

Liner Notes

By

John Patrick Bray

LINER NOTES

Copyright (c) 2004 By John Patrick Bray

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **LINER NOTES** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **LINER NOTES** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to licensing@nextstagepress.net

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **LINER NOTES** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

LINER NOTES

Characters

Alice, 20, the daughter of the deceased rock and roll legend, Jake Sampson.

George, late 40's-early 50's, former guitar player for rock and roll legend, Jake Sampson, in the band Ghostlight Operator.

Setting

The turn of the 21st Century, just before the cell-phone boom. Various locations between South Carolina and a cemetery in Montreal, Canada.

NOTES: The set should be minimal. Representational pieces can be brought on and off as the script requires. Furthermore, there is no set music for the songs – the music should be created by the actors and director. The playwright trusts you.

This play is dedicated to Danielle Bienvenue Bray, the great music the late seventies had to offer, and to the ORIGINAL G.L.O. (Zack, Dan X 2, and Dr. Big Pants.)

LINER NOTES was given a staged reading at The New School for Drama featuring Jerry Zellers as George and Kristen Cerelli as Alice. The reading was directed by Constance Thackaberry. LINER NOTES made its world premiere on June 3, 2010 as part of Planet Connections Theatre Festivity at The Robert Moss Theatre at 440 Studios in NYC. It was produced by the (re:)Directions Theatre Company, with the following cast and crew:

George.....Michael Bertolini
Alice.....Kathryn Elisabeth Lawson

Directed by Erin Smiley
Stage Managed by Courtney Ferrell
Lighting Designed by Tim Kaufman
Sound Designed by Martha Goode

LINER NOTES was subsequently developed at the 2011 Last Frontier Theatre Conference, featuring Van Horn Ely as George, and Rachel Márquez as Alice.

LINER NOTES

Scene 1

In the dark, an overture: rock-and-roll guitar, heavy drums. Cymbals clashing; a wild time on stage. Sounds fade into a single acoustic guitar, playing the same tune but much slower. LIGHTS UP in GEORGE's apartment. It is sparse; might even be considered neat if it weren't for the Hungryman Dinner boxes, which seems out of place. GEORGE is sitting at a desk, peering over his glasses at a computer screen. Note: it is an older computer; large; should be indicative of the late 1990's. Next to the computer is a framed picture. It doesn't matter if the audience can't see it, but it's of George and JAKE from their younger days, and will be referenced later.

George is deeply invested in what he's writing. Occasionally, he references an academic journal, and picks up a chicken leg. He wipes his hands and continues working. A knock on the door. George pauses. His stillness suggests he would rather not answer the door, or let anyone know he's home. Another knock. George resigns himself. He stands, still holding the academic journal, using his thumb as a book mark. He opens the door ALICE enters without looking at him.

ALICE. I meant to bring coffee –

GEORGE. Excuse - ?

ALICE. It's this place I work at - Cafe Art Java, near the Metro Station. I'm standing there yesterday morning, about to make coffee, and not just coffee for me, but for everybody, I mean my entire part of town shows up at 5:15, even though we don't open until 5:30, but it's this LUNATIC Annie that works there, she opens the door wide open at 3 AM, singing her heart out to Bonnie Tyler or worse, Leonard Cohen, letting all the lunatics just hang out, eating cookies free of charge, and so when people show up at 5:15, they expect their coffee to be ready, and she knows all their orders; BUT, if SHE'S not working, and I'M working, I don't open the store until 5:30, which is when we open; so, I've got a line by 5:25, people banging, literally, BANGING on the glass, pointing to their watches, AND WHAT THE FUCK KIND OF JOBS DO THEY WORK THAT THEY NEED COFFEE BY

LINER NOTES

5:30? And so, I'm standing, the coffee maker's going, no Bonnie Tyler today, my heart is POUNDING IN MY CHEST, and I can't even look at the book -

GEORGE. - the book?

