

Night Falls

A Physical Play

*Written by
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*Choreographed by
Deborah Slater*

Draft
9.28.11

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A tall cave near an ocean. Dark, rocky walls rise out of sight; a shaft of light slices in from above. The rhythmic surge of waves pulses in the distance. A tiny, tiny bed sits empty on the floor of the cave.

It takes a moment to realize there are people tucked into the walls, their backs to us, in repose. In the beginning there are only tiny physical adjustments from these people, but eventually the movements become larger, erratic at first, then unified, rhythmic.

PEREGRINE

Sh-sh-sh-

SHADE PEARL

Sh-sh-

LEJEUNE

Sh-sh-sh-sh-

PRIMA

Shhhhhhhhhhh-shhhhhhhhhhh-

The breath-sounds quicken into panting. Prima sounds an alarm, a sustained note.

***PEREGRINE**, 59, turns from her perch on the wall, eyes shut. She wears a tight-fitting, rock-star-worthy black velvet coat over a well-used white nightgown.*

PEREGRINE

She woke in the night without opening her eyes.

***LEJEUNE** shoots upright, a younger woman in her 30's, wearing the same white nightgown, but fresh and sexy.*

LEJEUNE

She woke in the night.

***SHADE PEARL**, a fierce, ancient woman in her 90's, reaches in confusion. She wears an old, stained version of the white nightgown, in tatters. Long gray hair spills across her face.*

SHADE PEARL

She woke in the night not knowing where she was.

PEREGRINE

Reaching for the body next to her.

Peregrine reaches, finds no one.

LEJEUNE

Where is he?

SHADE PEARL

Who?

PEREGRINE

Reaching.

PRIMA turns from the wall, facing the others for the first time. Athletic, androgynous, ageless, her white nightgown tucked into her tights so she can move, she watches the others like a predator, with an unnerving stillness. Prima prefers the shadows.

PRIMA

Shhhhhhhhhhh-

SHADE PEARL

No, no, shhhh, no...

PEREGRINE

She woke in the night, sweaty, feverish, ready to fight. A bullet coming at her--

LEJEUNE

She dusted cobwebs from her mother's grave. Wait, did my mother--

SHADE PEARL

She wandered her rooms, listing all the things she had to do.

LEJEUNE

Did my mother die?

Everyone turns to her.

LEJEUNE

I dreamed my mother died and I didn't go to her funeral.

PEREGRINE

I was busy.

SHADE PEARL

I'm busy, damn it, I'm busy. What page am I on?

LEJEUNE

Is she dead?

SHADE PEARL

I can't think, I know too much. I can't think.

PEREGRINE

There was a bullet coming at me.

The movement becomes violent. Prima raises her nightgown to reveal the Eight of Spades tattooed on her back. Peregrine is mesmerized by it.

PEREGRINE

The eight of spades.

LEJEUNE

(nervous about the Eight)

Sh-sh-sh-sh-

PEREGRINE

What does it mean, the Eight. Of Spades.

Shade Pearl FALLS in slow motion.

PEREGRINE

She fell.

LEJEUNE

Is she dead?

Shade Pearl moans in pain. Peregrine doesn't move.

PEREGRINE

No.

LEJEUNE

Should we help her?

PEREGRINE

No. I stopped to pick up the newspaper in the driveway and she went ahead. An article caught my eye-- 78 Million Baby Boomers Can't Be Wrong. I am one of 78 million... and I'm wrong all the time.

LeJeune and Prima FALL IN SLOW MOTION.

LEJEUNE

Is this a dream?

PEREGRINE

She slipped on the wet steps, falling, cracking her bones.

Wake up. LEJEUNE

Don't touch her! PEREGRINE

She's hurt. LEJEUNE

You'll make it worse. PEREGRINE

We can't leave her here. I'm going to call someone. LEJEUNE

I did. PEREGRINE

Prima completes her slow motion fall, taking the place of Shade Pearl, who rises.

What page am I on? SHADE PEARL

Old-woman-falling-down. PEREGRINE

I wasn't looking. LEJEUNE

I was dreaming, pages flipping-- sliding-down-the-mountain-on-cardboard page... SHADE PEARL

LeJeune enacts this.

Kissing-my-husband page... SHADE PEARL

Peregrine enacts this.

The page of the-daughter-laughing. SHADE PEARL

All of them laugh, delicately, genuine.

And now I'm on old-woman-falling-down page. SHADE PEARL

Is this my page now?

LEJEUNE

All of them fall in slow motion... then Peregrine jolts, as if just waking up.

What page am I on?

PEREGRINE

Prima rises, climbs, hides. Shade Pearl and LeJeune synch up with Peregrine.

My speech.

PEREGRINE

She woke in the night...

SHADE PEARL

Did my mother die while I was sleeping?

LEJEUNE

Prima sings a note. The time flashes on the wall of the cave. **1:37.**

Am I dreaming? Am I awake? 1:37.
(devastated)

I've only been asleep for an hour.

PEREGRINE

I dreamed she died and I didn't go to her funeral.

PEREGRINE

I know.

LEJEUNE

I was too busy with the eight of spades.

PEREGRINE

What am I missing?

SHADE PEARL

It was only a dream. How old am I? I can't remember.

PEREGRINE

37. Always 37 would be good.

LEJEUNE

I thought 17 was the perfect age?

PEREGRINE

As I get older, the perfect age gets older.

SHADE PEARL

How old am I now?

PEREGRINE

Tomorrow I will be 60. No wonder I can't sleep.

SHADE PEARL

37. The year I married... 'Tommy-Charmey, we're flooded, wake up!'

Pitched into a memory, all together. Prima softly hums "Blackbird."

PEREGRINE

Camping at the beach in Florida... I wake with water in my nose, the tent is flooded!

SHADE PEARL

The driving rain of a sudden storm collapses the tent on top of us in pitch blackness.

LEJEUNE

'Tommy! We're flooded! Wake up!'

PEREGRINE

Squealing we try to rescue our things from the water-- food, watches, clothes.

LEJEUNE

Lightning! Thunder cracking!

SHADE PEARL

In the flash of blue-yellow light--

PEREGRINE

I see Tommy-Charmey's stubbly face.

SHADE PEARL

Run!

PEREGRINE

Running wild across the dunes, illuminated in flashes--

SHADE PEARL

He drops his canteen-- then black again and gone.

PEREGRINE

Like an idiot I scream--

LEJEUNE

‘Serpentine! Serpentine!’

SHADE PEARL

Dodging crazy-close lightning! We could hear the sizzle of electricity...

PEREGRINE

We were the tallest things for miles...

LEJEUNE

Scared out of our minds...

PEREGRINE

We couldn’t stop laughing.

SHADE PEARL

Never more alive. 37.

Prima sings...

PRIMA

Blackbird singing in the dead of night

PEREGRINE

Our honeymoon. We had no money so we camped on the beach. I had the single best night of sex in my life that night. Something about the lust I felt for him mixed with the awe of the marriage vows-- my body opened like a waterfall. Sex sanctioned by god.

LEJEUNE

I want that again.

PRIMA

Take these broken wings and learn to fly

PEREGRINE

And then the heavens split apart on our heads. I guess we hadn’t checked the weather report.

LEJEUNE

Serpentine!

Shade Pearl tries to run, but--

SHADE PEARL

I can't run like that now. Aching back. Heavy, heavy legs.

PEREGRINE

You need to sleep.

LEJEUNE

What about the speech?

PEREGRINE

I don't know what to say.

SHADE PEARL

Leave me alone! Say that.

LEJEUNE

Tell them what it's like.

SHADE PEARL

Who?

LEJEUNE

The students.

PEREGRINE

The truth is too scary.

SHADE PEARL

Tell me.

PEREGRINE

I'm in decline, but I never peaked. Or I guess the peak was smaller than I imagined, and I didn't realize until it was over. How can I tell them to lower their expectations... brace themselves, life is going to hurt.

LEJEUNE

Can't say that.

PEREGRINE

If it goes well, the dean offers me a teaching position; if I blow it, he won't. I need this.

SHADE PEARL

I need this.

LEJEUNE

I need this so I have to give an uplifting speech that encourages the students...

