONYA

(pause) Was the tattoo set what you wanted?

DRAGOS

No, what I wanted was priceless, but as a dealer, I know that intrinsic value and market value are often disconnected, arbitrary, even whimsical, especially in degenerate cultures that value corporate moguls, athletes, and film stars more than poets, artists, teachers, caretakers, and everyone working with purity of purpose. So what is true intrinsic worth? Something as elusive as a woman's charms. *(pause)* Why are you smiling?

SONYA

(pause) I was just wondering if you have any tattoos?

DRAGOS

If I did would you be interested in seeing them?

SONYA

I might be.

DRAGOS

It may cost you.

SONYA

Will it be worth it?

DRAGOS

Definitely -- if you are willing to pay.

SONYA

What do you want?

DRAGOS

We could start with a kiss.

(DRAGOS pulls her towards him and THEY kiss.)

DRAGOS

Well then, my dear Miss Sprocker, before I display my tattoos, would you care to see the rest of the apartment? I have a boudoir suite with furnishings dating back to Louis the Fourteenth.

SONYA

Please call me Sonya.

(DRAGOS grasps SONYA'S hand and THEY depart as chimes resound, stars swirl, and TUCKER appears at a future auction holding several swords.)

TUCKER

What collector of weaponry can resist these daggers, sabers, and swords?! Shall we start with this single edged Japanese katana that dates back to the fifteenth century. Notice the ivory hilt with inlaid akita crafted for a Samurai who could slice a man in half with a single blow! Yes, before guns, gas, and laser guided drones, wars were conducted by brave sword-wielding warriors willing to confront their enemies face to face. Now shall we start the bidding at a five hundred dollars? Do I hear a thousand dollars? One thousand five hundred? Two thousand,...

(Lights fade on TUCKER as DRAGOS reappears in his apartment wearing a silk robe. SONYA sits nearby with her hair unpinned. THEY drink wine while listening to classical music until VIOLET enters.)

VIOLET

Chelsea's here with a man, a Doctor Danes.

DRAGOS

(he sighs) I suppose you should send them in.

(VIOLET departs and SONYA pins back her hair.)

SONYA

I should leave.

DRAGOS

No, please stay.

(CHELSEA and TUCKER enter as DRAGOS stands.)

CHELSEA

Hello, Dragos, surprised to see me?! Where's my kiss?

(CHELSEA puckers her lips, but Dragos kisses her cheek, then steps back.)

CHELSEA

You remember the Doctor?

DRAGOS

(extending his hand) A pleasure to see you.

TUCKER

I don't believe we've actually met. I'm Doctor Danes, but please call me Tucker.
(to Sonya) Well, I see you're one of our bidders -- the lady from the museum. So are you here to purchase the tattoo set?

SONYA

Yes, but it was generously donated as a gift.

DRAGOS

I am certain Dragos would have wanted it placed in her care.

SONYA

We're extremely grateful.

CHELSEA

I bet you are.

TUCKER

(to Dragos) Well, you certainly paid dearly for Monty's treasures.

CHELSEA

There were some missing items that ole Tuck here seems to have found.

TUCKER

Pilfered actually -- as mementoes. I suppose you'll be wanting Monty's watch.

DRAGOS

Yes, thank you.

TUCKER

(handing the watch to Dragos) You wouldn't be willing to sell it, would you?

DRAGOS

Never.

TUCKER

You know, that trunk of his was quite a surprise -- hidden behind some crates in the cellar. We assumed he forgot it -- not that Monty ever showed signs of senility. In fact, he possessed an amazing breadth of knowledge, and his shop was a joy to behold. Did you know him well?

DRAGOS

Well enough.

CHELSEA

Ha!

CHELSEA

This is a nice little party. Aren't you going to offer us some drinks?

DRAGOS

Of course.

(DRAGOS rings a bell, summoning VIOLET who appears instantly.)

DRAGOS

Violet, would you please bring more wine and some refreshments for our guests.

CHELSEA

Hey, Vi, did you miss me?

(VIOLET ignores CHELSEA and departs as TUCKER admires a raven.)

TUCKER

So will you be keeping Monty's menagerie?

DRAGOS

Perhaps. I was telling Sonya that I intend to open a shop here in Manhattan. After all, New York is a mecca of consumerism.

TUCKER

Why that's wonderful! I could serve as your representative in Georgia, inform you of any exceptional collectables that come my way. You know, Monty was a regular at my auctions, called them "dog auctions" 'cause there was always some bric-a-brac pups on sale. Ole Monty was a devout dog lover.

CHELSEA

Being part dog himself.

DRAGOS

Really, Chelsea...

TUCKER

So have you lived in the city long?

DRAGOS

Long enough to observe the insidious effect of incessant traffic, police paranoia, people staring at screens, constantly distracted instead of seeking the solitude required to create the wonders of art, music, and poetry. *(he sighs)* I fear they may soon be forsaken.

TUCKER

Oh, certainly not. If you give yourself time, I'm sure you'll find some like-minded friends. You're just feeling lonely.

DRAGOS

Whenever I feel a longing for companionship, I simply step onto the subway at rush hour and press my flesh into the huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

CHELSEA

That's pathetic.

DRAGOS

Is it really? Is one person really so different from another?

CHELSEA

(to Tucker) He's just like his great-granddaddy: he prefers things to people.

TUCKER

Well darlin', people break our hearts and die, but their precious possessions live on, and sometimes they...well, they speak to us.

DRAGOS

Precisely! You understand that every object has a tale to tell. This little brass bell had a creator, a destiny, and is a material manifestation: a tangible bell reflection of its divine bell reality. In any case, I am rarely lonely. Violet and her sister, Rosanne, live here as well, and I intend to adopt one, perhaps two dogs.

CHELSEA

The trouble with dogs is they die.

TUCKER

Chelsea here claims she can see the dead.

DRAGOS

She is gifted, though capricious and likes to court danger.

CHELSEA

I can't help myself; I'm shit full of bad memories.

TUCKER

She also claims to have been in prison.

DRAGOS

Indeed there are times she is a very bad girl who belongs in a cage.

CHELSEA

Fuck you. *(growling)* Grrrrrrrrrr...

DRAGOS

Please, try to behave; there is a lady present.

(SONYA checks her watch, then stands.)

SONYA

Pardon me, but I have an appointment at the Romanian Cultural Institute. *(to Dragos)*
Thank you again for your generosity. *(to Tucker and Chelsea)* Good bye.

TUCKER

It's starting to rain. I hope you brought...

TUCKER

...an umbrella!

DRAGOS

An umbrella!

DRAGOS

Ah! I have a parasol instead.

(DRAGOS retrieves a parasol that resembles the
auctioned parasol.)

DRAGOS

Here, my dear, take this.

SONYA

Oh, no, it is much too fine and delicate for rain.

DRAGOS

Not at all, and you may return it when we meet again. Now let me escort you to the
elevator.

(DRAGOS walks SONYA out the door, whispering
in her ear, leaving TUCKER and CHELSEA alone.)

CHELSEA

Thank Christ she's gone! So Tuck, aren't you glad you came? Our gypsy lover boy
knows how to live.

(Pause as TUCKER takes a swig from his flask.)

CHELSEA

Still feeling a little dry, are we?

TUCKER

Just a little.

(DRAGOS returns.)

CHELSEA

Back so soon? So you didn't fuck her...?

DRAGOS

What do you want? Why are you here?

CHELSEA

You invited me, remember?

DRAGOS

That was before you became a felon. *(to Tucker)* In case you're unaware, agents of the F.B.I. are searching for Chelsea.

TUCKER

Jesus, is that true?

DRAGOS

Her picture was posted on the news.

