

While We Wait

By Ethan Pack
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CAST

Daniel

A young man in his late twenties or early thirties. In Act II, he is bald and undergoing chemotherapy.

Michael

A skinny, bald teenager undergoing chemotherapy.

Ruth

Daniel's mother: middle-aged, short.

Aria

An attractive young woman, younger than Daniel. Early to mid-twenties.

Ensemble

To create the various states of a waiting room, there will be a rotating cast of patients, caretakers, family members and nurses. To make production feasible, these roles should be double-cast, with costume changes effecting the distinction between roles. The purpose of these characters is to provide the Waiting Room with a realistic feel. But these figures – like the space – are also somewhat allegorical. They eventually take on a function somewhere between Daniel's projections and a Greek chorus.

This will demand a lot of flexibility on the part of the actors, whose characters range a great deal, particularly in terms of age. And yet the way that various characters in the Waiting Room seem to float from role to role is, in fact, crucial to the play's meaning. To the patient, high on fear and medicine, the identity of yesterday's secretary begins to blur with today's nurse and tomorrow's fellow patient.

What matters most for costuming and props are the ages and other specific details given below. Unless otherwise noted, the characters should wear Midwestern dress: jeans, casual shirts, even cowboy boots and hats. Outside of the particular points noted below, the director can decide how much resemblance to allow in the appearance of each actor under the guises of different characters. With the following double casting suggestions, the characters and actors will not overlap in any scene.

During scenes that utilize anonymous characters in the external quarter of the stage (outside the Waiting Room), as many free ensemble characters as can be assembled should participate.

Unless otherwise specified, all casting is race neutral.

Male Actor #1

Ruben: Daniel's brother. In his thirties.

Phil: a hefty, middle-aged white man. His wife is Lynne.

Herman: middle-aged. Carol's son and caregiver.

Male Actor #2

Claymon: *an elderly Black man with a cane, wearing a small suit jacket and hat. His wife is Eunice.*

Leonard: *a Black man in his sixties, with a walker. Casual dress.*

Male Actor #3

Business Man: *a white male in his thirties or forties. An entirely allegorical character, he is only seen by Daniel. He wears a suit.*

Simon: *Daniel's brother. In his thirties.*

Doctor: *the director has a lot of range here. It is essential, however, to make sure this character doesn't resemble Simon or Business Man. The Doctor should be made to look older than those two. As the Doctor does not appear until the final scene, the actor will have time to alter their appearance significantly.*

Female Actor #1

Nurse A: *middle-aged white woman. A typical Midwesterner: a bit loud, jolly, friendly. In uniform.*

Eric: *Daniel's father, a late middle-aged (sixties) male.*

Secretary A: *middle-aged woman.*

Female Actor #2

Nurse B: *middle-aged Black woman. Midwestern or Southern. In uniform.*

Eunice: *Claymon's wife, elderly black woman. Gray-hair pulled back in a bun.*

Female Actor #3

Secretary B and Nurse C: *middle-aged woman with British accent. The only difference is the Nurse wears a uniform.*

Carol: *a white woman in her sixties, in a wheelchair. She is accompanied by her son, Herman. Carol will require a significant costume distinction to show age: large white-haired wig, etc.*

Lynne: *Phil's wife, middle-aged. Few lines, mostly there as accompaniment.*

Alice: *Betsy's friend, middle-aged. No lines, strictly there as a caregiver.*

Female Actor #4

Anne: a very frail old white woman. She wears an oversized faux-fur coat that exaggerates her shrunken frame as it hangs loosely about her. Her face is entirely covered in cheap make-up, horrible shades of blue, as if it was painted on. But her eyes should convey an absurd liveliness of anxiety. She has a cane. She always sits next to the stack of pamphlets in the Waiting Room.

Betsy: an old woman connected to a breathing tube. In contrast to Anne, nothing about her costume should stand out as unusual. A wig should be used to give her a different hair color than Anne.

Act I. Scene 1

From extreme stage right, three-fourths of the stage is comprised of the Waiting Room, covered with a black curtain. Outside this, under one lamp, there is a hospital bed with Michael on it. The bed is lowered flat against the ground.

Michael should look about fifteen, maybe younger, with a shaved head. He looks emaciated, wearing no shirt and pajama shorts. On the inside of his right bicep, there is a square of bandaging around a PICC line, a blue plastic port to which intravenous tubes are connected by day.

He shuffles around on the mattress, goes still, then sits straight up. He picks up a paper cup on the floor next to his pillow, and spits bile into it. He waits a moment, lays back down, then rises up with frustration to spit again into the cup.

MICHAEL

Looking off into space.

I'm not going to sleep.

Pause. Picks up the cup to spit, holds it and looks at it, attempts to spit, can't. Looks around.

Is there any help?

Pause.