SHADE PEARL

Imparts advice and wisdom with self-deprecating humor...

PEREGRINE

Implying I'm more successful than I am.

LEJEUNE

I have to make an indelible impression.

PEREGRINE

To get an underpaid, no-benefits adjunct position so I can pay rent until Social Security kicks in.

LEJEUNE

Warn them not to be free-lancing at sixty.

PEREGRINE

Right.

LEJEUNE

Tell them...

PEREGRINE

I'm as scared and confused as I ever was. Just better at pretending.

SHADE PEARL

So good at pretending.

LEJEUNE

Who am I pretending to be now?

PEREGRINE

Someone who knows what she's doing.

SHADE PEARL

... who's not scared.

LEJEUNE

... who's always kind.

PEREGRINE

... someone pretending to be okay.

LEJEUNE

Unafraid.

PEREGRINE

Unafraid of change.

SHADE PEARL

Change sounds heroic... it's decline that's so...

Prima makes a jarring move. A back ache stabs all of them. They moan, bend over in pain.

SHADE PEARL

The Dear Body tells the real story.

LEJEUNE

(stretching through the pain)

Don't give in! Stand up straight, pick up your feet, move, move-- you can do it!

PEREGRINE

I'm tired.

SHADE PEARL

I'm weak.

LEJEUNE

Don't say that! I'm strong, I'm strong...

PEREGRINE

You always push--

LEJEUNE

I thought you were unafraid?

PEREGRINE

I was pretending!

SHADE PEARL

It hurts--

LEJEUNE

What are you afraid of?

SHADE PEARL

(becoming transfixed)

Getting sick, getting weak, losing my mind, my memories, losing my ability to run, walk, bend, lift-- all that-- losing, losing, losing everything except weight.

PEREGRINE

Losing.

SHADE PEARL

(still transfixed)

It's cold up here.

LeJeune reaches for Shade Pearl.

LEJEUNE

Come down.

SHADE PEARL

It's cold up here, without a body.

LEJEUNE

You still have a body.

SHADE PEARL

For a little while.

PEREGRINE

O Fortunate One.

SHADE PEARL

Yes.

LEJEUNE

What is so fortunate?

PEREGRINE

To have a body.

SHADE PEARL

So they say. The Dear Body.

LEJEUNE

Why do you say 'the Dear Body'? Why?

PEREGRINE

At 53 I barely thought about my body, at 54 it took effort to think of anything else. I got old in a year. I started calling her 'The Dear Body' because after cursing the sweats, aches, hemorrhages, confusion, exhaustion--

SHADE PEARL

Curse, curse, curse my fucking body! Too hot, too wide, too this, too that... I realized I was cursing myself.

PEREGRINE

Cursing the body that's taken me so far, given me such pleasure.

SHADE PEARL

Such pleasure. Where did it go?

PEREGRINE

The strong, sexy, beautiful body... where did it go?

SHADE PEARL

So weak now.

LEJEUNE

Come down, Mama. You fell.

SHADE PEARL

I'm not your mother.

LEJEUNE

She fell. I thought she was going to die.

As Shade Pearl slowly climbs into the bed, Prima recedes to the shadows.

PEREGRINE

In the hospital the sound of her wet gasps wakes me up. I must've dozed off.

LEJEUNE

I'm afraid she will die while I am not looking.

PEREGRINE

I touch her, tell her to turn on her side, so she can breathe easier. Her one eye opens like a fish and she grunts a primitive understanding, then stays where she is. I touch her again and she turns. Within seconds she heaves, gulping as if underwater, the sounds from her nose and open mouth like the flapping of a great wet sail.

LEJEUNE

My mother, the addict.

PEREGRINE

When she wakes I tell her she fell because she overdosed and she says...

SHADE PEARL

I would never do that. I'm not an addict, it's not who I am.

PEREGRINE

She doesn't remember falling, in a stupor on the steps outside my house.

LEJEUNE

She doesn't remember my terror and calling the ambulance.

LEJEUNE

She doesn't even remember detoxing-- the screaming, the shivers, the violent kicking--

PEREGRINE

I feared she would snap her fragile spine so I pinned her down while roaring for help-- roaring that I didn't know this is what they meant when they said she had to get off all meds-- she was crying and asking to die, death was better than this pain-- and I screamed, too, demanded the doctor give her something to stop this. He must stop this. Stop this.

LEJEUNE

She was on meds in the first place because she has intolerable pain, her spine is crumbling and it hurts.

PEREGRINE

She thrashes as if to break it once and for all.

SHADE PEARL

She is addicted and that is preferable.

PEREGRINE

Give her something. This has to stop.

LEJEUNE

He injected her and she went limp under my hands.

PEREGRINE

I slumped into a chair and looked at this woman who had been a towering presence, a ferocious rival, the one I turned to, the one I turned on, the defining woman of my life, my mother with whom I have been engaged in intimate battle for as long as I can remember, the moral center, the judge, the one to please, the one to beat... now a shriveled addict screaming for morphine.

SHADE PEARL

I would never.

PEREGRINE

So proud.

LEJEUNE

Leave her alone.

SHADE PEARL

I would never.

PEREGRINE

Will I be this way with my daughter one day?

LEJEUNE

You don't have a daughter.

SHADE PEARL

You have no one.

PEREGRINE

I have no one.

(considering)

I don't know what to do about that.

SHADE PEARL

I don't know what to do in the face of it all.

LEJEUNE

I'm losing my mother. She is my someone.

SHADE PEARL

What to do.

PEREGRINE

I'm afraid I will never know what to do, like I don't know right now.

SHADE PEARL

I used to fix everything, now I can't even fix dinner.

PEREGRINE

I pick fights because it's easier to argue about what everyone else should be doing. I've turned into a bully.

SHADE PEARL

Do what I say!

LEJEUNE

Everyone should just do what I say!

PEREGRINE

I have no idea what I'm feeling.

SHADE PEARL

Bossing people around gives me the illusion of control.

LEJEUNE

Bossing people around makes me feel good. Finding fault makes me--

SHADE PEARL

Righteous. Angry.

LEJEUNE

I'm-right-you're-wrong-anger.

PEREGRINE

Where does it come from? I don't want to be so angry.

SHADE PEARL

Fear.

LEJEUNE

Losing control.

PEREGRINE

Losing my memory, my figure, my job. Forgetting my words, my age, my appointments.
You name it, I can forget it.

LEJEUNE

What am I forgetting now.

SHADE PEARL

Tomorrow's your birthday.

PEREGRINE

Who cares?

SHADE PEARL

Tomorrow's the hospital.

PEREGRINE

I won't forget.

SHADE PEARL

Tomorrow's...

PEREGRINE

Oh god.

LEJEUNE

The speech.

SHADE PEARL

What'll you tell them, the young people? What should they do?

Peregrine panics.

PEREGRINE

I don't know. I need paper--

She reaches under the tiny bed for paper.

PEREGRINE

Why do I always do this, wait until the last minute?

Instead of paper, she comes up with a well-worn SF
Giants baseball cap.

LEJEUNE

Tommy-Charmey left you.

PEREGRINE

I left him.

SHADE PEARL

He's gone. You have no one.

LeJeune takes the cap and puts it on. Prima sings...

PRIMA

Black-- bird.

LEJEUNE

I miss him. He made me laugh. Why did he leave?

PEREGRINE

He gave up, I can't give up. I never give up.

LEJEUNE

Hard-headed, stubborn, old... you chased him off.

SHADE PEARL

How old am I?

PEREGRINE

60, I will be 60.

SHADE PEARL

What's in a number?

LEJEUNE

You're old now. Sixty.

Everything stops. Peregrine climbs into her tiny, tiny bed.
She doesn't fit.

PEREGRINE

Better get some sleep.

LEJEUNE

You're giving up.

What about the speech?
SHADE PEARL

I'll wing it.
PEREGRINE

She closes her eyes. LeJeune and Shade Pearl also close their eyes, rest.

As they close down, Prima emerges.

SCENE TWO

Prima slow motion slides/falls, singing a song from Peregrine's youth.

PRIMA

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to arise*

LeJeune joins Prima... enacting a dream image: the memory of children sliding down the hill on cardboard, falling.