CHELSEA

Lucky for me, I look like lots of girls my age.

DRAGOS

You are careless! Sonya just saw you; the door man saw you; everyone at the auction saw you. They already know you hitchhiked on a fruit truck and were dropped off at the barn. It is only a matter of time before they track you to the City. *(to Tucker)* What has Chelsea told you about herself?

CHELSEA

Everything! I even told him about you. Of course, he didn't believe me and now he's in shock. Well, get over it, Tuck, and look closely: *(pointing to Dragos)* This is your pal, Monty, years younger, but still Monty.

TUCKER

Sorry, I don't see much resemblance, but if you're Monty, then you know we played poker together, and sometimes he loaned me money. So what else did he do for me?

DRAGOS

(pause) Among many favors, I saved your life. After you were abandoned by your wife and daughter, you attempted suicide.

TUCKER

How?

DRAGOS

By hanging.

TUCKER

Only Monty knows that. *(to Chelsea)* He rang the doorbell just as I was about to step off the stool, and god help me, I slipped off the rope and answered. Then he stayed till the black buboes of despair dissolved. *(pause)* So if you're really Monty, what was I wearing?

DRAGOS

Blue striped pajamas.

TUCKER

What was I drinking?

DRAGOS

Crown Royal whiskey.

TUCKER

What was my daughter's name?

DRAGOS

Hannah.

TUCKER

My wife?

DRAGOS

Olivia. Enough, please!

TUCKER

But I...I identified his remains.

DRAGOS

Familiar spectacles amid ashes and charred bones.

CHELSEA

Tell him the truth, Dragos, tell him.

DRAGOS

He may not wish to know.

TUCKER

Oh, I'm all ears. Chelsea claims you can dodge the Grim Reaper and become your younger selves.

DRAGOS

Indeed, without the tedium of childhood and adolescence. We replicate to our mid-twenties so we experience a parade of generational successions with newly created identities while being in our primes. Of course, the burden of belonging to any generation is that it traps you with your contemporaries, most of them blind to the past and making the same mistakes -- only with crueler, more efficient weapons. Our current generation, like previous ones, considers the world to be in a precarious state, only now they're more justified than ever.

CHELSEA

So what do you think, Tuck?

TUCKER

(pause) If what you say is possible, then my god... I mean, it must be wonderful to be given more chances to stand on the cusp: no midlife crisis, no bemoaning the trails not trod, the books unread, the art unseen...

DRAGOS

The music unheard, the oceans never sailed...

TUCKER

Rivers never fished, wines never tasted...

DRAGOS

Women never kissed...

CHELSEA

Lovers never loved enough...

TUCKER

Yes, well, who wouldn't want new futures to accomplish great things.

DRAGOS

Of course our possibilities are still limited by the talents we originally possessed.

CHELSEA

He means the gene pool of our inbreeding parents.

DRAGOS

We have all been imprisoned or displaced which tends to make us see the world as threatening -- unlike many Americans who see the world as their oyster and snatch the pearls while knowing nothing of history.

(VIOLET enters with a tray of cakes, sandwiches,
and a decanter of wine and glasses.)

DRAGOS

Ah, Violet, my dear, please join us. Violet is one of us.

CHELSEA

A real bitch. *(yapping)* Ruff, ruff!

VIOLET

(to Tucker) Would you like some wine?

TUCKER

Yes, thank you.

CHELSEA

(glancing at the tray) What? No dog biscuits?

(CHELSEA grabs a few cakes and gobbles them.)

DRAGOS

Chelsea, your manners!

TUCKER

(to Violet) Mmm, this sandwich is delicious.

VIOLET

In past lives, I worked in bakeries, cooked in taverns and restaurants, but now I'm taking classes in dance.

DRAGOS

Imagine over three centuries old and training to be a ballerina.

(VIOLET spins across the room.)

DRAGOS

Brava! Such grace! Rosanne has mastered several instruments, and together they perform for my amusement. Perhaps later they will consent to entertain us.

CHELSEA

I can hardly wait.

DRAGOS

Violet and Rosanne have lived in the city for nearly a century. Now Violet has agreed to do the cooking and Rosanne is my chauffeur.

TUCKER

Well, you certainly live like a king.

DRAGOS

I invested wisely.

CHELSEA

It beats sleeping in coffins.

DRAGOS

You Americans romanticize vampires -- repellent blood sucking revenants who sleep in graves -- while time-traveling gypsies are considered too fantastical to be real much less romantic. The few times I've shared my lineage, I was ridiculed, accused of having a fevered imagination.

TUCKER

Well, it's still hard to believe you're Monty. I mean, you're talking about a quantum leap from extreme senectitude to vibrant youth.

DRAGOS

It was my most exhilarating replication: I could feel electrochemical consciousness pulsating through every cell, smoothing the reptilian webbings of my skin, making my vision clear, my hearing keen, my energy restored.

TUCKER

Along with your hair!

DRAGOS

Violet was my witness; tell him.

VIOLET

He stood naked before the mirror, staring at his flat belly.

DRAGOS

Then I dressed, and Violet and I walked outside, delighting in the sights of the city!

(DRAGOS grasps VIOLET'S arm and strolls about the room.)

DRAGOS

Ah, look at the sidewalks full of people! Gaze at the magnificent shop windows! Now let's stroll through Central Park: behold the elms, the oaks; the phlox and lilies! Every person, every pigeon is radiant, glowing with life! Ha, ha!

(DRAGOS returns to his chair and VIOLET stands aside.)

DRAGOS

Believe me, my friend, my lives and the lives of my clan have been full. We walk among you with great pride; witnesses to all the social changes and inventions of our times.

CHELSEA

Yeah, and the wars -- millions picked off like ticks off a mutt's tail.

DRAGOS

We have all become catastrophists, but I also think of history in terms of medical discoveries -- from herbs to antibiotics to kidneys transplanted from one person to another.

VIOLET

All my lives are so jumbled in my mind, I stopped trying to think chronologically.

DRAGOS

No offense, Violet, but you don't think much at all. You have many fine qualities, but historical facts and ideas do not seem to interest you. *(to Tucker)* She prefers titillating trivia and boorish celebrity gossip.

VIOLET

(to Tucker) There's too much to remember; I was never good with dates. *(to Dragos)* You and Rosanne live in past, always reminiscing; I prefer to live in the present.

TUCKER

I can't even imagine all the places you've been, the things you've seen.

DRAGOS

We have plied our trades in towns and cities, but ancestral scars make us essentially the same, though we have lived hundreds of years, thousands of days.

TUCKER

But how...? I mean, how do you “replicate”?

VIOLET

Go on, Dragos, tell him.

DRAGOS

In 1689 I was a relic at sixty, but still a practicing physician and amateur alchemist. Every week I gathered herbs in the forest, accompanied by my dog, Darco.

(As DRAGOS continues, shimmering lights reveal LUMINISTA, a majestic woman covered in jewels and flowing scarves.)

DRAGOS

One day we came upon a stone hovel. Inside was a woman who claimed to be from the original Roma tribe of Northern India which means she was born nearly a thousand years ago. After I introduced myself, she presented me with several...

DRAGOS

...gifts.

LUMINISTA

Gifts...

LUMINISTA

...to change your life: Behold this crystal sphere, an amazing electrified enigma, and these gloves with which to grasp the sphere.

DRAGOS

I asked what she meant by “electrified”?

LUMINISTA

You shall know soon enough. If you dare to glimpse the future, focus on the spheres within the sphere, then speak the time and place you wish to visit. (*handing over the pocket watch*) Now here is a watch which has functions that will increase in value with the coming years. And now to bestow the greatest of gifts: from the science of molecular regeneration, comes an instrument that implants a device that initiates limitless replications. Rather than explain, I shall demonstrate on your dog. Come, let us find him.