ALICE. - and I'm like, FUCK IT! NOBODY GETS COFFEE TODAY! NONE OF YOU GET COFFEE! MONTREAL CAN HAVE A FUCKING LACK-OF-CAFFEINE-INDUCING-MIGRAINE FOR ALL I FUCKING CARE! FUCK YOU AND YOUR COFFEE NEEDS YOU FUCKING ADDICTS OF FUCKING - GRRRRRRRRRRRRR! And I get my car, they're all looking at me with destroyed coffee-less faces, I might as well have killed a cute puppy and dropped it on their heads for the sulking they're doing, as I'm speeding away...and I can't drive home, the carpet needs cleaning, there's dishes, there's MY MOTHER, who, don't worry knows I'm here -

GEORGE. She does?

ALICE. -and I don't know what to do, so I end up driving here.

GEORGE. (*Beat.*) To South Carolina? (*Beat.*) From Montreal?

ALICE. I need to smoke...can I smoke in here?

GEORGE. No.

ALICE. Good. (*Takes out cigarette. Beat.*) Shit. (*Puts down cigarette.*) You sure? (*He nods.*) Shit. (*She holds the cigarettes, paces, and throws them.*) Shit! (*Pause. She bursts into tears. George watches her, still holding an academic journal.*) I found your address a few days ago, and I don't know it just seemed like the only thing to do. (*Awkward moment. George looks at his dinner, and picks up a cup of coffee.*)

GEORGE. Coffee? (*She glares at him.*) It's decaf, and it's just as tasty. (*She lets out a big sob. George moves to touch her hair, but doesn't. Alice sits on his sofa. George sits on a chair. He watches her a moment.*)

ALICE. Can I stay the night?

GEORGE. Oh, well...

ALICE. I can't do this, I can't – (*She walks to the door, and turns. She takes a long look at George. He says nothing. His not reacting makes her laugh. She wipes her ears and approaches George, pulling herself together.*) Hi, Uncle George. (*He nods at her.*) You don't say much do you? Jake said "that George, he doesn't say much," and I guess you can say that Jake, he was, um, you know. He was right. (*Beat.*) I really wish you would say something!

GEORGE. Oh! Hi. Hello. Yes, hello. Hey. I...hi. (*Alice laughs.*)

LINER NOTES

ALICE. You're thin.

GEORGE. Thank you.

ALICE. Jake wasn't so thin, you know? No, of course you wouldn't. You weren't there.

GEORGE. Where?

ALICE. You just. You weren't there.

GEORGE. Oh. Well. Life gets in the way, you know? You have friends, and, you know. Life happens.

ALICE. But Jake was your- he was. Shit. *(Beat.)* You didn't come to the funeral.

GEORGE. I know. Busy. It's May.

ALICE. Right. Should've been buried in June. Would've made a difference?

GEORGE. Grades would be in. This article would be finished. Divorce finalized. A lot happens. In May. This May. Now, I mean.

ALICE. So, when you do talk you just string words together.

GEORGE. Well, no. I mean. Well.

ALICE. You still should have been there. *(Beat.)* Can I spend the night? I just drove all the –

GEORGE. Why don't we go out and grab a bite. You're probably hungry. Are you hungry? I don't have much here. Just some Hungryman dinners.

ALICE. Jake ate like that, too. Real healthy, that Jake.

GEORGE. Right.

ALICE. That's why he killed himself. *(Pause.)*

GEORGE. Yeah, sorry to hear about...I've been meaning to call...how's your mom?

ALICE. A widow.

GEORGE. She with you? *(Beat.)* You need to call her?

ALICE. *(Quickly.)* No. *(Beat.)* What am I, twelve, I need to ask my mother to go out or something? I do go to work in the middle of the night! *(She takes a chicken leg from GEORGE and starts eating it.)* Thanks, by the way. For not saying shit like "oh, you got so big," or "oh, you look like..." whichever parent you're closer to. Jake, in your case. My favorite is "Christ, when did you get such a rack?" *(Beat.)* Not sure, really. They did come in nice. *(She shakes them back and forth. Not in a sexy manner, but mechanical. Rather proud of them. NOTE: they don't have to be big.)* If Jake were here he'd love it. Small apartment. Close to a college. Banging college girls who are all wide-eyed and - *(George is giving her a severe look.)*

LINER NOTES

-come on, you're telling me that's not why you're getting divorced? Up here in your bohemian love pad? That's what Aunt Kathleen called it.

GEORGE. She did?