PRIMA

*Black bird singing in the dead of night
Take these sunken eyes and learn to see
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to be free*

Now Shade Pearl joins them, in a lovely triple image of sliding/flailing.

PRIMA

*Blackbird fly, Blackbird fly
Into the light of the dark black night.
(repeating)
You were only waiting for this moment to arise*

As they land, Peregrine sits up.

Peregrine looks at the time flashing on the wall. **2:43.**

PEREGRINE

2:43. Oh god. Why can't I sleep?

LEJEUNE & PRIMA

'Blackbird fly...'

SHADE PEARL

Write the speech. Winging it has not worked well for you in the past.

PEREGRINE

I know too much. If this was a movie I would have been killed twenty minutes ago. Ever notice there's no mature women in movies-- because they'd be the ones to say, 'Are you fucking kidding me? Don't do that.'

LEJEUNE

(parroting)

Are you fucking kidding me? Don't do that

Shade Pearl encroaches.

PEREGRINE

Don't.

LEJEUNE

Don't do that.

Peregrine hides in her bed from Shade Pearl who keeps coming.

PEREGRINE

I know too much.

Shade Pearl stops near Peregrine, whispers:

SHADE PEARL

Are you fucking kidding me?

Peregrine does not move.

PEREGRINE

I'm up, I'm up, I'm doing it--

She's not.

SHADE PEARL

Ladies and gentlemen...

PEREGRINE

No, really, I have nothing to say.

SHADE PEARL

Why'd you agree to give a speech?

Peregrine grunts her displeasure.

PEREGRINE

They're giving me an award. What was I supposed to do?

SHADE PEARL

Ladies and gentlemen...

Acquiescing, Peregrine finds her hat, puts it on.

PEREGRINE

Ladies... I can't. Really, this is too much. I'm old, it's late, I have nothing to say, I need to lie down.

SHADE PEARL

If I could just lay my body down...

PEREGRINE

If I could just lay my body down...relinquish exhausted flesh...

SHADE PEARL

Fly from cracking bones... let go my old fat friend...

PEREGRINE

Leave her in my bed...

LEJEUNE

The I that is me that imagines release...

PEREGRINE

Could meet you for dinner...

SHADE PEARL

Visit Tibet.

LEJEUNE

Return to my grandma's kitchen.

PEREGRINE

I could be the soil in daVinci's garden...

SHADE PEARL

The water rushing from the Madonna's eyes...

LEJEUNE
The light in Einstein's mind.

PEREGRINE
I want to race naked on the beach at sunset...

SHADE PEARL
Laughing...

PEREGRINE
Leaping lover.

LEJEUNE
I want to be the future...

PEREGRINE
Again. .. If I could just lay my body down.

LEJEUNE
The Dear Old Body...

SHADE PEARL
Not the Dear Old Body!

PEREGRINE
The Dear Body.

Peregrine takes her hat off.

LEJEUNE
The only reason you're calling it 'dear' is because it's old. You never called it anything but 'my body' before it started aching, creaking, sagging, farting, cracking and thickening.

SHADE PEARL
I do not fart.

They look at her in disbelief. She concedes.

SHADE PEARL
I get stomach aches if I don't release the pressure.

PEREGRINE
Ah, the Dear Body.

LEJEUNE
Old.

PEREGRINE
Coffee, coffee, coffee. If I have to work.

She rushes around looking for coffee. LeJeune BARKS like an excited dog.

LEJEUNE

Ruff-ruff! Coffee, do I smell coffee?

PEREGRINE

Dog thinking. Coffee, coffee.

SHADE PEARL

O Fortunate One with the empty mind...

Suddenly, Prima grunts and struts her theme song.

PRIMA

Unh-Unh--un-un. Un-un-un-- Unh-- un-un. Un-un-un-- Unh-- un-un. Un-un-un-- Unh. Unh. Unh. Unh.

Just as suddenly, the other three join her, strutting and grunting.

ALL WOMEN

Unh-un-un. Un-un-un-- Unh-- un-un. Un-un-un-- Unh-- un-un. Un-un-un-- Unh. Unh. Unh. Unh.

Peregrine stops as unexpectedly as she started.

PEREGRINE

I can't do this, I know too much.

SHADE PEARL

I don't know anything.

Shade Pearl stops, too, but Prima and LeJeune go on.

LEJEUNE

No! We know it! We know it! Unh-un-un...!

SHADE PEARL

Stop it.

Hurt, but trying to maintain her dignity, LeJeune struts and grunts a wilted version of the theme song as she makes her way to a hiding spot on the wall. LeJeune hurls the downbeats at the others in rebellion. Prima continues the movement, but goes silent. Eventually, she climbs back and away.

LEJEUNE

Unh-un-un. Un-un-un-- Unh-- un-un.

PEREGRINE

I hate giving speeches. Too much has happened, I'm paralyzed.

SHADE PEARL

Start in the middle.

PEREGRINE

The middle is so-- long.

SHADE PEARL

Start where you are.

PEREGRINE

What is it about speeches? Why do I balk?

SHADE PEARL

I don't know anything.

PEREGRINE

I was so confident when I knew nothing. Can an old brain learn new tricks?

LeJeune barks like a dog again.

SHADE PEARL

Aging brains continue to develop in certain circumstances...

LEJEUNE

My brain is not finished developing.

PEREGRINE & SHADE PEARL

(as in 'Shut up!')

Correct.

PEREGRINE

What circumstances?

SHADE PEARL

Disorienting Dilemmas. You love your mother, should you unplug her?

PEREGRINE

My mother is not on life support!

SHADE PEARL

But that would be a disorienting dilemma.

LEJEUNE

Don't pull the plug!

PEREGRINE

She's fine!

SHADE PEARL

Your divorce.

PEREGRINE

I don't want to talk about that.

SHADE PEARL

Disorienting dilemmas grow new brain cells.

PEREGRINE

Like if you're dropped in the middle of Tibet with no money and you don't speak Tibetan.

SHADE PEARL

That wouldn't be a problem. The Tibetan people are open-hearted.

PEREGRINE

I'm sure there are Tibetan criminals, let's be real. Anyway, you would have to figure out how to communicate, learn bits of language, work out trades for travel and food perhaps, orient yourself with a map-- all of that would create new connections in your brain. New chemical pathways.

LEJEUNE

I'm game.

SHADE PEARL

Unless you were alone atop Qomolangma Peak in mid-winter without a coat. That adventure could kill you.

PEREGRINE

Okay, so not a fatal experience, but something disorienting. If you always hang around with people you agree with, and read things that agree with what you already know your brain will atrophy.

SHADE PEARL

That could kill you.

PEREGRINE

What?

SHADE PEARL

(becoming transfixed)

It's cold up there. Qomolangma is over 29,000 feet high. Many people have died--

PEREGRINE

Why are you stuck on that?

SHADE PEARL

Why do people climb mountains?

LEJEUNE

It's disorienting.

PEREGRINE

And if you were robbed by a bad seed Tibetan that would be even better because this would cause you to reflect on your assumption that all Tibetans are good. Therefore challenging an established thought pattern... and growing your old brain.

LEJEUNE

My first period was in November.

PEREGRINE

What?!

SHADE PEARL

(explaining)

I was disoriented.

LEJEUNE

I didn't tell anyone, just folded toilet paper to shield my panties. I walked to church in a new dress we'd ordered from the Sears catalog, the pretty blue and black plaid with a white collar. When I sat in the wooden pew at church, I was worried about the back of the dress, so I perched on one hip and then the other. I didn't tell my mother until the following month when it came back.

PEREGRINE

My last period was in November. I was shooting in the desert, leading a crew of seventy men, hemorrhaging blood, soaking through pads and tampons every twenty minutes. Jumping in the van for a long ride to a bathroom when I could stand it no more. Kept my coat on all day.

LEJEUNE

Don't like to ask for help.

PEREGRINE

Right, can you hear me saying, sorry I can't work today, I'm on my period. Right. I never had a heavy period until menopause. I don't understand how I am this old. It's like... BOOM, you're old!

SHADE PEARL

Tired, heavy, slow. Thinking a little sluggish.

PEREGRINE

Can't rely on intuition anymore, knowledge has jammed up the works.