I should scream for my mother. Then she'll call the doctor, wake *him* up in the middle of the night.

Face sours. Waits. Turns and spits again.

Tomorrow, I'll ask the nurses about this. They'll ask the doctor... Just like today.

Tomorrow he might say what he didn't know today.

Screams

“Maaaaaaaam!!!!”

Silence.

Other people don't expect how much I expected it. I braced for it, but didn't think it would come. I looked for my aunts and uncles on my Father's side, and couldn't find

them. They had cancer or died or had cancer and died. It was coming. But it wouldn't happen to my brothers. Only me.

Starts convulsing with frustration, running his hands forcefully over his bald head, beating it with his knuckles, shaking it, then grabbing the arm with the PICC line in pain.

In a world of death, we look for him to heal us. To let us live. We wait for an appointment. To hold secrets of life and death, to watch both and be one. We're so different, though. We are going to die, we only have so much time. Adults have priorities. They make compromises. Some people smoke, some people sleep. Then it comes, you resist it. But they tell you to wait for the doctor.

Stands up.

You think, "this is too much. I can't bear it... But I did it all wrong before. I did it all wrong, so here I am. Incapable of surviving this."

Indicates the empty stage.

What did I do wrong? I did it all wrong? You're a big person. When you spit, you can blame all your mistakes.

Slumps down. He's on the verge of tears, but with almost comical self-pity.

I'm too small to make the big mistakes...

Looks up. A sword is lowered down from the ceiling, dangling above his head. It should lower slowly over the next two monologues, almost reaching him and then stopping by the end of the second one.

Chemo hits me without any memories of crimes to absorb it. It shakes me with all the force of a body falling apart and earth's furthest chemicals... All of his force, the force of the words I might never hear... I'll think about asking him at night. In the morning, I'll ask the nurses. And they'll ask him. He won't speak to me, and they won't let me in to see him. Not until it's over.

I'm too small to make someone to blame.

Pause.

My father? No. Can't blame his genes of disease. It's no more their fault than it was my fault, when I was six: I threw an ice-packed snowball at my friend. It split his forehead open. His face was a sheet of blood. The grown-ups came. I said I was aiming for the pole above the swingset... My father was aiming to create life.

He stands again, and begins walking around the sword.

This boy's parents took me skiing once, later. I was older then, as old as I really am. I saw all these other children shooting across the mountain's face, like marbles rolling off a table. They weren't scared of death, of course. Real kids have no fear. Good parents ruin them, trying to keep them alive. They know they can call the Doctor, but they don't trust him. Something. But at the mountain, the parents are all different. They let their kids scream down the slopes. When they fall, no one's looking. Or the parents shout: GET UP!, because they just want to keep skiing, too. They aren't aiming for anyone but themselves.

Crouches under the sword, looking up at its point.

But what if they fell?

Jumps out of the way and yells.

MAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAM!

If the Doctor won't answer, all I have is anyone else. The people who don't know what they're waiting for. Fearless children flying down a mountain. They put me on the lift with a tiny four-year-old, all by herself. We sat on the creaking open bench, high above whizzing specks crisscrossing the snow. There was a roped-off streak of black rock right beneath the lift, tracing us up the mountain. The girl looked like she weighed less than her coat. If a marble dropped on her skis, she would have tipped off in an instant. I asked her if she was afraid of being so high up. Of being alone. Of falling off the lift, life... She looked down, looked right back at me, looked ahead, and shrugged. That was the closest anyone came to telling me whose fault this is.

Screams.

MAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAM!

It's useless because she has already called the Doctor every night. Every morning. She fears for me, and her fear became me, and I became cancer. Blame anyone and anything that tries to keep you alive.

Keels over in pain, gropes around the bed for the cup, finds it, brings it to his mouth, and lets out a mouthful of bile.

I blame the medicine.

Blackout.

Act I. Scene 2

Lights back up on Michael. He sits on his bed as before, and watches as a curtain lifts over the rest (three-fourths) of the stage. It reveals a doctor's office. It is an entirely self-contained space.

The entrance door is at stage right. Chairs line the side walls, which are hung with cheap prints of iconic Impressionist nature scenes. In the center, there is another line of chairs. Small tables strewn with magazines are placed between every few chairs. The walls, carpeting, and the fabric of the chairs are all rustic mixtures of red and brown.

There are two chairs on the right side of the back wall, but these give way to a large stand with a number of rows of pamphlets. The titles should not be visible/legible.

In the center of the back wall, a sliding mirror covers the area where the secretaries and nurses work, presumably leading back into the office. When this is open, an intensely bright, almost ethereal light should come from above and behind the secretaries.

To the left of this is a door, leading to the patients' rooms.

Outside this waiting room, the empty area of the stage will be variously used to depict scenes that echo or correlate to the dialogue within it.