(A DOG yaps as LUMINISTA departs.)

DRAGOS

We found Darco, and rejuvenated him to a frisky pup until he yapped at a wild boar that slashed his throat with its tusks. I still cannot bear to think of it...

VIOLET

Dragos was inconsolable, but the gypsy assured him he would feel better once he used the instrument on himself and the elders of our clan, which included me, Rosanne, and Chelsea. So soon we became our beautiful, fresh-faced, younger selves.

DRAGOS

That was when I realized my benevolent sage was possibly deranged. You see, when we replicated, we wound up with Darco's spare molars and sharp cuspids.

(CHELSEA bares her teeth, growling.)

CHELSEA

See? Grrrrrrrr...

TUCKER

Good lord!

DRAGOS

I believe that we evolved to possess an extra sequence of canine nucleotides which accounts for our being swift footed, with an acute sense of smell, hearing, and a ravenous hunger for meat. For most of us it appears to have been a blessing.

CHELSEA

Except for the dog breath and a tendency to attract other breeds. Hey, Vi, let's show Tuck how we howl. Yooooooooowwwwwrrrrr...

DRAGOS

Shhhh! Behave yourself!

VIOLET

Shhhhhh! The neighbors!

TUCKER

(pause) So what's this replicator look like?

DRAGOS

It resembles a staple gun that shoots small silver sensors into our navels. Violet and Chelsea can show you theirs.

(CHELSEA and VIOLET pull up their shirts, revealing glistening silver stars covering their navels.)

CHELSEA

The prison doc tried to remove it, but I screamed bloody murder and bit her hand.

TUCKER

So after your rejuvenation, were you still a physician?

DRAGOS

Yes, and progressed in my education to a series of specialists, so I was also a chemist, an engineer, a botanist, geologist, and eventually a tattooist who joined the merchant class with the purchase of Alchemy Antiques.

TUCKER

What about you, Chelsea?

CHELSEA

Since I sewed, I was series of seamstresses and milliners until I finally went to school and learned to become an illustrator. But being a woman I was also stalked, beaten, raped, and treated like a fucking slave. Isn't that right, Vi? Remember the Iron Guard? The bastards gave us crabs!

VIOLET

The nightmares were worse. That's why I'm sick of the past. Tell him anything you want, but keep me out of it.

CHELSEA

At first, pale gypsies like me and Vi were considered Aryans till they decided we were contaminated from shacking up with outsiders. So they rounded us up along with Jews and cripples, then deported us to camps where they branded us like fuckin' cattle.

DRAGOS

Chelsea was in the woman's camp, so after being together for two and a half centuries, we were separated and did not meet until after the war when she strolled into my parlor and stole my heart once again.

CHELSEA

Bullshit! You dumped me; you left!

DRAGOS

(to Tucker) I grew weary of Romania, of Europe, and all the non-gypsies who still wanted to slaughter us. I told Chelsea we had to learn English and leave for America, but she refused, so I left without her. Then we lost touch until she came to Florida and went into business for herself.

CHELSEA

Yeah, so how do you like my idiomatic English? My teacher said I could pass as a native.

DRAGOS

I detect a slight accent.

CHELSEA

And you just came off the boat!

DRAGOS

Now, now...

CHELSEA

Nobody ever asks me where I'm from!

TUCKER

(pause, to Dragos) So how did you wind up in Georgia of all places?

DRAGOS

An American tourist left his newspaper on a café table. Inside was a notice of a charming emporium for sale called Alchemy Antiques. I considered it an omen.

TUCKER

You know, in Georgia you could have lived in Atlanta or Savannah, or any city with more cultured people.

DRAGOS

None like you, Doctor. Most drunkards are tiresome melancholics who consume our energy. They are the true vampires, but you... *(he sighs)* Who can explain why the presence of a certain person is like a benevolent breeze that makes us grateful to remain among the living.

CHELSEA

Yeah, even the dead like him.

DRAGOS

Within your besotted breast lies the tender heart of a romantic, idealistic man.

TUCKER

Not man enough to keep his family from leaving.

DRAGOS

That, my friend, is their tragic loss.

TUCKER

Well, I'm glad you think so highly of me, but I have many regrets. Truth be told, I've snatched from every auction I've ever held -- mostly small items like sugar tongs and cufflinks.

DRAGOS

Ah, but do you collect for the sake of collecting or do you appreciate the consolation of objects?

TUCKER

Both I suppose. I mean, there's all sorts of ways of filling the hollows made by wounds of the heart, though some cut too deeply. In fact, I've been wondering: If spawning all your mini-me's is so wonderful, why are so few of you left?

VIOLET

We can still be killed.

DRAGOS

And we can succumb to disease and despair. Our clan was small to begin with and most died in the First and Second World Wars. Others became depressed and reached a threshold of curiosity, a spiritual inertia.

CHELSEA

Zombieville. They start sitting it out, stop giving a shit.

TUCKER

What about children?

VIOLET

Once we replicate, we no longer propagate.

DRAGOS

Why would we? Most people want progeny to redeem the lives they've wasted, but we keep rebirthing, giving ourselves new lives, new beginnings.

VIOLET

Some preferred not to replicate. They thought it perverse to outlive their children or become the same age or younger. Rosanne and I recently lost our cousin, Nadia, and a week later seven others drowned in a trawler in the North Sea. That means only four of us are left: we three and Rosanne.

CHELSEA

What?! Fuck! *(to Dragos)* Is she saying there's just us...?

DRAGOS

I'm afraid so.

CHELSEA

Jesus...

VIOLET

(to Tucker) That's why we have to keep working; to stop living in the past. Nadia's decline started with dreams of people she'd forgotten she knew from places she'd forgotten she'd been.

DRAGOS

Memories can be oppressive, yet without them we are diminished, especially memories of the names of things that tether us to the world, words like "fedora."

VIOLET

"Salsa!" "Samba!"

CHELSEA

"Swastika!"

VIOLET

"Swing!" *(pause)* Most of us tend to replicate by the time we're sixty or sooner if we start losing our health or our minds. I begged Nadia; I kept reminding her of all the beauty in the world: the songs of birds, the passing of seasons, how Dragos and I love the snow...

CHELSEA

Really? So what were you doing in Georgia?

DRAGOS

Learning to love the sun! *(kissing Violet's cheek)* Ha, ha!

TUCKER

So how did Nadia die?

DRAGOS

Cocaine and tequila -- not very original.

VIOLET

Her final text was "I'm so over myself." She spent her last years in filthy rooms playing video poker. She was tired of burying her pets, not to mention keeping her condo clean, her hair washed, folding laundry...

CHELSEA

Fuck! Think of all the hair we've cut, toenails clipped; all the cows slaughtered to feed us, the fish caught, the apples picked...

DRAGOS

Please shush!

CHELSEA

...the wine drunk, the shit flushed, the monthly blood leaking out of our...

VIOLET

Really, Chelsea!

DRAGOS

That's enough!

DRAGOS

Now stop this instant!

(Pause as CHELSEA is silenced, then DRAGOS speaks.)

DRAGOS

The trouble with replications is that we cease wanting to live as post-adolescents in our twenties -- except for some of us who never even aspire to maturity.

CHELSEA

He means me 'cause I can sleep anywhere anytime.

VIOLET

With anyone!

CHELSEA

You should talk!

DRAGOS

Please, don't start.

TUCKER

(pause) So regeneration doesn't guarantee...wisdom.

DRAGOS

Or superiority. Of course, we hope to evolve since it excuses our recycling.

TUCKER

Yes, well, a single lifespan is hardly time enough, is it?