ALICE. Yes. No. Implied it. I knock on your door, and Aunt Kathleen is all like "he's not here." "What, another one?" And sent me over.

GEORGE. She didn't recognize you?

ALICE. I don't know.

GEORGE. So she's just sending anyone who...that's funny. Too too funny. (*She sits.*) You're hungry. You have to be. Let's go.

ALICE. Kicking me out already? Papers to grade?

GEORGE. Students to screw.

ALICE. (*Laughs.*) Wow. Haven't seen you in...how many years?

GEORGE. You gonna tell me I got big? (*George watches Alice; she is brimming with emotion. He grabs his jacket.*) Why don't we go out and grab something, okay? We can talk about it from there.

ALICE. Any reason why you don't want me here- oh. Aunt Kathleen.

GEORGE. We're meeting with our lawyers next week. You know? If she were to drop by...I just.

ALICE. Right. //She already knows I'm here.

GEORGE. //I'd probably lose my shit. (*Pause. Alice walks to his computer and looks at his photo.*)

ALICE. What's this?

GEORGE. Oh. Just. Just an old picture. Me and your Dad.

ALICE. Jake.

GEORGE. Right. Me and your...Jake.

ALICE. You look good, Uncle George.

GEORGE. Thank you.

ALICE. In the picture, I mean.

GEORGE. Oh. (*Beat.*) You know, you don't have to call me Uncle if you call your Dad, your Jake... Jake. We're not related.

ALICE. Uncles are allowed to be absent. Dads? Not so much. He was Jake a long time ago. (*Pause. She starts crying.*) There's a motel down the block. Is that safe?

GEORGE. It's a safe neighborhood. It's just...you do know. I mean. (*Beat.*) I can't think of anything to say. (*Beat.*) Fine. Stay. Take my room. I'll stay out here. But just...don't near the windows or anything. (*Alice laughs.*)

ALICE. Really? The entire Southwest wall is plate glass.

GEORGE. I just. Yeah. *(Pause. She continues eating his dinner. She becomes ravenous. George finally sets down the academic journal. He gets her a class of milk. He watches her eat. LIGHTS FADE.)*

Scene 2

In the dark, a blues progression plays. It's an arrangement of the opening song. LIGHTS UP. Music fades. The next day. Alice is in the kitchenette making eggs. She is wearing a night-shirt and boxers. George enters looking like hell. He sees Alice and is thrown off for a moment.

ALICE. Good morning.

GEORGE. Hey. Whatcha doin.?

ALICE. I decided to make cheese omelets.

GEORGE. The result?

ALICE. Scrambled eggs with cheese. *(She turns off the stove. George sits with her by the "island." Alice puts all of the eggs on one plate, and moves to the sofa, putting her feet up, leaving George by himself. He reacts to being "egg-less." Beat.)*

GEORGE. Help yourself to anything you like.

ALICE. Sorry. We usually fend for ourselves in my house.

GEORGE. Right. *(He takes out a box of cereal from under the island.)* I bought those eggs in April.

ALICE. It's only May.

GEORGE. Nineteen ninety eight. *(Alice spits out the eggs.)*

ALICE. I thought you just moved in here.

GEORGE. The divorce is just happening now. We've been separated two years. I just live sparse. Between that, and...you wouldn't believe how many students I have this year. They've been cutting back on adjuncts, so my workload has been...*(Elevates hand over his head. Beat.)* I'm sorry, Alice. *(He sits next to her.)* I'm really sorry.

ALICE. *(Beat.)* What were you playing last night?

GEORGE. "Come again?"

ALICE. I heard you playing your guitar.

LINER NOTES

GEORGE. That was the name of the song. “Come again?” It’s a cheesy folk-thing I’ve been working on.

ALICE. Folk, huh? (*Beat. George gives her a look. She puts her hands up.*) I like folk. (*George gives her another look.*) Really. Ani DiFranco, Bitch and Animal.

GEORGE. I think I saw them open for Peter, Paul, and Mary.

ALICE. You have a Rickenbacker, right?

GEORGE. Yeah.

ALICE. Can I see it?

GEORGE. It’s with Kathleen.

ALICE. You’re letting Kathleen keep your guitars?

GEORGE. No, they’re just safer with her right now.