In the Waiting Room, the patients should be evenly distributed across the rows, sitting close or next to their accompanying family member if they have one. Some periodically peruse through the stacks of magazines, taking one or replacing one. The patients in this scene are: Phil, Leonard, Betsy and Alice.

Daniel enters from the downstage right door. He is dressed casually, looks healthy. He pauses at the entrance, scanning the room for the secretary's desk.

MICHAEL

That's him.

Pause. Daniel looks toward the wall separating the room from Michael, nervously; half-aware of Michael. With trepidation:

It's his room now.

Michael exits stage left. Blackout over the outer section of the stage. Slowly and seemingly out of confusion, Daniel walks to the back of the waiting room and finds the mirror. He stares at it for a moment, then looks on the counter in front of it for a bell. Not finding one, he hesitantly raises his hand to tap the glass, when it slides open:

SECRETARY A

Good morning, Mr. Bayne. What time was your appointment?

DANIEL

Surprised.

Uhh, well, I thought it was at 10:30, but I came a little early to--

SECRETARY A

--It's fine. Let me have you fill out these forms, and sign this HIPAA agreement. I'm sure you're familiar with it, from all your visits.

This strikes him as unfounded, as if she's talking to the wrong person. She hands him a clipboard with papers and pen.

You may have to wait awhile, we're already quite backed up. I apologize.

DANIEL

Is there any way I can--

SECRETARY A

--The Doctor looks forward to seeing you. We'll call you when we're ready.

She abruptly slides the mirror closed, as Daniel is about to speak. He thinks for a moment about his question, then swallows it and goes to find a seat. He stops at one of the magazine tables, looks over them impatiently and chooses one without much thought. He takes a seat in the middle of the center row of chairs, between Leonard and Eunice/Claymon.

Daniel attempts to leaf through the magazine, but quickly grows frustrated, realizing it's an old issue on a boring topic. Long pause.

DANIEL

I...

Wary pause. But no one seems to hear his address, so he continues, fearfully

I should not have come here.

He puts the magazine under his chair and begins going over the clipboard. More decidedly:

It would have been better not to come.

Pause. Some faint sound of a breathing tube. Someone coughs. Daniel starts looking over/filling out the papers in the clipboard.

“Height.” Five foot nine inches. What’s that in meters? I had to know that once.

“Weight.”

Puts the clipboard down and looks up mischievously, turning to the back mirror, then to the audience, as if letting them in on a secret, quietly.

The people here – no one knows me!

Louder, defeated.

But the rules still apply.

They act like I’ve been here before.

Protesting.

I have never, ever been here! Not in my entire life!

Some other patients look up, perhaps coincidentally, perhaps in response.

But I’ve done this a thousand times. In far-flung corners of the country. The world even.

“My previous visits.” What do they know about it? ... But the rules still apply. I have been accepted into a cruel joke.

Looks back to the clipboard.

“Past illnesses.” That’s always pleasant. Each doctor, in each office, they force you to remind yourself of every mishap and misery. Why can’t *they* keep track, if they know so much?

How far does this go back? Well, there was the broken arm once. Football practice. Coach played favorites. Or maybe he played his strengths. But there were always a few of us who didn’t get on the field much, so we’d climb the fence to pass the time. Fell clean off once, shattered my fibula. Cast for the season...

Looking around the room for laughs. No one notices.

And Mother thought I would get hurt if I got tackled!

“Record of hospitalizations.” Did I go in when I caught pneumonia? Really lucky there. Father’s sister had polio when she was a child. Times change. I got off with a bad cold.

Looks around the room, attempting to engage anyone. He’s repeatedly met with silence and shrugs.

Anyone want to help? Group effort maybe? Let’s see, “family medical history.”

Turns to Leonard.

Now you wouldn’t really know that. Rather private. Hmmm. How about “birthdate”? How did I miss that? You have to write it on every page. They really put a lot of stock in things decided by random chance... Or your parents.

Looking around again.

Any help? Anyone want to participate?

Silence.

I shouldn’t have come here. To live on... and spend years of that life watching people die.

A few people have begun to gaze absently at Daniel. He notices this.

Or them watching you.

He sets down the clipboard. Phil stands up and stretches loudly. This momentarily attracts Daniel’s attention. Phil walks over to the small table in the corner, picking up magazines and loudly dropping them until he finds one he likes, a National Geographic. He slowly walks back to his seat, confident that his choice was important.

These people, they must be thinking ... If they’ve been here before, they have more information.... Maybe that makes them think less.

Daniel grows agitated by the lack of response in the room. He begins glaring at Phil. He rises and paces, addressing the audience more directly. Some change in the lighting might help create the monologue:

Oh, to hell with him! You know what these people do? This is the salt of the earth right here. This guy, he's worked his life at no-skill jobs on hourly salaries. He was a heavy-drinking young man, and the years have barely quieted him down.