LEJEUNE

Psyche. Soma. Intelligi-hootsia. Intuitionatsia. Rachmaninoff. Apollo, Rome, Greek food. What?

PRIMA

Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

PEREGRINE

Lonely, sad, confused. In the hour after dusk mostly.

SHADE PEARL

If only I could restrain it to that hour.

Peregrine studies the shaft of light.

PEREGRINE

Slanted rays at twilight. The dying light moves so slowly to the top of the magnolia it seems like no movement at all.

SHADE PEARL

Good, an empty mind. Write.

PEREGRINE

They don't really care what I say, they want me to help them get work. They want a mentor. Mentoring makes me feel old. Makes me feel like my time is limited. I'm expected to be kind and motherly and give advice and make room for them in my field. There's barely room for me in my field. Sometimes there is none.

LEJEUNE

Can we have coffee? I'd like to hear your story.

PEREGRINE

I feel like a jerk if I say no to coffee. After the small talk, the finding a table, the getting of drinks, they all want the same thing.

LEJEUNE

How can you help me get a job?

PEREGRINE

I am a free-lancer, competing for the same jobs they want. Yet they expect me to be...

SHADE PEARL

A sacrificing mother.

PEREGRINE

That's what old women are-- helps to everyone else. And when they don't, won't, can't, they are bitches.

LEJEUNE

I love bitches.

SHADE PEARL

I am a bitch.

PEREGRINE

So be it.

LEJEUNE

Tell them the truth.

SHADE PEARL

Which is what?

PEREGRINE

I'm not a bitch, but god, stop pulling at me.

SHADE PEARL

Why am I the one who always knows what to do?

LEJEUNE

The calm one.

PEREGRINE

Things go wrong, people go nuts and I think, fuck, let me take care of this. If I was in a movie I'd be dead in the first twenty minutes.

SHADE PEARL

I don't know what it means to get old. I need a mentor.

PEREGRINE

How can I give advice... when I need advice. One girl looked at me with such earnestness, such a bright girl...

LEJEUNE

What's it like from your vantage point? What's it like to be smart, successful and older? How I should live? What should I look out for? I ask my mother, but she won't tell me. She's a beautiful woman, my mother, but she can't accept a compliment.

SHADE PEARL

So devastated by the humiliations of age she cannot bear even a momentary reference to how she looks.

LEJEUNE

Why can she not see that she is beautiful?

PEREGRINE

The caving mouth, the sagging breasts, the bleary red eyes, the thickening fat and thinning skin. Where is the beauty again? In the young ones swarming around us looking for mentors.

LEJEUNE

No, you are beautiful.

PEREGRINE

She is mentoring me.

SHADE PEARL

Oh la la. Courage. Focus. It's not about looks, is it.

PEREGRINE

But good looks are so much fun.

LEJEUNE

That's what I'm saying... I dream about sex, I wake up with a smile. Where did that go... that... touching?

SHADE PEARL

You scared him away.

PEREGRINE

No.

LEJEUNE

It wasn't me.

SHADE PEARL

You fell in love with him because he didn't fit in, and then you spent seventeen years berating him for not fitting in.

PEREGRINE

Liar!

SHADE PEARL

Look at it.

PEREGRINE

Tommy-Charmey made me laugh in the middle of sex. I was crazy about him.

SHADE PEARL

You hammered, you nagged...

PEREGRINE

I bullied. A little.

SHADE PEARL

You didn't let him stand up.

LEJEUNE

I like to sit in his lap. I love to sit in his lap.

Prima climbs on LeJeune, the duet becomes violent.

PEREGRINE

He's a man who needs to fight.

SHADE PEARL

Are you talking about yourself?

PEREGRINE

I don't know.

LEJEUNE

Fighting makes me feel alive. Sex makes me feel alive.

SHADE PEARL

He likes to fight but he couldn't fight you, he had to leave.

PEREGRINE

I left him.

SHADE PEARL

After you destroyed him. You destroyed him, then you left.

PEREGRINE

I'm not that kind of person.

SHADE PEARL

Hah!

Startled by this thought, Peregrine heats up, has a--

PEREGRINE

Hot flash...

They flush with unbearable heat, pull at their clothes, fight for air.

SHADE PEARL

Feeling her way in the dark...

PEREGRINE

The wave of heat explodes out of me like a wildfire.

LEJEUNE

Radiating fever in all directions...

PEREGRINE

My underarms drip...

SHADE PEARL

Every crevice of the Dear Body dampens, light-headed now.

PEREGRINE

Blinking, blinking dry eyes, useless in the dark.

SHADE PEARL

Clothes off, clothes off!

LEJEUNE

Fishlike, gulping for oxygen, she heaves the door open.

PEREGRINE

Unnhhhh.

SHADE PEARL

Damp cold night overtakes her like opium.

PEREGRINE

Unnhhhh...

Prima softly hums Blackbird.

PEREGRINE

Sliding on cardboard down a hot hill, no waiting in line. All the kids slid and climbed, slid and climbed, screaming a thousand glees.

SHADE PEARL

How old am I?

PEREGRINE

12.

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| No. | SHADE PEARL |
| 59. | LEJEUNE |
| 59. | SHADE PEARL |
| 59. Unnhhhh. I have sinned. | PEREGRINE |
| Yes. | SHADE PEARL |
| I have hurt people. | PEREGRINE |
| Yes. | SHADE PEARL |
| I'm sorry... I was wrong... | PEREGRINE |
| No one can hear you. | SHADE PEARL |
| I was selfish... | PEREGRINE |
| It's too late. | SHADE PEARL |
| He's gone. | LEJEUNE |
| I'm sorry. | PEREGRINE |
| Tell him. | LEJEUNE |
| It doesn't matter. | SHADE PEARL |
| Tell him. | LEJEUNE |

PEREGRINE

Tommy-Charmey... I sinned against you.

SHADE PEARL

Call him.

LEJEUNE

Before you lose your nerve.

Prima hands Peregrine her phone. Peregrine paws at it, looking for a number. She dials.

PEREGRINE

Something is wrong with me. I'm not a good person. I find fault, I criticize-- mean, relentless-- I want everyone to do what I say-- no wonder they kill me in the first twenty minutes of the movie. Why am I so sure I'm right, then things turn out so wrong?

She hears a man's voice on voicemail: "Leave a message." Her internal monologue freezes as she struggles with what to say to her ex-husband.

PEREGRINE

It's me. Calling to... it's not that I want to get together, I know that's not... I know it was my fault, I'm not calling to... I don't... want... all I want...

(Long terrible pause... she doesn't know what she wants.)

Tommy... oh...

Suddenly aghast at herself she hangs up. Peregrine stares at Prima.

PEREGRINE

Why did you make me do that?

Prima smiles enigmatically, shows Peregrine the Eight of Spades. Peregrine takes the phone apart...

LEJEUNE

Close my eyes, take slow breaths.

PEREGRINE

Concentrate on what's in front of me.

| | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Eat. | SHADE PEARL |
| Hug my thumbs. | LEJEUNE |
| Eating helps. | SHADE PEARL |
| Do something ordinary. Avoid catastrophic thinking. | LEJEUNE |
| Eating is anti-panic activity. | SHADE PEARL |
| What's the worst that could happen... humiliation? Check. | PEREGRINE |
| Call somebody. | LEJEUNE |
| | This agitates them all. |
| No! | SHADE PEARL |
| Panic, panic. | LEJEUNE |
| No calling, no calling. | PEREGRINE |
| No tears. | SHADE PEARL |
| Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. | PRIMA |
| What am I afraid of? | PEREGRINE |
| | Prima sh-sh-sh's them into calmness. |
| Being alone. | LEJEUNE |
| Sick. Poor. | SHADE PEARL |

PEREGRINE

Ah, getting old is fine. Who cares? Happens to everyone. All this yammering is a screen for something else, some other fear. Dying, I guess.

SHADE PEARL

But not that either, really, is it? Gonna die, big deal, gonna happen. Happening all around me. Melinda died at 59. My brother died at 44.

LEJEUNE

My mom's going to die. I can hear it in her voice.

PEREGRINE

Is that what I fear more than dying, being alone?

SHADE PEARL

I like being alone.