DRAGOS

So replication appeals to you, doctor?

TUCKER

Oh, sure. I mean, do any of us ever truly fulfill our potential? Our dreams? So do your old selves end up in the obituaries -- like Monty?

DRAGOS

No, we're usually listed as missing, or presumed drowned, deported or murdered. We try not to encounter people who knew us, people who grew old.

CHELSEA

If they see us, they freak; they think they're seeing ghosts.

TUCKER

(to Violet) Speaking of ghosts, are you still in contact with your cousin, Nadia? I mean, since you can see the dead.

VIOLET

I can't see them; neither can Dragos. Chelsea's our only medium. I think I would find them invasive, but she enjoys chatting with the dead, don't you?

CHELSEA

Sure, when I'm bored with the living.

VIOLET

Are they here now?

CHELSEA

(staring out) Oh, we have quite an audience. They're waiting to see what Tuck's going to do next.

TUCKER

Actually, I ought to be leaving.

DRAGOS

Please, you must stay. I have a guest room; you will be very comfortable.

TUCKER

Well, I'm grateful, but I plan to attend an estate sale in Darien, so I'll head out of the city, check into a motel.

DRAGOS

I am afraid you do not appreciate our situation: By now someone at the auction will have identified Chelsea, so police will be tracking her movements along with your truck and credit cards, which is why I've taken the precaution of removing them

(DRAGOS holds up Tucker's credit cards.)

TUCKER

How in the devil...?!

DRAGOS

Gypsy magic.

(TUCKER snatches the cards.)

TUCKER

Well, give them back! Now I'm leaving; I've done nothing wrong!

DRAGOS

Nothing but aided an escaped criminal. Care to take a look?

(DRAGOS retrieves a newspaper from his pocket and hands it to TUCKER who glances at the front page while CHELSEA peeks over his shoulder.)

CHELSEA

Gee, Tuck, we're famous.

TUCKER

My god...

TUCKER

(pause to Chelsea) They're calling you "The Toxic Tattooist."

CHELSEA

No shit? Where?

TUCKER

(pointing to the page) There! Christ almighty...

DRAGOS

Chelsea is what they call an asymptomatic carrier. She remains healthy but her body contains a virulent virus -- much worse than influenza, mumps, measles, or the pox.

TUCKER

Well, this is all very...disconcerting, but I still intend to leave.

I'm afraid not.

DRAGOS

I beg your pardon?

TUCKER

You heard me.

DRAGOS

Are you threatening me?

TUCKER

(DRAGOS rings his bell and ROSANNE enters brandishing the sword displayed in the auction.)

TUCKER

Jesus!

CHELSEA

Hey there, Rosie, ha ha!

TUCKER

You can't be serious?!

DRAGOS

Rosanne is an expert at kenjutsu; she also monitors our security cameras.

TUCKER

(to Rosanne) Now surely you wouldn't injure an unarmed man?

ROSANNE

Never! So would you prefer dueling daggers or fencing foils?

TUCKER

What I'd prefer is to leave the premises!

DRAGOS

Not possible. You will be found and questioned, and since drunkards cannot be trusted, I suggest you accept my hospitality with grace.

TUCKER

You can't be Monty; he'd never do this to me!

DRAGOS

Why? Because you assumed Monty was a homosexual like you -- not that you were mistaken. After enough replications, we tend to resist sexual identities and restraints of any kind. Remember the night we embraced, and you said I was too old? Well, now I am too young, ha, ha! Why look so wounded? Your friends esteemed you enough to tread lightly around your closet. Forgive me for asking, but is that why Olivia left you?

TUCKER

You're despicable!

DRAGOS

All I ask is that you resign yourself to abandoning your plans, to having an experience beyond your usual phenomenological boundaries. Now please, Rosanne, escort Doctor Danes to the lavender room. He might like to freshen up before dinner. We dine at eight.

(ROSANNE gestures for TUCKER to follow, and THEY depart as CHELSEA speaks.)

CHELSEA

Tsk, tsk, poor ole Tuck. *(pause to Violet and Dragos)* So are you fucking each other now?

VIOLET

Oh, shut up! *(to Dragos)* I told you she'd find us and ruin everything!

CHELSEA

Thanks, Vi. Hey, have you got any clothes I can borrow? I know lover boy likes us to dress for dinner.

DRAGOS

(to Violet) Please loan her some decent clothes. *(to Chelsea)* And for godssake take a bath and do something about your hair.

CHELSEA

Careful, I have fleas, *(barking)* ruff ruff!

DRAGOS

(to Violet) If she misbehaves, let me know and I will give her a good thrashing! I should mention that I have invited Sonya to join us for dinner.

VIOLET

You what...?

CHELSEA

You're kidding?

DRAGOS

You heard me.

CHELSEA

Shit.

VIOLET

Please tell me you're joking.

DRAGOS

Set an extra place at the table.

VIOLET

But why...?

CHELSEA

(growling) Grrrrrrrrrrr...

DRAGOS

I have my reasons, *(to Chelsea)* and I expect you to be on your best behavior! No begging, drooling or licking the plates!

(CHELSEA snarls as DRAGOS marches off. The WOMEN stand frozen in time as TUCKER appears at a future auction, holding a tray of inkwells.)

TUCKER

Behold these ink pots from the Parisian shops of bygone days when the gentry scripted letters on fine linen stationery. This pot dates back to Napoleon the Third and features a hinged lid with an etching of airedales. It's small enough to fit into the pocket of a traveling scrivener. You'll notice it has a matching bell that summoned servants when letters were ready for posting. Now, shall we start the bidding at three hundred dollars? Do I hear four hundred? Five hundred? Six hundred....

(TUCKER'S voice trails off as CHELSEA confronts VIOLET in the parlor.)

CHELSEA

Please don't hate me, Vi. If I start to drive you nuts, I'll leave.

VIOLET

(walking away) You should never have come!

CHELSEA

Don't go! Please, Vi, talk to me! We were friends once, remember? *(pause)* What happened?

VIOLET

Time happened.

CHELSEA

Yeah, a whole chorus of Chelseas, each one growing smaller.

VIOLET

And meaner and crazier! *(pause, she sighs)* I miss the old one..

CHELSEA

Yeah, well I miss a lot of things -- like camping in forests; I miss cleaner air, fresher lakes, long lost pets, but fuck it! We live now, on a sick, overcrowded, dried up planet!

VIOLET

Why are you so angry?

CHELSEA

Why aren't you? Why isn't everyone?!

VIOLET

(pause) I was never as passionate as you. Despite what's happened, I thought you had the purest heart of us all; you always wanted to change the world.

CHELSEA

So did you.

VIOLET

Not with poisoned swastikas; not by killing!

CHELSEA

Don't tell me you didn't want to; don't tell me you didn't feel like offing the fuckers!

VIOLET

Yes, but feeling isn't *doing*! We're women; we're supposed to generate life: to heal and hope.

CHELSEA

Beam down, Vi. It's a dog eat dog world. We're all living in militant macho police states. Everyone in power has a prick, and if they don't, they act like they do, so we haven't done much to change things, have we?

VIOLET

Life is still better.

CHELSEA

Only for some.

VIOLET

For us! Why can't you forget?

CHELSEA

'Cause swastikas won't let me! *(pause)* My last shrink thinks what happened to great granny in the camps affects me now, and since great granny and I are one and the same... Look, I couldn't help it. My gut gave in to some primal howling hatred -- like the dog inside me finally needed to fight back. Grrrrrrr...

(ROSANNE enters, having eavesdropped.)

ROSANNE

It's not the dog! Dogs are decent and loyal; you're the other kind of bitch, the kind who violates our primal law. Did you forget? We only deserve more lives if we make the world better; if we treat life as sacred -- *every* life! We've all been victims, but none of us murderers.