ALICE. Safer? You got them locked up in chains?

GEORGE. No. She’s. I’m just keeping them in the basement.

ALICE. The basement? Don’t you have a National O?

GEORGE. And a sixty-three Dobro. And a fifty-six Les Paul Special with the original neck.

ALICE. Warping in a basement?

GEORGE. It’s a finished basement. Does get a little clammy sometimes. Can’t say I’m too worried about it right now.

ALICE. Wow. And this is the way the great George Kellington ends. Guitars gently weeping in water. No muse. No fire.

GEORGE. No eggs.

ALICE. Whatever will you do? I have an idea: folk yourself to sleep at night. (*Beat.*) That didn’t come out right.

GEORGE. It is a solid plan.

ALICE. How about...?

GEORGE. How about what?

ALICE. Come back with me. Just to visit.

GEORGE. Visit? Your Mom?

ALICE. Jake’s grave.

GEORGE. Oh, I can’t do that. I gotta have these grades in. Not to mention this damn article. And the meeting with our lawyers next week. She wants half of everything. I heard of a guy who was sued for half of everything. He ended up sawing his house down the middle, and he kept the half with the TV.

ALICE. Helluva saw.

LINER NOTES

GEORGE. Yeah. I might go someday. If I find myself in Montreal, okay? But not now.

ALICE. Jesus, why don't you just pat me on the head, say "shhh?" then gesture me away. *(He walks over, pats her on the head and says "shh." She gives him a severe look. Alice walks over to George's computer and picks up the picture.)*

ALICE. This is the only picture in here.

GEORGE. I'm sure I have an album somewhere.

ALICE. You don't. Sorry. I was curious. So. I did some digging. You also have an alarming lack of porn. *(He gives her a look.)* I'm just saying: sexy older guy, divorced, hot college students running around. No wonder you only get cold water. What? My shower was freezing last night. *(Beat.)* Are you sure there's nothing you want to say to Jake?

GEORGE. If I think of something, I'll write it down and you can say it for me. *(Beat.)*

ALICE. Fans showed up. Strangers. Shouting, singing.

GEORGE. Man, don't talk to me about fans. During "Crimson Vision," our opening song on our last tour, he interrupted just to have the crowd cheer at the last three chords, which he decided to scat. He didn't need a crowd. He needed a mirror.

ALICE. Ah. No ego on you, right?

GEORGE. Please, I'm the most humble man alive. But Jake? You know the story with him.

ALICE. No, I don't.

GEORGE. Really?

ALICE. Here's what I know: *(She pulls a stack of albums out of her bag.)*

Ghostlight Operator: "Wave of No FX," Released: 1977; Style: New Wave.

GEORGE. No Wave. New Wave was a year later. *(Alice looks at the next one.)*

ALICE. *(Ignoring him.)* Ghostlight Operator: "Panther's Tears," Released: 1978; Style: Hard Rock. *(She looks at the next one.)* Now known as G.L.O., we have "Valentine in Limbo," Released: 1979; Style: Prog. Rock. *(Beat.)* Really, a story album?

GEORGE. Same year as "The Wall." It was a seventies' thing.

ALICE. And finally, the fourth album, plummeting the charts with a bullet, "Dust in the Can," Released: 1980; Style: Eighties Hair Band.

GEORGE. I never really grew out my hair. Had a beard, but -

LINER NOTES

ALICE. And here, the epilogue: Jake's solo albums. One is called Jake," and the other "Say Goodbye, Sucker." It's Robert Palmer meets Poison meets...total crap! Want me to put it on? *(She looks around, presumably for a turntable.)*

GEORGE. What makes you think I haven't heard it? *(Beat.)* Wait, this is all you know about us?

ALICE. *(Alice stops looking.)* The liner notes give some of the story, through Jake-tinted glasses. Some other stuff came up when he fought with Mom.

GEORGE. Yeah? *(Beat.)* How IS your mother? Aside from being a widow?

ALICE. She's not exactly one of Montreal's tourist traps. What's mom got to do with it? *(She walks to the couch and takes off her night shirt. She is wearing a bra. She sings like Tina Turner.)* "What's Mom got to do, got to do with it?" *(Beat.)* What? *(He turns away from her.)*

GEORGE. Have I mentioned how much I hate the eighties?