PEREGRINE

I don't care about getting old, looking old. I don't care about mistakes made in the past. About my mother dying, Tommy-Charmey leaving.

LEJEUNE

(correcting her)

I left him. And I love my mother... I don't want her to die. I will miss her.

PEREGRINE

I remember her cruelties, her kindnesses. To me, to my father. It's all there when I look at her in the hospital bed. Do I love her?

LEJEUNE

Yes.

SHADE PEARL

Do I love anyone?

PEREGRINE

This part of me that is talking now doesn't care much about anything... about myself... herself. This part of me that is talking now is kind of dead. .

LEJEUNE

I need my mother. Don't say these things.

PEREGRINE

I damaged her, as she did me. Tommy-Charmey and I damaged each other. I did all kinds of things to convince myself and everyone else, that I wasn't a bad person for doing these things, but maybe I was, maybe I am.

LEJEUNE

I'm not.

SHADE PEARL

Keep going.

PEREGRINE

I can be harsh. I know this. I try to mitigate it, try to hide it, try to convince everyone that I am so nice, but my thoughts slice like razors. I'm tired of play-acting at being a good person all the time.

LEJEUNE

Am I a bad person?

PEREGRINE

My nerve endings are burnt out from too much empathy, too much caring and sensitivity and blah, blah, blah. I am exhausted from the show... cannot feel what is real anymore.

LEJEUNE

I want my mother.

PEREGRINE

She's real.

SHADE PEARL

After she went through 'the Change'...

LEJEUNE

'The Change of Life'...

PEREGRINE

Funny old phrase...

SHADE PEARL

The niceness was burned off, leaving the flint of her actual self, her actual thoughts.

LEJEUNE

I have always loved her, but I love her even more now.

SHADE PEARL

A hard old bird.

PEREGRINE

Not mean, but truthful. I would like to be like that. As honest as if I were dying.

Prima's humming lifts into wordless singing. A peaceful, open moment.

PEREGRINE

I don't care. That's the unspeakable... I don't give a shit about any of it. I'm numb. I'm tired of the fight. All I care about is my work, really, and I fear... even that doesn't matter.

LEJEUNE

You never had children, you chased him away, you chased them all away. For what?

SHADE PEARL

I watched my mother give herself away, over and over. I chose not to do that.

PEREGRINE

... I've sacrificed so many relationships for work... for films that never happened. Stories about relationships...

SHADE PEARL

Is it only women who worry about this?

LEJEUNE

The film about my brother, will I ever make that?

PEREGRINE

And now even that-- confidence in my work-- is fading.

SHADE PEARL

That's why you're so angry with the young ones... they have passion..

PEREGRINE

Do they? They speak about it enough, but it's a word that's been drained of meaning. It's offensive to hear so many inexperienced people speak of their 'passion'. As if it matters. What matters is work. What are you making with your hands? Who are you touching? Where are you walking with your feet? I ask you.

SHADE PEARL

I ask you.

PEREGRINE

Me? I've been sleepwalking. And if I don't wake up soon it will all be over.

SCENE THREE (CONTINUOUS)

A LOUD KNOCKING.

All the women freeze, turn, look at the entrance. Look at each other. Maybe that didn't really happen. As they begin to move freely again, there is another **KNOCK**. More urgent.

PEREGRINE

(stumped)

Who? I have always meant to put a peephole in that door.

Shade Pearl and LeJeune cling to the wall, all but hidden. Prima hides in a crazy hanging place, not hidden, but she feels safe. Peregrine stands in the middle of the room--staring at the door, frozen with indecision.

SHADE PEARL

Once it's open, it is open.

LEJEUNE

Oh my god... I want a gun... I want a gun...

PEREGRINE

Don't be idiotic.

Another **KNOCK**, but this one is gentle, final, giving up. The women look at each other. Whisper--

LEJEUNE

What if they go away and we never know the story behind the knock?

SHADE PEARL

Lot of mysteries in life, don't worry about it.

Peregrine puts on her jaunty hat, crosses to the entrance. There is **REGGIE**, a small, spry man in his sixties, dressed in a nicely cut tuxedo jacket over pajamas.

REGGIE

Are you alright?

As soon as they see Reggie the women move in unison, except Prima who stays still, watching like a predator.

PEREGRINE

Reggie!?

REGGIE

I'm sorry, Peregrine, I was worried.

SHADE PEARL

What?

REGGIE

I don't mean to impose, but you sounded so...

What? LEJEUNE

I shouldn't have come. I'll leave. REGGIE

What are you doing here? PEREGRINE

You sounded so... REGGIE

So what, dammit...?! SHADE PEARL

... Unlike yourself. REGGIE

Perch and rotate. SHADE PEARL
(giving him the finger)

You heard my phone message? PEREGRINE

Remind me-- who is this man again? LEJEUNE

Fuck him. SHADE PEARL

I shouldn't have... REGGIE

Did Tommy call you? PEREGRINE

No, you did. REGGIE

I didn't call you. PEREGRINE

About half an hour ago. You sounded-- REGGIE

That was a private phone call, you little prick... SHADE PEARL

THE YOUNG KING

You sounded desperate.

THE YOUNG KING, 35, appears in an unlikely spot, part of Reggie, yet not, like Shade Pearl, LeJeune and Prima are part of Peregrine. He is elegant, athletic and filled with compassion. Oh, and occasionally arrogant. He wears a tuxedo.

REGGIE

When a phone rings in the middle of the night...

THE YOUNG KING

I thought you might need help.

LEJEUNE

(stricken with love)

Help.

PEREGRINE

(realizing)

I called the wrong number.

SHADE PEARL

Get rid of him.

PEREGRINE

I put in Tommy's last name and my phone filled in your number instead of his.

LEJEUNE

Who is he?

SHADE PEARL

Reginald Charmey, III.

PEREGRINE

Tommy-Charmey's brother. My ex-brother-in-law.

LEJEUNE

(eying the Young King)

So then it's legal, if I... right?

SHADE PEARL

Back off.

REGGIE

I apologize for disturbing you, I shouldn't have come.

THE YOUNG KING

I'm here to save you.

REGGIE

I was afraid you were going to...

PEREGRINE

(remembering)

Reggie, sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you.

REGGIE

No, no, it's okay.

LEJEUNE

What?

PEREGRINE

His girlfriend...

SHADE PEARL

Killed herself...

PEREGRINE

Years ago.

REGGIE

I didn't mean to make a big deal of this... if it's not.

LEJEUNE

(realizing)

He couldn't save her...

PEREGRINE

Why didn't you just call back?

She looks toward her destroyed phone.

REGGIE

I tried. No answer.

THE YOUNG KING

That's when I decided to save you.

LeJeune falls in mock swoon, hoping the Young King will save her.

Oh my...

LEJEUNE

And he does. The Young King swoops her into his arms, saving her.

Shade Pearl cannot tolerate this farce.

SHADE PEARL

Oh for god's sake.
(commanding LeJeune)

Pick him up.

LEJEUNE

What, no, he's saving me.

SHADE PEARL

Pick him up.

LeJeune obeys Shade Pearl. She flips out of The Young King's arms and picks him up, toting him on her back.

SHADE PEARL

Go. Go.

She indicates Reggie. LeJeune carries the Young King, deposits him behind Reggie.

SHADE PEARL
(to the Young King)

Stay.
(to Peregrine)

Close the door.

PEREGRINE

I was trying to contact Tommy.

REGGIE

He's out of the country.

PEREGRINE

You must have known this wasn't for you.

SHADE PEARL

He knew.

THE YOUNG KING

I thought you called me.

I thought... REGGIE

I hoped... THE YOUNG KING

My mistake. Sorry for frightening you. PEREGRINE

Stillness for a moment.

Are you alright? REGGIE

Yes, good night. SHADE PEARL

Peregrine looks away. Prima FALLS, CRASHES, startling everyone. A pause long enough for stillness to reign once more...

You want a drink? I'm going to have one. PEREGRINE

SCENE FOUR (CONTINUOUS)

Reggie and the Young King enter the cave, which now somehow feels like an apartment.

The Young King touches things, the walls, the bed. LeJeune follows him from a distance. Prima climbs on him, but he tosses her off, intent on LeJeune.