CHELSEA

At least I touched my targets; looked them in the eyes. This country you've chosen drops bombs from planes.

ROSANNE

I agree that bombs are cowardly weapons for cowardly assassins, but we've lived through history; we're supposed to know better.

CHELSEA

You hypocrites! You do nothing, but I can't! *(pointing)* It's the dead; it's their fault! They made me realize I owed it to myself, my self respect, and to everyone I see and don't see, the ones killed and still being killed just 'cause they're not the same race or religion.

ROSANNE

So you think you made things better by poisoning a few hundred dicks?!

CHELSEA

Yeah, maybe.

VIOLET

You should live somewhere else; this country's making you crazy.

CHELSEA

History made me crazy!

VIOLET

We were doing so well; we were...happy.

CHELSEA

Really? I thought only idiots were happy. Just watch out for Dragos: he'll seduce you, make you dependent, then one day you'll wake up all alone 'cause he's left and tossed your heart on a shelf with his collection of vintage beer steins.

ROSANNE

You're the one he left; he treats us very well.

CHELSEA

Trust me, he's a monster.

ROSANNE

The only monster here is you!

CHELSEA

Screw you!

VIOLET

(covering her ears) Please, stop arguing!

CHELSEA

(pause) So are you a threesome now? Or is he fucking around like the hungry hound he is? You know he screwed that woman from the museum. I could smell the heat off her, and why the hell did he invite her to dinner?

ROSANNE

Why do you think? There's only four of us left.

CHELSEA

Are you saying he wants to make her one of us?

ROSANNE

Maybe. Her and that auctioneer.

CHELSEA

Do you know? Did he say...?

ROSANNE

No, forget it; I could be wrong.

CHELSEA

But what makes you think...?

ROSANNE

I said forget it! *(pause)* You know you're shedding, and you look like shit.

CHELSEA

Yeah, I'll try not to piss on the rug, *(barking)* arf, arf!

ROSANNE

(to Violet) Could you please get her cleaned up? Make her shower!

VIOLET

Follow me, I'll show you where to wash up. I have a dress that should fit.

CHELSEA

It better be black! *(growling)* Grrrrrrr...

(Music resounds as the THREE WOMEN depart, and TUCKER appears at a future auction, lifting a compass from a box.)

TUCKER

These vintage compasses are in full working order: all needles pointing with perfect precision to the magnetic north! Some were used for surveying fields of battle from the late eighteen hundreds through the First World War. *(holding a compass)* This beauty was handcrafted in silver and features a watch alongside the compass displaying the "when" as well as the "where" -- which is useful to those of us still tethered to the space-time continuum. So shall we start the bidding at three hundred dollars? four thousand, five hundred; six hundred, seven hundred...

(The auction fades as lights reveal the parlor after dinner where ROSANNE plays a guitar and VIOLET dances. CHELSEA and SONYA are drinking brandy with DRAGOS who sniffs from his snuff box. HE wears a dinner jacket, and the women wear dark dresses. TUCKER has joined them, wearing a bow tie. After ROSANNE and VIOLET cease performing, THEY bow to applause.)

DRAGOS

(to Sonya and Tucker) May I offer you more cognac? A souvenir acquired during a tour of France prior to the revolution.

SONYA

Yes, thank you.

TUCKER

Please.

CHELSEA

Oh, yeah!

(DRAGOS pours the cognac.)

DRAGOS

(to Sonya) I hope the entertainment and Violet's gourmet goulash have made your visit worthwhile. I still believe a fine meal among friends is the height of civilized living.
(toasting) To the alchemy of epicurean cuisine!

(THEY raise their glasses, then sip as CHELSEA swills her brandy, then pants, her tongue protruding.)

VIOLET

(whispering) Chelsea, your tongue!

DRAGOS

(to Sonya) Excuse her beastly manners.

(CHELSEA retracts her tongue.)

DRAGOS

(to Tucker) Are you enjoying your accommodations?

TUCKER

For a prison, the furnishings are exquisite. In fact, I sat at the rococo desk writing my final requests in case I don't survive your hospitality. I'll need a witness, so if you'll please sign here.

(TUCKER hands DRAGOS a sheet of paper and a plumed fountain pen. DRAGOS signs and returns it.)

TUCKER

(to Sonya) Has our host told you about himself and his time-tweaking gypsies?

SONYA

He told me the story of the first Dragos.

TUCKER

He *is* the first Dragos.

DRAGOS

Ah, so you are no longer a skeptic?

TUCKER

Frankly, I'm having trouble assessing the truth of anything anyone here has said. You all remind me of schizoid aliens from the comics I read as a youngster. But to answer your question: yes, I suspect you're all quite exceptional. Of course, I can't help wondering why you two ladies bid against each other at my auction.

CHELSEA

Oh, just us girls having fun.

ROSANNE

She didn't appreciate my ignoring her.

CHELSEA

Ha! She freaked; she couldn't believe her eyes! Yeah, Rosie, I'm still among the living.

ROSANNE

I was hoping you weren't.

CHELSEA

Fuck you!

ROSANNE

Sorry, I didn't mean...

CHELSEA

Go to hell! Grrrrrruuufff...

DRAGOS

Now, ladies...

VIOLET

Shush, both of you!

SONYA

(pause, to Dragos) Please tell me more. Can you vanish and relocate at will?

DRAGOS

No, we tend to be mired in linear time, but our perspectives are wider. To you "war" and "genocide" are just words. You watch films that glamorize but diminish the great wars, but we know the truth of their significance because we've experienced them. *(pause)* We've also witnessed the ravages of starvation and diseases that are still not obsolete.

TUCKER

Is there a period you enjoyed, a time you preferred more than others?

(Pause as THEY contemplate this question.)

ROSANNE

For me it was after the Second World War during my years at Hunter College. That's when I fell in love with a professor who encouraged me to audition for the New York Philharmonic. We were happy and he would have left his wife, if she hadn't shot him.

VIOLET

For me, now is the best time.

DRAGOS

For me as well, but I was also fond of the years before we replicated, centuries ago when Chelsea was Christina and we were happy -- before our two sons passed away from consumption.

SONYA

You had children?!

DRAGOS

Yes.

CHELSEA

Back when Dragos loved me.

DRAGOS

Back when Christina was an innocent girl of rare sensitivity.

CHELSEA

And dumb as a rock! (*snarling*) Grrrrrr...

TUCKER

What about you, Chelsea? Was there a best time or should I say "a best life"?

CHELSEA

No! I'm hoping it hasn't happened yet.

SONYA

What a pity you can't travel to the future.

DRAGOS

Actually we have -- with the gift of the crystal sphere. A week after we first replicated, Chelsea and I ventured forth. We shared our experience with the rest of our clan, and later it became a yearly ritual, a little drama we enacted. Do you remember your parts?

ROSANNE

Of course.

VIOLET

I think so.

CHELSEA

Yeah.

DRAGOS

Violet, please bring our costumes and props

(VIOLET leaves the room)

DRAGOS

At that time we only spoke a Romani dialect, but for you we will speak English.
(*to Tucker and Sonya*) So are you ready to be enlightened?

SONYA

Yes.

TUCKER

I'm on the edge of my seat.

DRAGOS

Rosanne, please adjust the lights.

(ROSANNE dims the lights. VIOLET returns with long black capes that DRAGOS and CHELSEA drape over their shoulders. VIOLET also hands DRAGOS a crystal sphere.)

DRAGOS

After donning the cloak I slipped on a pair of gloves, held the sphere, then chose the place where I was born, in a caravan camped in the Carpathian forest. Chelsea chose the time, the year...