ALICE. You're wrong.

GEORGE. An opinion can't be wrong.

ALICE. Yours is.

GEORGE. Well. Give her my best.

ALICE. Come on, George! In Montreal, we remember the music. Why do you think Jake moved us there?

GEORGE. To annoy the French.

ALICE. He was going alternative. True Indie-sound. Except...he couldn't play anything.

GEORGE. Montreal didn't inspire him?

ALICE. He went out a lot. Saw a bunch of local bands, but...*(She rummages through her bag and finds a black tank top with a band-name on it.)* Do not judge my by this shirt. The store I bought it from is one of those, you know, trendy goth wanna be stores in the mall. This band missed "goth" and became "emo" by default.

GEORGE. Emo. Isn't that a muppet?

ALICE. Emo. Whiney boys who want you to think they're on heroin, and sing about their bleeding hearts and balls.

GEORGE. I love that ball-gouging, whiney shit. *(She puts on the shirt, and removes her bra from under it. She turns to him. The phone rings. They both look at it.)*

ALICE. Want me to get it?

GEORGE. Oh, yeah, that would solve everything. *(Beat. The phone stops ringing.)*

You look like her. Your mother.

ALICE. Can I just tell you how glad I am you said that AFTER I got this shirt on?

GEORGE. Maybe I'll give her a visit. Someday.

ALICE. You may want to wait on that one.

GEORGE. Why's that?

ALICE. Jake was buried, and where was George?

GEORGE. I meant to send a card. (*Alice gives a disapproving look.*) I know. Lame.

ALICE. Oh, don't use the word "lame." It sounds, I don't know, LAME coming from you.

GEORGE. So I'm supposed to drive back with you to Montreal and not visit your Mom?

ALICE. What is that like a deal-breaker or something? (*Beat.*) Are we negotiating? (*The phone rings again.*)

GEORGE. No. You're probably right. (*George looks at the picture.*) Alice, you can't just show up at a person's house and expect them to go with you. You know? It's not reasonable.

ALICE. I know.

GEORGE. And just your being here. You know we couldn't have kids? Me and Kathleen. You have any idea what your showing up probably did to her? (*Phone stops ringing.*)

ALICE. If you did have a daughter, and she was really good..okay, not really good, but you know, decent...okay, not decent but just starting out as a guitar player, and had some really great insight, and wanted to, you know, get a band together...what would you tell her?

GEORGE. We all have that feeling at some point or another. Chalk it up to hormones. Or gas. It'll pass sooner or later. (*Beat.*)

ALICE. (*Laughs*) Wow! I expected a lecture on reality, or finances...gas? Jesus...Jake...(*Alice notices that George is looking at the picture.*) Dad never thought of that one.

GEORGE. You trying to tell me I'm your Dad?

ALICE. No. Hell, no! Not where I was going with this. (*Beat.*) It's just...when I listen to these records. I mean, I hear Jake...Dad...Dad/Jake sing. But, what I really hear is the way you play. You know? It just hits me. It's honest. Jake wasn't always so honest. And I just...I just need a little honesty right now, you know? (*Beat. She*

LINER NOTES

starts to pull one of the GLO records out of its sleeve, and gives another quick look around.) I give up - where's your record player?

GEORGE. I don't have one.

ALICE. Wha?!

GEORGE. I don't - *(The phone rings again. George picks it up and slams it down. He pulls the chord out of the wall.)*

GEORGE. I don't have one.

ALICE. I've done that. *(Beat.)* Really. You're on your way to a break down. I mean, a big one. A "find Jesus with John Tesh."

GEORGE. Maybe I'll go Emo.

ALICE. You're on your way, the way you were playing last night.

GEORGE. What's wrong with the way I was playing?

ALICE. Forget I brought it up.

GEORGE. No, what was wrong with the way I was playing?

ALICE. It sounded...I don't know. Don't you have grading to do? *(George gives her a look.)* You played like you had grading to do.

GEORGE. Great. You know, they go hand-in-hand. Music and math.

ALICE. Not the way you were playing. *(Beat.)* There was a moment. A bridge you played. That sounded like something. Would love to hear it again.

GEORGE. Would you?