Peregrine uses a small remote to turn off the sound of waves which has been ongoing from the beginning. The silence is rather awful.

Sorry, my sound machine. Supposed to help me sleep. Doesn't seem to work. PEREGRINE

I never sleep anymore. SHADE PEARL

What's the matter? What happened? REGGIE

PEREGRINE

I have to give a speech and I don't know what to say.

REGGIE

That's it?

PEREGRINE

If I do well, they'll hire me to teach. I need employment.

SHADE PEARL

I need, I need, I need...

PEREGRINE

Bourbon?

REGGIE

Sure. A speech about what?

PEREGRINE

I'm getting an award for a commercial I shot. I'm supposed to inspire a bunch of MFA students with accumulated wisdom... of which I seem to have none.

SHADE PEARL

Feels like writing my own obituary.

REGGIE

It's a job interview.

PEREGRINE

Not feeling especially good about my work at the moment.

(handing him a shot of Bourbon)

Oh, and tomorrow's my birthday. The big Six-Oh.

REGGIE

Ah. You were calling Tommy to...?

PEREGRINE

Apologize for being a castrating bitch who wouldn't let him breathe.

SHADE PEARL

Harsh... but true.

LEJEUNE

I like him, Tommy-Charney, he's funny.

(to the Young King)

Are you funny?

The Young King makes a funny move. Delighted,
LeJeune goes toward him.

REGGIE

Let's not blow this out of proportion because it's the middle of the night and you're feeling bad... my brother's kind of an ass.

PEREGRINE

And I'm kind of a bitch.

SHADE PEARL

Bitch.

LEJEUNE

Bitch.

REGGIE

I'm kind of a loser.

THE YOUNG KING

No! I'm the guy who saves her.

SHADE PEARL

Loser.

REGGIE

Bitch.

Peregrine toasts Reggie.

PEREGRINE

Loser, bitch, assholes... hey, Know Thyself, right?

SHADE PEARL

Socrates.

He toasts her.

REGGIE

... 'the deep dark truthful mirror.'

PEREGRINE

Richard Rorty...?

REGGIE

Elvis. Costello.

They drink, the silence stretches.

PEREGRINE

Should I put the sound machine back on? It's peaceful, right?

She clicks the remote, the sound of waves fills the room again. Starts off tinny, builds to luscious fullness again.

REGGIE

Straight up-- were you thinking of-- ?

PEREGRINE

I'm not the suicidal type. More manic, neurotic, eat-myself-and-everyone-around-me-alive type.

REGGIE

Your message spooked me.

PEREGRINE

Made you think of... what was her name?

REGGIE

Carolyn.

PEREGRINE

Yeah, Carolyn. I'm sorry.

REGGIE

It was a long time ago.

PEREGRINE

You found her.

REGGIE

In the morning. No phone call that night.

PEREGRINE

Reggie, I didn't mean to... but I'm glad you're here.

REGGIE

Oh yeah?

PEREGRINE

Yeah.

REGGIE

Why?

PEREGRINE

I don't know. Maybe I'm not.

REGGIE

Don't take it back.

PEREGRINE

Okay.

REGGIE

I was awake. I don't sleep much either. I work at night.

Reggie and Peregrine begin a duet as they speak. Other duets appear... as the innocuous language floats above the real action.

PEREGRINE

You still writing about sports?

REGGIE

I've got a weekly radio show and a blog. No pictures, don't want to scare people away with this old mug. Every morning I look in the mirror I feel like I'm shaving my dad. Who's in your mirror?

PEREGRINE

My grandma Pearl. I've said for years I'm curious to see what I'll look like as an old woman. No face-lifts, no hormones for me, none of that. Now I am seeing it... but it's too soon.

REGGIE

Yeah.

He pours them each another shot of Bourbon, hands it to her. They clink glasses. They drink.

THE YOUNG KING

You have a beautiful body.

PEREGRINE

You must be hard up.

SHADE PEARL

Mean.

LEJEUNE

Why can't you accept a compliment?

PEREGRINE

It's a lie I watch people notice the details of my aging face. Yesterday someone I hadn't seen in a while looked at me curiously and said, 'You got old.'

REGGIE

Who would say that?

PEREGRINE

I'm sure I've said things like that. You'd think it wouldn't be such a shock, getting old.

REGGIE

Takes me an hour to wake up and twenty minutes to pee these days.

PEREGRINE

Right. You're going along like always, the body you've known since you were a teenager-- forty years with a body-- this is your body, this is you-- then suddenly WHAM-- old body. Tired, stiff, weak. Inside I'm the same-- but someone has stolen my body and replaced it with an old woman. Makes me sad.

REGGIE

I know.

SHADE PEARL

I need to be alone in a place I can be naked.

REGGIE

I love to look at women, but I can't... I don't... anymore.

THE YOUNG KING

I love to be naked. With women. Naked with women.

LeJeune starts to undress herself.

LEJEUNE

I am too young for the caving in, heavily lined mouth of my mother.

PEREGRINE

I'm shocked by mirrors, I avoid them.

THE YOUNG KING

I'll be your mirror...

The Young King reaches for LeJeune who suddenly moves away from him.

A moment for recovering, quietness. Starting again with a safe subject, and exactly the same movement as before.

REGGIE

What's the award?

PEREGRINE

I made a TV ad for a watch company. I think it may have been the peak of my film-making career and I didn't realize it.

REGGIE

Have I seen it?

PEREGRINE

Guy and a girl wake up in a tent rapidly filling with water-- summer storm. Their watches float by their noses-- they grab the watches and run for it across a beach. Lightning flashes-- we see him drop his watch, it bounces off a rock, he grabs it. She yells out 'Serpentine!' Like goofballs they run in an S-pattern to trick the lightning.

LeJeune & Prima run Serpentine for a few beats!

PEREGRINE

They get to their car-- laughing, kissing. He shows her his watch-- still working.

REGGIE

Didn't that happen to you and Tommy on your honeymoon?

SHADE PEARL

On the beach in Florida.

PEREGRINE

Only our watches never worked again.

REGGIE

You got paid, you won an award, what's the problem?

PEREGRINE

I pimped one of my favorite memories for commercial gain.

REGGIE

You're concerned about selling out? Really? Don't you trust yourself more than that?

PEREGRINE

I'm afraid I'm running out of time. What if this is it? This is what I'm known for. I'll walk in tomorrow and some kid will yell out, 'Serpentine!' And they'll all start running in an S-pattern.

Prima, LeJeune & the Young King run Serpentine!

REGGIE

That's great. Do they even know it's Peter Falk and Alan Arkin?

SHADE PEARL

No.

PEREGRINE

Then I'll go to the podium and try to advise them on how to use their authentic emotions for their work... even if the work is a piece of crap.

REGGIE

Tell them what you know how to do-- which is to hold onto your point of view while making a living.

PEREGRINE

I have no advice for anyone, I can't give a speech. It's hypocritical.

REGGIE

So don't. Call in sick.

All the women respond with shock.

PEREGRINE

I would never do that.

REGGIE

You should consider fucking up once in awhile, it's liberating. The world doesn't end.

Reggie and the Young King do the Fuck-up Dance, entertaining the women who eventually join in.

REGGIE

You fuck up, you fuck up. Everybody fucks up.

PEREGRINE

I don't.

REGGIE

Yes, you do. Like calling me tonight.

SHADE PEARL

I do.

LEJEUNE

I do.

PEREGRINE

I do, but I hide it.

THE YOUNG KING

Me, too.

REGGIE

No, you don't. Everyone fucks up, and everyone sees it.

PEREGRINE

Fucking up in public, I hate that.

LEJEUNE

Embarrassing.

PEREGRINE

Humiliating.

SHADE PEARL

Disorienting.

REGGIE

Good practice. You're human, admit it.

PEREGRINE

Getting old is like fucking up. It's humiliating.

SHADE PEARL

A disorienting dilemma.

REGGIE

What?

PEREGRINE

Supposedly the best thing for an aging brain is a 'disorienting dilemma.' Keeps your mind alive and growing, literally building brain cells. Like learning a new language, starting a new career, doing something you've never done before.

REGGIE

Fucking up in public.

PEREGRINE

A little disorienting for the high-achieving good girl.