DRAGOS

...two thousand and ninety-nine.

CHELSEA

Two thousand and ninety-nine.

(ROSANNE flickers the lights as SHE and VIOLET hum, and smoky shadows surround the players.)

DRAGOS

My god, it looks like...

DRAGOS

...hell.

CHELSEA

Hell...

CHELSEA

...must be like this. What is this dust?

DRAGOS

Ashes from fires...? Not a single tree standing... (*sniffing*) It stinks of burning wood and metal.

CHELSEA

(sniffing) And waste water! Where is our beautiful forest? Is it possible we made a mistake? Instead of the future, could this be the past?

(VIOLET is dressed as SYPHILISSA, a woman covered in sores, limping, and wearing rags.)

DRAGOS

My god...

CHELSEA

Hello, miss...?

DRAGOS

Don't touch her! Stand back! She's rabid and covered in sores!

(CHELSEA ignoring him, approaches SYPHILISSA)

CHELSEA

Please speak to us; what happened?

SYPHILISSA

(whispering) War.

DRAGOS

Which countries are fighting? Who is the enemy?

SYPHILISSA

War.

DRAGOS

Why are they fighting?

SYPHILISSA

War!

DRAGOS

Ah, yes of course, the reason for war is...

DRAGOS

...war.

SYPHILISSA

War!

(SYPHILISSA turns to leave, followed by CHELSEA.)

CHELSEA

Wait! Please, miss!

DRAGOS

When we returned to camp, we spent hours in the river, scrubbing the filth of the future while we wept in mourning. Then a few days later Chelsea started having symptoms.

CHELSEA

Fucking fevers and vomiting so bad, I was hoping to croak and get it over with.

DRAGOS

We did not know what the rabies virus was back then. We only knew that being bitten by salivating beasts meant certain death, but fortunately, Chelsea had enough canine antibodies to survive.

CHELSEA

That's when the dead showed up and I thought I'd gone to hell.

DRAGOS

The disease made Chelsea an authentic medium, but also a carrier.

CHELSEA

Yeah, I'm the kiss of death for everyone but clan members. I can't even sneeze in public which puts a real damper on my social life. *(to Tucker and Sonya)* So what do you think of the future? Cat got your tongues? Ruff, ruff!

SONYA

It's terrible.

TUCKER

If that was really a glimpse of the future, then it looks like the violent armies of the world are going to win.

DRAGOS

Their vanity and barbaric ignorance! The war toys they can't resist using!

ROSANNE

They're going to ruin everything for everyone and soon.

SONYA

But is it possible you only saw the devastation of a local war?

DRAGOS

We felt certain we witnessed a meta-extinction in progress, which is why I promised myself: if human beings were going to be rendered extinct, then at least I could salvage the things we once made, the objects that reflect civilization's superiority, humanity's belief in the primacy of imagination. That was when we started collecting, when we swore to dedicate our lives to more benign visions of the future. *(pause)* Of course, everything we collect and create is vulnerable to time, erosion, and bombs.

ROSANNE

For me, only music provides a sense of continuity, of hope. Since I play several instruments, each lifetime gives me another chance at perfection.

SONYA

(pause) Maybe that future you glimpsed wasn't meant to be seen.

(VIOLET enters during Sonya's remark.)

VIOLET

I agree! And I'm sick of reliving the past -- even if it is the future.

TUCKER

(to Dragos and Chelsea) Well, at least you survived the ordeal.

DRAGOS

Ah, but in transit I lost a glove -- the mate to the one you took from the trunk, though I have been wondering why? Why would you want a single glove?

TUCKER

Well, I imagined Monty slipping his gnarly old hand into it, and I guess I...I missed him.

DRAGOS

Missed me?

TUCKER

Call me a sentimental sap.

DRAGOS

I am touched -- truly. Which is why you, Doctor Tucker Danes, have been named the legal heir to Alchemy Antiques.

TUCKER

Me...? Really...? I'm surprised! Given your reappearance -- not to mention our respective ages -- it's unlikely I'll be the recipient of your generosity.

CHELSEA

Unless we teach you to replicate.

VIOLET

Shush!

CHELSEA

(to Dragos) Well, isn't that the plan?

(DRAGOS ignores CHELSEA, and turns to SONYA.)

DRAGOS

(to Sonya) I notice you're admiring my snifters.

SONYA

They're exquisite.

DRAGOS

Austrian crystal, purchased during the reign of Franz Joseph.

TUCKER

Lord, the treasures you've acquired!

DRAGOS

We've all become collectors. I started with the polished skulls of clan members who perished of the plague. Rosanne collects popular songs, and Violet collects dance steps.

VIOLET

So Doctor, what do you collect?

TUCKER

Too much of everything: coveted curios, piles of books, posters, and vinyl records; boxes of doorstops and knobs. I've got walls filled with clocks that work and clocks that don't; rooms full of medical and musical instruments -- scalpels, forceps, clamps, harps, cellos, pianos that are never tuned much less played; and vintage game boards with chessmen, checkers, marbles, *(lifting a small pouch)* which is why I swiped this bag of beauties from your trunk.

(DRAGOS snatches the bag of marbles from TUCKER.)

DRAGOS

Thank you! *(pause)* I must admit, Doctor, your home was a hoarder's heaven!

TUCKER

But hell for my family and the source of many spats that escalated into enmity and ended in divorce. That's the real reason Olivia left me.

DRAGOS

Such a pity.

VIOLET

I'm sorry.

CHELSEA

(pause) Doesn't anyone want to know what I collect?

TUCKER

Well, what do you collect?

ROSANNE

(mumbling) Besides corpses.

CHELSEA

(staring at Dragos) Your love letters. They're in a safe along with the collars of all my pets.

DRAGOS

So you see, we're all collectors. Of course, I've read predictions that someday soon there will be portable computers that can collect, classify, and commodify everything everywhere. But for us, for now, we are like sponges, soaking up the trends of our times from personal perspectives.

CHELSEA

What about you, Tuck? Would you like to join us sponges?

TUCKER

Well, it's certainly tempting.

CHELSEA

Sonya...?

DRAGOS

Enough! We'll discuss this later when our minds are clear.

CHELSEA

Why? They look sober enough to me.

DRAGOS

Because I said so! And if you insist on pursuing the matter, I will whip you like the defiant bitch you've become!

CHELSEA

(growling) Grrrrrrr...

TUCKER

Aren't you being a little hard on the girl?

DRAGOS

Surely you have noticed "the girl" is more dog than the rest of us.

(ROSANNE puts her hand on CHELSEA'S constantly restless, shaking leg.)

ROSANNE

Will you please sit still?! *(to Tucker and Sonya)* Sometimes she needs a leash.

VIOLET

To keep her from chasing squirrels.

ROSANNE

And snarling at people on sidewalks!

DRAGOS

It was not always like this, there were many months, even years, she seemed in control.

CHELSEA

(to Tucker and Sonya) Don't you love how they talk like I'm not here? They forgot to mention how my scent attracts other dogs who start yapping till I'm hosed down. It's a dog's life, Tuck, over three centuries of feeling like I've swallowed the fuckin' freak, like she's swimming inside my belly. You're a doctor, so can you cut her out of me?

TUCKER

Cut who exactly...?

CHELSEA

That rabid woman who bit me! She made me crazier than I already was.

TUCKER

Sorry, I'm afraid my practice is limited to bad colds and bunions. What you need is a specialist.

CHELSEA

You mean a shrink 'cause you think I'm batshit crazy, right?

TUCKER

Who am I to judge?

CHELSEA

Dragos was the only man I ever wanted beside and inside me, all of him always and forever, though he forgets that he loved how I licked his face and belly. (*howling pitifully*) Whuurrrrr...