ALICE. Yeah. It was honest. *(She nods. She exits to the bedroom. George looks at the albums.)*

GEORGE. "Hair metal." *(Beat. Imitates putting gun to his head and shooting himself. Freezes. Looks toward door. Alice did not see him. Pauses. Looks back at the record.)* No liner notes. *(He sets down the record and puts the picture back. As he does, he looks at the academic journal. He considers. He looks toward the bedroom. He picks up the journal, the picture, and a grade-book. Alice comes out holding his guitar. George moves past her into the bedroom. He re-enters with a duffle bag.)*

ALICE. Wh-

GEORGE. Not a word. Just...not a word. *(He exits. SOUNDS OF GEORGE going through a closet. Alice gets it.)*

ALICE. Can we take your car? I mean, I can drive, but can we use your car? *(No answer. She walks to her bag. She puts the albums back in. She moves to shut the bag. She removes a small book and looks at it. She looks towards George's*

room, and back at the book. *BLACKOUT.*)

Scene 3

In the dark, someone counts off, one-two-three-four, and strikes a chord. He does so again a few times, as if trying to build the nerve to play. LIGHTS UP. A motel room. A sign that says "Motel 9" buzzes outside the window. George is sitting on a bed. Alice is not with him. He is wearing tube socks, shorts, and a t-shirt. He is grading papers. Alice enters with a brown grocery bag.

ALICE. What the hell are you wearing?

GEORGE. Clothes.

ALICE. You look like a...

GEORGE. Dork?

ALICE. Tourist.

GEORGE. This is that kind of town.

ALICE. It's a college town.

GEORGE. I knew I knew that smell.

ALICE. You know we're a half-hour away from Woodstock?

GEORGE. What do you know about Woodstock?

ALICE. *Hello:* my nickname was Electric Lady Land.

GEORGE. Who called you that?

ALICE. ME. (*Beat.*) We should go out tonight. Check out the scene.

GEORGE. (*Mocking*) *Hello:* you slept the nine hours here, I did not. Plus, I've got all this.

ALICE. You brought homework?

GEORGE. Mmm-hmm. Figure if I can do twenty tonight, and twenty tomorrow I'll be all set.

ALICE. You couldn't have done them when you got back?

GEORGE. In one day? Man, I'd have to use the staircase method.

ALICE. Do teachers actually do that? Top stair, A, lower stair, F?

GEORGE. I mix it up. Sometimes the ones that land in the middle are the A.

ALICE. Isn't it just Math?

GEORGE. Research essays. They're Masters students.

LINER NOTES

ALICE. “Master of Math!” Sounds very...I don’t know. He-Man. (*Alice takes out a small, decorative box from her bag. She fishes inside.*) You look tired.

GEORGE. Long drives affect you differently once you reach the age of dirt.

ALICE. Age of dirt. Isn't that a geriatric heavy metal act?

GEORGE. Ha. (*She takes out a small dime bag of weed. She flicks off a little dust that’s on it back into the box.*) What are you doing?

ALICE. This is my joint-box. (*She reaches inside the little box again, and shakes off a small package of rolling papers, also covered in a little dust that gets back into the box.*)

GEORGE. Put that away.

ALICE. Why? Do you really care?

GEORGE. We got a non-smoking room for a reason.

ALICE. Which is?

GEORGE. I quit smoking. I can’t even be around the stuff.

ALICE. But this isn’t nicotine –

GEORGE. It doesn’t matter what it is. Just seeing any smoke. A camp-fire would get me horny for a cigarette. Do you mind?

ALICE. Yeah, I mind. You’re a tool. (*She puts the dime bag and the rolling papers back into the box.*) Whatever. I’ll just roll one before the gig tonight.

GEORGE. What gig? (*She hands him a flyer from the grocery bag.*)

ALICE. A hot Emo-boy gave this to me on the way to the deli.

GEORGE. Did you say ‘hot’ and ‘Emo’?

ALICE. Blow me.

GEORGE. Emo. “I don’t use drugs but I like the look.”

ALICE. Look who's catching on!

GEORGE. (*Reading.*) “Open Mic. Night.” You’re going to an open mic. night?

ALICE. Yeah!

GEORGE. And you’re, what, singing?