SHADE PEARL

Looking like hell.

REGGIE

Saying things people don't want to hear.

PEREGRINE

Dilemmas.

REGGIE

Giving a speech.

PEREGRINE

I've been thinking of ways to get out of it. When I was a kid and had to give a speech, I read a poem...

LeJeune marches around giving a nonsense speech.
Cadences and rhythms sound right, but all she says is--

LEJEUNE

La-la-la, la-la-la-la. La. La-la.

PEREGRINE

Do you remember.. Something about 'a child of the universe...' Something like that?

REGGIE

Oh yeah-- what was that thing called?

PEREGRINE

Carmina Burata. No, that's a mixture of a Carl Orff opera and an Italian cheese.

LEJEUNE

'No less than the trees and the stars'.

REGGIE

Something -arata. Or am I thinking of Tubular Bells?

PEREGRINE

Ohmygod, Tubular Bells.

SHADE PEARL

Stop. The moment will come... and then it will pass. What do I say?

PEREGRINE

Un-fucking-stoppable time. What is that? The arrow of Time-- why does it only go one way? We are not sure of absolutely anything except the unstoppable of time.

REGGIE

You'll have to say something.

The Young King and LeJeune begin a shy seductive duet.

PEREGRINE

All night I keep thinking of our old house, my first house with Tommy-Charney. Why is it on my mind?

REGGIE

You still in love with my brother?

PEREGRINE

I've made mistakes.

REGGIE

Yeah. Well.

PEREGRINE

Mistake to get out of the car that night and walk those last few blocks alone.

REGGIE

Mistake not to punch back.

PEREGRINE

Mistake to pretend it didn't happen.

REGGIE

Mistake to take the money.

PEREGRINE

Mistake to hold out for more money.

REGGIE

Mistake to do work I hate.

PEREGRINE

Mistake not to push ahead.

REGGIE

Mistake to postpone writing my book until I can't hear my own voice anymore.

PEREGRINE

Mistake to say things are okay when they're not.

REGGIE

Mistake to tell off the boss.

She turns to him.

PEREGRINE

But it felt good, didn't it?

REGGIE

Mistake to do it, mistake not to do it.

PEREGRINE

(sudden insight)

Mahabharata! No. What is the name of that poem?

SHADE PEARL

It doesn't matter.

Prima exposes the Eight of Spades. Peregrine and Shade Pearl are distracted by it.

PEREGRINE

The meaning, what is the meaning of it? I don't get it.

SHADE PEARL

I'm afraid...

LEJEUNE

Me too.

REGGIE

Me too.

THE YOUNG KING

I'm not.

Reggie stops The Young King, who is caught in a lie.

PEREGRINE

You are?

REGGIE

Sure.

PEREGRINE

What are you afraid of?

REGGIE

Losing my mind. My memories. My ability to make love to a woman. My desire to make love to a woman, to feel like a man. When Carolyn died I went inside and closed the door. When I woke up I was old. It's like the end now, near the end in a way, the last part anyway, of my life, and I have to step up, you know, step out. I don't know if I can anymore, but.. if not now, when, right?

PEREGRINE

Hillel the Elder.

Is that who said that?
 REGGIE

Yeah.
 SHADE PEARL

Yeah.
 PEREGRINE

I'm strong. I'm still strong, I'm young. I can do things.
 LEJEUNE

I can do things. Watch this--
 THE YOUNG KING

The older ones stare at the younger ones who move in a
 defiant duet.

Mistake to run around so much.
 PEREGRINE

Not a mistake.
 REGGIE

Mistake to wait until the last minute to write a speech.
 PEREGRINE

I don't know what I would say.
 REGGIE

How does anybody know what to say?
 PEREGRINE

I had a dream about people running around saying anything that came to their minds.
 REGGIE

Like real life.
 SHADE PEARL

I was so freaked out. I kept saying... 'Where's my script? Where's my script?'
 REGGIE

'Where's my speech? Where's my speech?'
 SHADE PEARL

I didn't know what to say. People were just talking but it was like they were flinging
 knives at each other, unaware of the damage they were doing.
 REGGIE

(offering)

Inspirata?

Peregrine shakes her head, no.

REGGIE

In the dream I was scared shitless but I was also in awe of people just spitting out what they thought, what they felt. You could do that-- instead of writing a speech.

SHADE PEARL

Give up control?

LEJEUNE

I would be revealed.

THE YOUNG KING

What's wrong with that?

PEREGRINE

I'd screw it up, lose the job, then when it was over I'd think of the perfect things to say.

SHADE PEARL

So many nightmares.

LEJEUNE

So many dreams.

PEREGRINE

Do you have dreams now, Reggie?

REGGIE

I seem to have given up on a few things.

PEREGRINE

Yeah. My dreams are humbler now.

(could it be...?)

Deteriorata? Is that it? No. Yes... no.

REGGIE

What the hell is that called?

SHADE PEARL

The poem thing's not going to work.

PEREGRINE

Remember when everything was ahead of you?

REGGIE

Don't.

Don't do that.

SHADE PEARL

A breath, as they watch LeJeune and the Young King dance together, slower.

Mistake to marry Tommy-Charney?

PEREGRINE

Mistake to stay?

REGGIE

Mistake to divorce him?

PEREGRINE

Mistake to go to sleep that night?

REGGIE

Mistake to let go.

PEREGRINE

Mistake to hold on.

REGGIE

I don't know.

PEREGRINE

I don't want to think about all that.

REGGIE

She pours them both another shot.

To... losers.

PEREGRINE

LeJeune accidentally kicks the Young King down. He scrambles up.

No, man, no way. I got to go.

REGGIE

Sorry, don't go.

PEREGRINE

I was talking about myself.

LEJEUNE

I know I said loser before, but...

REGGIE

PEREGRINE

I was just being sarcastic, I'm sorry.

REGGIE

Believe me, I've thought about this. Lot of people think I'm a loser, my family, my brother. I pretty much braced myself against that. I don't let anybody in and I win the battle in here...

(taps his head)

Most of the time. In order to get up in the morning I got to believe in myself at least a little bit. So don't call me a loser.

PEREGRINE

I don't think you're...

She falters.

REGGIE

It's alright, you don't know me.

PEREGRINE

But I do.

REGGIE

Through my brother's eyes. You don't know *me*. And that's okay with me.

He and the Young King move to the exit.

LEJEUNE

No!

The Young King braces himself for another slap. Reggie protects the younger man.

PEREGRINE

Don't go. Please.

REGGIE

See ya.

She hardens, gives up.

PEREGRINE

Forget it, it doesn't matter.

REGGIE

It does matter. Cynicism's the enemy, Peregrine.

SHADE PEARL

I need my cynicism, I earned it.

REGGIE

It's corrosive--

THE YOUNG KING

You're like my brother.

PEREGRINE

I'm not cynical. I work. I get up everyday and work. What's the point of living if you can't work? What are we here for? I don't understand retirement. I love my work. Why in the hell would I stop doing something I love? I'm not tired, not that tired. So what if I have no children, no grandchildren and I don't like to knit? What if everybody I know dies and all the rest want nothing to do with me? Call me a loser.

REGGIE

Call me a loser.

SHADE PEARL

Loser. You never made the film about your brother.

PEREGRINE

So what? I wrote it. If nobody reads it, sees it, buys it, I work anyway. It's how I live. It's good. I have faith in the receiver of the work. Even if he's not born yet. Even if all my work is destroyed and there is no evidence left at all, someone will feel my effort. Work is a prayer.

REGGIE

Yes.

PEREGRINE

I'll keep working till I die. I'm not cynical. And still I feel like I'm going under.

He downs his Bourbon. He holds out a hand to her, inviting her to dance. She puts down her glass, he takes her in his arms. They dance slowly.

SHADE PEARL

It was a half moon that night, low in the sky. A platform in the woods covered in dried leaves. Moonlight through the trees in autumn...

LEJEUNE

Shhh-shhh-shhh...

SHADE PEARL

The sound of leaves shushing around our feet as we moved.

LeJeune waits for the Young King to come to her.

LEJEUNE

Shh-shh-shh...

Instead, he goes to Shade Pearl and dances slowly with her. LeJeune doesn't mind, she moves in tandem with them, alone.