ROSANNE

Will you shut up!

VIOLET

Please spare us.

DRAGOS

(*to Chelsea*) You are mistaken, my dear. Never think I have forgotten the years of tender kindness and devotion you gave this aching heart.

VIOLET

It's true, he loves none of us as well.

(CHELSEA stands and starts walking.)

VIOLET

Where are you going?

CHELSEA

To the kitchen, I'm famished.

ROSANNE

You just ate!

(CHELSEA departs for the kitchen, panting.)

ROSANNE

(*mumbling*) The glutton!

DRAGOS

(*pause*) No matter how much you love someone, no matter how much you think you know them, they can change; they can become...

ROSANNE

Repulsive! No impulse control!

DRAGOS

That is why we carry compasses, to remind us of our greatest moral imperative: that despite our darkest desires, it is wrong to kill, that killing any human being for any reason contributes to the collective unconscious suffering of all humanity.

(CHELSEA reenters, nibbling a large turkey leg.)

VIOLET

Chelsea, your manners!

ROSANNE

God, you're shameless!

CHELSEA

Still talking about me?

DRAGOS

In case you were wondering, Sonya knows who you are; she knows what you've done.

SONYA

Some radical Zionists think she's heroic for trying to rid the world of anti-semites. On the news they claim she's killed at least two hundred.

CHELSEA

"She" is right here and it's closer to three hundred. Swastikas are popular with guys who love to hate, and they're not just anti-semites, they're anti-women, anti-gypsies, anti-anybody who isn't like them.

DRAGOS

(to Tucker) Or they're foolish boys who were drunk and made mistakes they later regret.

CHELSEA

Why are you staring at Tuck?

DRAGOS

Show them your ankle, Doctor.

(TUCKER lifts his pant cuff, revealing a spiderweb tattoo, then turns to DRAGOS.)

TUCKER

You're not very discreet, are you? *(pause, to the women)* I'm afraid I was a very lonely fourteen year old who succumbed to the charms of a racist rube. Only Monty knew about that tattoo because he dug out his needles and turned my swastika into a spiderweb, but I still never see it without feeling remorse.

DRAGOS

My obliterating artistry cannot obliterate memories, though many survivors preferred to keep their numbers -- as proof their nightmares were real.

CHELSEA

Gee, since we're being so honest, why not fess up and tell Tuck and your girlfriends the truth?

VIOLET

Oh, no, Chelsea, please...

ROSANNE

(to Dragos) Can't you shut her up?!

CHELSEA

(to Sonya and Tucker) Why do you think Dragos covered up the survivors' tattoos?
(pause) Because he put them there in the first place!

TUCKER

What is she saying...?

SONYA

No, that can't be...

CHELSEA

They called him "The Numbers Man". Go on, admit it!

DRAGOS

Yes, I was captured, deported, and employed by a sadistic major. *(pause)* My specialty was Roma prisoners like myself which meant after the numbers, I added the letter Z for Zigeuner which is German for gypsy. I was a doctor then, so the major thought blood wouldn't bother me, and since I was given a surgical mask, I was never recognized. *(pause)* Judge me if you wish, but what else could I have done?

SONYA

You could have refused -- resisted!

DRAGOS

With a luger pointed at my heart...? Not likely. Perhaps that makes me a coward, but at least I insisted on tattooing myself first. *(lifting his sleeve)* Even after replicating, the numbers are visible.

SONYA

Where? I don't see them!

DRAGOS

But I do and always will, and trust me, you would have done the same.

SONYA

No, never!

DRAGOS

Then you would have been killed.

SONYA

I've seen pictures of your crude handiwork. How do you live with yourself?!

DRAGOS

How does anyone? Excuses, justifications, denial. Now I regard my handiwork as a form of identity theft since my tattoos diminished all former documentation. Of course now we are all branded by numbers -- beginning with the dates on our birth certificates, followed by social security cards, passports and so on -- as if a sequence of digits can truly distinguish one person from another, one genocide from another.

SONYA

You can't seriously compare passport numbers to needles piercing skin?! It's barbaric! To think all these years everyone at the museum believed Dragos was a compassionate survivor!

DRAGOS

Feel free to disillusion them.

SONYA

If I do, you'll be arrested!

DRAGOS

It's a little late for that, and who would believe I am who I am? I'm sorry to disappoint you, ladies, but I never claimed to be heroic. At least I felt compelled to learn the trade and become a competent cover-up man.

SONYA

You think that absolves you?

DRAGOS

Would you prefer to have me executed?

ROSANNE

(to Chelsea) At least he never infected or killed anyone!

CHELSEA

Screw you! I had my own little peace plan.

ROSANNE

Spare us.

SONYA

No, I'd like to hear it.

CHELSEA

I was hoping my virus would make the bastards into carriers and set off a worldwide pandemic. Then every country would be united in a single cause: to find a vaccine that could only come from me -- my blood! And listen up, Tuck: we'd hold the world's biggest fucking auction with every country bidding with the scrap metal collected from torching their arsenals: their guns, grenades, landmines, missiles, warplanes, warships, and war toys of every kind!

ROSANNE

You're one sick bitch if you think armies will give up their guns.

(SONYA glances at her watch and stands.)

SONYA

Please excuse me, but I have to leave.

(SONYA starts to walk towards the door.)

DRAGOS

Please don't go!

CHELSEA

If you leave, you won't learn how to replicate!

VIOLET

Don't you want to join our little clan?

SONYA

No thanks.

DRAGOS

That's because you're young; you already feel immortal.

CHELSEA

Just wait till nobody takes you seriously 'cause you're a shriveled up hag with arthritis, depression, dementia...

DRAGOS

All right, that's enough!

SONYA

Trust me, I'm still not interested.

TUCKER

Well, hells bells, I am!

DRAGOS

That's because you're a doctor who's witnessed the ravages of time. *(pause)* Violet, will you please open the safe and bring the replicator. Rosanne can perform the procedure. *(to Sonya)* You're welcome to stay and observe.

(VIOLET departs and SONYA sighs, deciding to stay.)

ROSANNE

(to Tucker) Doctor, I'm afraid you'll have to remove your shirt to expose your navel. It takes a few seconds to implant the sensor which resembles a silver star that's activated by pressing.

TUCKER

Pressing...?

ROSANNE

Years from now when you're ready to replicate, lie supine and press hard on the star with your thumb until you feel internal vibrations. Then your body will begin the process.

TUCKER

How long does it take?

ROSANNE

It depends on how many organs need replacing and to what degree. If you're under fifty, it will take five minutes; if you're over, it will take up to ten. Now come closer, and take off your shirt.

(TUCKER approaches ROSANNE, and removes his shirt as VIOLET enters with the replicator which resembles a staple gun. SHE gives it to ROSANNE.)

ROSANNE

If you're ready I can begin.

TUCKER

I...I'm ready!

(As ROSANNE presses the sensor into Tucker's navel, an electronic hum is heard and TUCKER succumbs to spasmodic seizures, then stops.)

SONYA

Are you all right?

TUCKER

I...I'm just a little woozy...

DRAGOS

So my dear Doctor, welcome to the clan!

TUCKER

(pause) What now? Do I just go on with my life...?

DRAGOS

Yes, but you know where to find us.

TUCKER

So Chelsea, is your audience of the deceased still watching?

(CHELSEA turns and stares at the audience.)

CHELSEA

Yeah, we're their own private reality show. In fact, some of them want us to visit the future again, take another peek in the crystal ball.

DRAGOS

Did you tell them that's not possible? *(to Tucker and Sonya)* When we returned, there were cracks in the crystal which shattered into shards. Inside were small blue spheres that I've kept in my trunk. *(to Tucker)* In fact, they're in that pouch you snatched.