ALICE. Yeah. And I have accompaniment.

GEORGE. Yeah? They have, what, like an MC, or guitar player, or someone who Jesus-Christ-you-can’t-be-serious.

ALICE. I could do *a capella*, but in my town, only the whatchamacallits do it.

GEORGE. Barber-shop quartets?

ALICE. Free-stylers. Are you gaining decades by the second?

GEORGE. And why, exactly, should I do this for you?

ALICE. ‘Cause I’m cute.

GEORGE. No one’s that cute.

ALICE. Come on, George. Don’t be a dickwad.

GEORGE. Dickwad has grading. I already put the article on the back-burner – editor’s going to LOVE me. (*Beat.*) Okay, plus, I’m just not comfortable with hitting a bar with you. Pick a reason.

ALICE. But you’re comfortable spending the night in a motel hundreds of miles away from either ones’ home?

GEORGE. Yes.

ALICE. With a girl you thought was under-age?

GEORGE. Well, you are *under-age* for an American bar. You’re twenty, right?

ALICE. (*Beat.*) Canada is IN America, you know.

GEORGE. A U.S.A. bar. How do you expect to get in? (*She reaches into her pocket and hands him an I.D.*)

ALICE. I got this from a friend.

GEORGE. (*Reading.*) Yolanda Lewis. (*Beat.*) Yolanda??

ALICE. What? It’s the best I could do. I knew I’d need one. That’s stars and bars for ya. Throw you in the military, but won’t throw you a beer.

GEORGE. You don’t look anything like –

ALICE. I know, I know. I need to get a better one. But, a frat boy will be working the door, so I could just as well hand him *your* license.

GEORGE. Great. (*Alice goes to a ‘mirror’ and adjusts her shirt, stretching it lower, and musses her hair.*)

ALICE. So, do I look like trash or *serious* trash?

GEORGE. Which is worse?

ALICE. Good. (*As George speaks, Alice gives him a sweet look.*)

GEORGE. You want to perform, fine. You’re on your own. I’m leaving at dawn with or without you.

ALICE. (*Beat.*) Okay, I was going to wait to show you this, but, you’ve kind of forced my hand. What does ‘forced my hand’ mean anyway?

GEORGE. It’s a card-playing term.

ALICE. Oh, I thought it was sexual. (*George gives her a severe look.*) What?

GEORGE. You were going to show me something?

ALICE. Yes. (*She goes into her bag.*) Here.

GEORGE. What is...? (*He flips through it.*) Is it Jake's hand-writing? It's Jake's hand-writing...is it?

ALICE. You tell me.

GEORGE. Well, they're lyrics.

ALICE. Found this. Just after the funeral. Been keeping it with me, you know? Reading it at the coffee shop. (*He flips through a bit more.*) I wrote a couple of things down in the back, but...

GEORGE. They're...not very good. Not *terrible*, but...

ALICE. No, but they're lyrics. Not poems. Lyrics need music. All part of the song machine.

GEORGE. I whole-heartedly agree. Like this one, for instance. (*He looks around. Alice is already holding his guitar and hands it to him.*) Thank you. See, there is a pattern here. (*He begins to play a little.*) Jake wrote in patterns. Actually, most good lyricists wrote in patterns. I tried to write a few with him, but they would wander off a page. Used to drive Jake crazy. (*Beat.*) The man did write some hits, so...I guess he had insight. (*George starts playing a three chord progression. He begins humming to himself as he does. Alice is beaming behind him. She sits behind him and looks at him. George is engrossed in the book. She almost touches his hair, but stops when he speaks.*) No, no, this ain't right.

ALICE. Which one are you looking at?

GEORGE. This one.

ALICE. "Nocturnal Envy." I had an idea for that one. If I hum it, can you play it? (*George puts down the guitar.*) I'll take that as a 'maybe?' (*Beat.*) What's wrong?

GEORGE. Sorry, you struck a chord. No pun intended.

ALICE. I didn't mean to. (*Pause. Alice forces a laugh.*) Ha! Struck a 'chord.' Very...well, wrong. Don't you mean nerve? (*Beat.*) (*George puts his guitar away.*) I didn't mean to strike a nerve-chord. (*Beat.*) So, you don't want to come out to the open-mic night?