LEJEUNE

His hand on the small of my back. My head on his shoulder. I knew... there would never be a better moment... shh-shh-shh... I knew it even then. Didn't want it to end.

Peregrine pulls away from Reggie.

LEJEUNE

But the unstoppable arrow of time always has its way.

Shade Pearl eases from the arms of the Young King. The two men are left standing arms open, empty.

LEJEUNE

Shh-shh-shh.

PEREGRINE

How to keep going when you have nothing left?

SHADE PEARL

Sometimes I don't feel anything.

LEJEUNE

Sometimes I turn away.

REGGIE

Like now.

PEREGRINE

If I died tomorrow have I been living the right life?

Ignoring that question, he takes her in his arms again. They dance. He whispers.

REGGIE

Tell me a secret.

PEREGRINE

I like to eat alone.

REGGIE

Hey, me, too. We should go together sometimes, sit at neighboring tables, alone.

PEREGRINE

With a book.

REGGIE

A newspaper.

PEREGRINE

A glass of wine.

REGGIE

No interruptions. Not much of a secret though.

During the following speech, she moves free of him. He goes back to his glass of Bourbon.

PEREGRINE

I ate alone at a restaurant last week before a job interview. Feeling confident. On time. I went to the parking garage to get my car to go to the meeting, but I couldn't find it... anywhere. I clicked the remote on my key so long the battery died. Nothing triggered my memory. I missed the meeting and still couldn't find my car. I cursed, I cried but that was useless. I walked outside and sat on the curb to the street, there was nowhere else to sit-- and read my book for hours as cars drove by. People staring, what is that older woman doing sitting on the curb? When the parking lot was ready to close I went back in. My car was the last one there. Didn't get the job.

(sips her Bourbon)

I'm not that kind of person. Though I guess I am now. That is a secret.

REGGIE

It's hell being free-lancers at our age. Two weeks ago I was looking for an assignment from a kid in his twenties who kept saying how much I reminded him...

PEREGRINE

... of his dad?

REGGIE

His grandfather.

PEREGRINE

No!

REGGIE

Yes. Dig that. He wanted to introduce me to his grand-dad, thought we'd really hit it off. Needless to say, no job.

PEREGRINE

Is that your secret?

REGGIE

I always thought you were hot.

PEREGRINE

No, no, I...

LEJEUNE

Thank you.

SHADE PEARL

Thank you.

PEREGRINE

But thank you for saying it.

REGGIE

I like that you called me. Even if it was a mistake.

PEREGRINE

I like that you showed up.

Reggie signals the Young King-- time to leave.

REGGIE

Thanks for the Bourbon.

PEREGRINE

What...?

SHADE PEARL

What...?

LEJEUNE

What just happened...?

REGGIE

Nothing.

THE YOUNG KING

I can't be responsible.

LEJEUNE
 For what?

THE YOUNG KING
 For you.

SHADE PEARL
 You're not.

REGGIE
 I know.

SHADE PEARL
 Do you?

LEJEUNE
 You want it. You don't want it. You want it...

THE YOUNG KING
 I don't, I do, I don't...

PEREGRINE
 I get it. Next thing you know she's calling you because she can't find her car, she can't find her keys, she can't find the meaning of her life... and your day is fucked.

SHADE PEARL
 I'm not the clingy type, never have been.

LEJEUNE
 I left Tommy-Charney, let's not forget that.

THE YOUNG KING
 That's not what he says.

REGGIE
 If I save you, you'll know me.

PEREGRINE
 Two things wrong with that thought-- you can't save me, we can only ever save ourselves. Two-- what's wrong with knowing you?

REGGIE
 I'm not that heroic.

PEREGRINE
 Really? Me either.

REGGIE

I may be over-thinking it.

PEREGRINE

Listen, if I ever get lost in a parking lot...

REGGIE

Try calling my brother again and I'll come over. We can go to a restaurant and eat at separate tables. With our books.

PEREGRINE

And newspapers. And wine.

He gestures to her tenderly.

REGGIE

Happy Birthday. Imagine you're turning thirty...

THE YOUNG KING

What would you do?

LEJEUNE

Become a yoga teacher and a gourmet cook who makes exquisite films that change people's lives.

SHADE PEARL

Fall in love slowly.

PEREGRINE

I would do what I felt like doing, I wouldn't think about it so much. I would--

Prima swings through the air, free, flying, singing.

PEREGRINE

Just be for awhile.

REGGIE

You should do that tomorrow, after your speech.

PEREGRINE

I have to go to the hospital. My mother fell.

REGGIE

Is she alright?

PEREGRINE

For now. That's what woke me up tonight, I had a dream she died and I didn't go to her funeral.

REGGIE

Why not?

SHADE PEARL

Too busy staring at the eight of spades.

PEREGRINE

It seemed to have great meaning.

LEJEUNE

I knew my mother had died and I was missing her funeral...

PEREGRINE

...but I was mesmerized by the card. And then I turned and saw a bullet coming at me. Someone shot me while I was distracted by the eight of spades.

REGGIE

Dead man's hand.

PEREGRINE

What?

REGGIE

Wild Bill Hickock's poker hand when he was shot--

THE YOUNG KING

Aces and eights.

REGGIE

He was probably staring at the eight of spades when the bullet went into his brain.

THE YOUNG KING

Maybe you're Wild Bill reincarnated.

PEREGRINE

I like that. I'm a gunslinger.

REGGIE

What speech would Wild Bill give?

SHADE PEARL

'You have until sun-up... to get out of my town.'

REGGIE

Tell your mother I said hello.

PEREGRINE

Will do. You know what's nice? Knowing someone over time.

REGGIE
 We got that going for us.

PEREGRINE
 Reggie... want to go to dinner? For my birthday.

The Young King catapults across the room, making
 LeJeune laugh.

REGGIE
 Sitting at the same table?

PEREGRINE
 I'll make an exception.

REGGIE
 I don't know if I can risk it.

PEREGRINE
 Be bold.

REGGIE
 Alright.

PEREGRINE
 Something low-key.

REGGIE
 I'll just show up, we'll see what we feel like.

PEREGRINE
 We'll think of something.

LEJEUNE
 Are they leaving?

SHADE PEARL
 Yes.

LEJEUNE
 No.

SHADE PEARL
 Let him go.

As Reggie leaves, he and the Young King become as one
 being. As they move out--

REGGIE

Hey, Wild Bill... focus on the gun.

PEREGRINE

Right.

The men leave. Peregrine remembers.

PEREGRINE

Desiderata. That's the poem.

LeJeune stares after the Young King.

LEJEUNE

I'm thinking I should have slept with him.

PEREGRINE

I can look up *Desiderata*... it might be interesting, it might trigger something...

SHADE PEARL

Don't. It's the Eight of Spades. Meaningless.

LEJEUNE

He's cute.

SHADE PEARL

(to Peregrine)

No distractions.

PEREGRINE

I'll just sit here until I get the right first line.

SHADE PEARL

The right question.

LEJEUNE

Will I ever have sex again?

SHADE PEARL

That's not it.

PRIMA

Shhhhh.

Prima swings out into the space, peaceful, soothing.

PRIMA

*Black bird singing in the dead of night
Blackbird fly, Blackbird fly*

Peregrine finds her speech. Already written.

PEREGRINE

My speech! I already wrote it. I forgot that I'd remembered to do it.

She scans it.

SHADE PEARL

Imagine... you believe in yourself.

LEJEUNE

Like I used to.

PEREGRINE

What would I do differently?

SHADE PEARL

What job would I quit? What story would I tell?

LEJEUNE

What man would I kiss? What speech would I give?

PEREGRINE

What would I make with my hands? Who would I want to touch?

PRIMA

Into the light of the dark black night.

SHADE PEARL

'Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

With your one wild and precious life?'

Peregrine tears the page of her speech... slowly.

As the others climb and fall, climb and fall in a repeating pattern, Peregrine sits still, looking into the distance of her future.

LEJEUNE

Oh Fortunate One, you have a body.

SHADE PEARL

For a little while longer...

Peregrine moves subtly in accord with the others, as the lights fade.

PEREGRINE

The Dear Body...

(End of play)

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