The marbles...?

TUCKER

(DRAGOS retrieves the pouch from his pocket.)

DRAGOS

There's one for each of us.

(DRAGOS distributes the blue spheres to CHELSEA, VIOLET, ROSANNE and keeps one for himself..)

VIOLET

How bright and beautiful!

(CHELSEA holds her sphere up to the light.)

CHELSEA

Nice.

ROSANNE

Mine's emanating heat.

CHELSEA

So is mine and there's a strange humming.

(CHELSEA pops the sphere in her mouth and swallows.)

VIOLET

Cheelsea!

TUCKER

Good lord.

ROSANNE

Jesus...

(CHELSEA opens her palm, revealing the sphere.)

CHELSEA

Just kidding, ha, ha!

VIOLET

(mumbling) Crazy bitch...

CHELSEA

It tasted like copper, and I felt electric ripples shooting down my throat to my stomach to my *(smiling)* -- whoa! *(pause, recovering)* Oh, shit, now I'm feeling weird...

TUCKER

Give me your hand; *(pause)* your pulse is irregular.

(VIOLET points to CHELSEA and backs away.)

VIOLET

Oh, god, oh, no, look! Look at her!

CHELSEA

What...?

TUCKER

Calm yourself, girl.

VIOLET

Her hands, look at Chelsea's hands!

(Pause as THEY stare at CHELSEA'S hands.)

TUCKER

There's a tremor...

ROSANNE

And spots!!

CHELSEA

Fuck! You can see my veins!

VIOLET

Her forehead's furrowing, and her hair's turning...

ROSANNE

(to Violet) So is yours!

DRAGOS

It's the spheres! Quick! Drop the spheres!

(CHELSEA, VIOLET, ROSANNE, and DRAGOS throw down their spheres.)

ROSANNE

Oh, shit, I...I can't see clearly, everything's clouding up.

TUCKER

Look at me.

(Pause as TUCKER looks into ROSANNE'S eyes.)

TUCKER

My god, girl, you've got cataracts!

CHELSEA

Oh, fuck, my legs are wobbly...

VIOLET

What did she say? Shit, I'm going deaf!

ROSANNE

I'm going blind!

VIOLET

My back hurts!

CHELSEA

What's happening?

VIOLET

I'm scared...

TUCKER

(to Violet) Sit down; take deep breaths.

ROSANNE

(to Tucker) Is this what it feels like to grow...

DRAGOS

We have to replicate! Replicate now!!!

(Pause as THEY stand, closing their eyes, their hands pressed to their navels, humming in harmony. TUCKER and SONYA stand aside to watch.)

DRAGOS, CHELSEA, ROSANNE, VIOLET

Ummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm...

CHELSEA

Fuck! It's not working.

VIOLET

Oh, god, oh, no...

ROSANNE

Nothing! I feel nothing,

CHELSEA

(gazing out) They're smiling, the dead are gloating; they know we're coming. *(pointing)*
He said I'm turning yellow. *(to Tucker)* Is it true, Tuck? Am I...?

TUCKER

Yes, you're jaundiced, *(feeling her forehead)* and feverish.

CHELSEA

Shit! *(pointing to the dead)* Stop it! Stop staring!

VIOLET

I'm not ready, I'm not!

SONYA

(to Tucker) I'm calling an ambulance!

DRAGOS

No, no, please don't!

TUCKER

Did your gypsy guru ever tell you that this could happen?

DRAGOS

Yes, she said something about...

TUCKER

What...?

CHELSEA

What!?

DRAGOS

I...I can't seem to remember...

ROSANNE

(to Violet) Oh, shit, he's senile!

DRAGOS

No, no, it's just a... What's the word!? La, la, lapse...? Yes, it's just a lapse!

ROSANNE

Well, what did she say?!

DRAGOS

Something about...

ROSANNE

What?! About what...?

DRAGOS

An expiration date...?

ROSANNE

Oh, shit! My tooth just fell out! *(to Violet)* How do I look?

VIOLET

I don't know. I...I can't see! *(weeping)* I can't see...

CHELSEA

Hey, Tuck, maybe you could euthanize us -- like the mangy dogs we've become.

ROSANNE

Oh, shush!

SONYA

(to Dragos) I feel so helpless; what can I do?

DRAGOS

Nothing! Ladies, stay close; don't leave. We must stay together.

(DRAGOS turns to TUCKER, his voice rasping.)

DAGOS

Don't look so surprised, dying is perfectly normal; everyone does it.

TUCKER

Not like this.

DRAGOS

Ha, ha! *(to the women)* Well, my dears, it looks like we've cheated death long enough. *(to Tucker)* Someday soon it will be your turn, Doctor. When you are ready, prepare yourself; put money aside, find a place. *(grasping Tucker's hand)* But for now please, spare us from becoming objects of...of what? What is the word...?

TUCKER

Inquest...?

DRAGOS

Yes, inquest! Dead bodies are such a ghastly spectacle. We need some discretion, a little posthumous respect; a poetic passing is what we desire. Later you may do what you wish with our bones.

TUCKER

I'll do my best. *(pause)* You know, now that you're aging, you're starting to resemble Monty.

SONYA

Dragos, I wonder, would you and the others mind if I shared your story?

DRAGOS

Fine, but prepare to be ridiculed. Better to publish it in a novel, or better yet a play -- a tragedy.

VIOLET

A comedy!

CHELSEA

A farce!

DRAGOS

(to Tucker; his voice rasping) Promise me you'll take over Alchemy Antiques and make it a place of beauty and...reverence.

TUCKER

I...I'll do my best.

DRAGOS

You must continue holding auctions -- splendid auctions of priceless treasures. *(pause)* My voice is fading... Where is she? Where is my girl?

CHELSEA

I'm right here, Dragos; hold my hand.

DRAGOS

(grasping her hand) Oh, my sweet, my darling Christina. Surely you know you were the love of my lives.

CHELSEA

And you of mine.

DRAGOS

Ah, what was that poem? "All lovers young, all lovers must, consign to thee..."

DRAGOS

...and come to dust."

CHELSEA

And come to dust.

CHELSEA

(howling like a dog in pain) Owwwwwww....

(Gradually DRAGOS, VIOLET and ROSANNE join CHELSEA'S mournful howls which peak then dwindle.)

CHELSEA, DRAGOS, VIOLET, ROSANNE

Owwwwwouuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu...

(THEY collapse and expire as lights dim to black and the sound of a clock is heard ticking.)

EPILOGUE

(Music chimes as stars in the galaxy swirl and time travels to a future auction where a more youthful TUCKER addresses the audience, his hair darkened, his glasses gone, a baseball cap replacing the fedora.)

TUCKER

For the last lot of the evening I have a surprise for all you collectors with a passion for human anatomy.

(TUCKER opens a large box and retrieves a single human skull.)

TUCKER

These splendid skulls date back to bygone days of yore. Composed of twenty-two bones, the human cranium protects the brain which takes its secrets to the grave. But today with the science of genetics and carbon dating, we proved these skulls belonged to a clan of gypsies from Eastern Europe whose afflictions were so accelerated that they withered, died, and decayed right before the eyes of reliable witnesses. This particular skull features extra canine molars, and belonged to a woman who claimed to see the dead dwelling among us. So shall we start the bidding at three hundred dollars? Four hundred dollars? Five hundred? Seven hundred? Nine hundred? One thousand dollars? One thousand, five hundred? Two thousand dollars? Do I hear three thousand? Four thousand? Five thousand, six thousand, seven thousand, eight thousand...

(TUCKER'S voice is joined by the howling of dogs as lights fade to black.)

End of Play