GEORGE. (*Beat.*) Jake used to say that. 'If I hum it, can you follow it.' It's how he got away with saying 'all songs composed by Jake Sampson' on the Liner Notes. Songs were compositions, and he planned it all. We were just unnamed members of the orchestra. He even said that he planned out all the improvised solos in his head. Like on Panther's Tears. The bridge is –

ALICE. Auld Lang Syne.

GEORGE. Exactly. We were all really stoned, when suddenly I realized it would fit. And what does Jake say? ‘Just as I planned it, George.’ Planned it. And now there’s this. Just words on a page, and it’s up to me to listen to him humming in my ear so he can take a few more bows?

ALICE. But it IS you coming up with it. Jake knew that. He *told* me he knew that.

GEORGE. Really?

ALICE. Actually, no.

GEORGE. But that's just it, though. We created those songs together. They weren't entirely his. The lyrics, absolutely, but the man never took the time to learn an *instrument*.

ALICE. Why’d you let him get away with it?

GEORGE. Let him?

ALICE. Yeah, *let* him. Maybe if you put him in his place once in awhile –

GEORGE. -you ever try putting him in his place?

ALICE. Maybe that’s what he needed! Someone to tell him to cut the shit. Someone, you know. (*Beat.*)

GEORGE. I gotta finish this grading, Alice. You wanna go up there? Perform? Sing like a barbershop freestyler, be my guest! This one, “Nocturnal Envy?” Easy as hell to figure out. Classic Jake!

ALICE. (*Beat.*) How so?

GEORGE. It’s a seduction song. “I want to see you close your eyes.” And “this is why nature gave us the night.” Well, you can take the hairspray out of the power-rocker, but you can’t take the power-rocker out of...this song!

ALICE. He was wearing hairspray.

GEORGE. Yeah?

ALICE. When I found him. (*Pause.*)

GEORGE. You...YOU found his...him?

ALICE. Yeah. His hair was actually more...crimson. (*Beat.*) I had just come home from work. See, I don’t go to school, that’s *my* nerve. I came home from WORK. He...he was laying there. (*Beat.*) Rolling Stone said that he went out ‘with his boots on.’ But you know what he was wearing? Tube socks. What is it with you guys and tube socks? (*Beat.*) I just want to play a couple of these songs, George. *This* is the memory I want to have of my dad. (*Long pause.*) I guess I’ll see you later. (*She grabs his guitar and makes for the door.*)

GEORGE. Let me hear it. (*She stops.*) Before you go up there, let me hear it.

ALICE. Why do you want to hear it?

GEORGE. You don't go up cold. You practice.

ALICE. I'll improvise.

GEORGE. Improvise, huh?

ALICE. Yeah. I told you. It's all up here. (*Points to her head.*)

GEORGE. But can you get it out? Come on.

ALICE. So, you can criticize me?

GEORGE. Hell, yeah, so I can criticize you. What do you think they'll do at the bar, huh? Or the next one? Or the next one? Every time you hit the stage, you need to create something lasting. Otherwise, why get up there at all?

ALICE. (*Beat.*) I can't play.

GEORGE. What?

ALICE. I CAN'T PLAY!

GEORGE. I thought you said –

ALICE. I'm starting out. (*Beat.*) I'm thinking of buying a guitar.

GEORGE. Didn't Jake have guitars?

ALICE. They were more for looking at.

GEORGE. He didn't play them. At all. Ever?

ALICE. Not really.

GEORGE. And you didn't play them.

ALICE. They were his.

GEORGE. What an asshole. Sorry, I know, but...he was an asshole. So, you're really going to go up and freestyle? No rhythm, no musicality...just...guess? (*Alice nods. Beat. The moment is still tense.*) Look, why don't...why don't you start humming in my ear again. We'll figure out that...Nocturnal Envy one. Okay? And then we'll hit an open mic. I hear there's a "hot emo" guy walking around promoting one.

ALICE. Yeah? (*George holds his guitar.*)

GEORGE. Yeah. But just this one song. And it has to be ready. (*Alice nods. She sits close to George. He looks at her. BLACKOUT.*)

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW THIS PLAY ENDS, ORDER
A HARD COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.NET***