He's waiting all this time to save his fat neck of a life. This man's life. What's there to know? ...He cooks pretty decent. Always mans the grill at barbecues – out of a sense of unswerving duty, never questioning that he is the one for the job. Never shuts up when he's back there either. Someone's always stuck listening to him prattle on about the fish he catches in the summer, or the ducks he shoots in November. Or where he drinks, even if it's always the same place.

When he first dropped out of school, he became a lifeguard. Struck a crew-cut figure of power up on his perch. Sat up there, like here maybe, not a thought in his head. Had big muscles that time seemed to blink into a belly. Used to love throwing things like knives and lighters at his friends when they'd drink.

A faint light comes on over the outer area of the stage. Three shadows of figures are projected around what seems to be the misting edge of a pond or lake. They have fishing rods, the lines of which are dropped into a surface concealed by mist.

Got older, didn't have much in his life to jaw about. Stopped talking about years in which he did nothing new. Found his wife and made his life a tight circle, closed his wagons – there weren't that many.

Lives a nod above paycheck to paycheck. On Saturdays, after a week of getting up at seven a.m., his eyes slide open before five so he can be to the state park before sunrise. He drags his dreary friends along, with enough beer, bacon and dogs to last through lunch. He grumbles about the bait. He can talk or sit in silence, it's all the same. He yells when dirt gets kicked up in the lake. He shouts at small boats to clear out of the way of the fishing lines, a goddamn obvious thing for folks to forget. When he buys his cigarettes for the ride home, he repeats his complaints and his expertise to the clerks at the gas station. They nod and prattle back, about the bait, as if through a mirror. And that's the life he's trying to save. To find his cure.

Lights down on the outer stage, the figures exit.

Past illnesses? In this place, the present is sick.

Light in the Waiting Room return to normal. Daniel sits down to the left of Leonard. Lengthy pause. Leonard sizes Daniel up, looks over at Betsy and Alice. He narrates slowly, slight accent.

LEONARD

Young man...

Daniel turns to him.

Yea, I'm talkin' to you. You see that woman there?

Indicates Betsy.

That's Betsy. Now, she ain't been walkin' for a long time. That's aside from all the trouble that's bringin' her here today. And that's her kin there. Alice. She ain't no sister or daughter, just family, y'understand? Now Alice been takin' care of ol' Betsy for many, many years by now. Betsy's husband passed a while back, and Alice's man separated from her. So inna way, all they got is each other. Ol' Betsy, and she ain't even that old, she can barely stomach most things. Can't have no dairy, barely any fruit. Medicine's eaten up the linin' in her stomach. So here Alice makes her food at home, an' brings it on over to her house, cause she's not movin' much, y'see. If it's nice, they'll eat out on the church steps cross the street, get some air. Barely anyone even go to the church, middle of the week 'specially. So it ain't much comp'ny – besides each other of course. But that's how they been eatin' when she ain't in here.

Now what'chu think 'bout all that?

Daniel shakes his head, half-smiling at the absurd gravity of the story.

But that's also livin.'

Points to Betsy and raises his arms with "up" and "down."

She'd rather be up than down. In her shoes, in her chair, her life – she'd rather be out in the sun than down in the dirt.

DANIEL

And what about yourself?

Leonard looks ahead, smiling. Nurse B enters from the rear door.

NURSE B

Harrison, Leonard?

Leonard stands slowly on his cane.

LEONARD

Think on what I said, son.

He walks off proudly, following the nurse out the door. Daniel rises to see the door close, then walks slowly toward it, as if to see where Leonard went. He pauses at the door, listens, and then crosses to the mirror. As he raises his hand to tap on the glass, the mirror slides open.

SECRETARY A

Mr. Bayne.

DANIEL

Yes, I just wanted to ask --

SECRETARY A

--Have you filled out your medical history?

DANIEL

Yes, but I wanted to find out where the nurse took that/ old man, who just left. Leonard Harrison.

SECRETARY A

/Please bring all completed forms up so that we can pass/ them back to the Doctor.

DANIEL

/Ma'am! Excuse me, I'm sorry. I just have a simple question. Where did she take that man?

SECRETARY A

More calmly, less official.

Well, he went to see the Doctor, of course.

DANIEL

Like me? My Doctor? ... Am I going to the same place?

SECRETARY A

Sternly again.

You must be patient, Mr. Bayne. Your Doctor will see you when *he's* ready.

Brief blackout to indicate the passage of time.

Act I. Scene 3

In this scene, the following patients/family are in the Waiting Room: Anne, Carol, Herman, and Claymon. Anne sits where Leonard had sat.

From the entrance door, Business Man comes on stage. He is dressed formally. He sits near Anne. He periodically checks a Blackberry and the voicemail on his cell phone.

Next, Ruth, Daniel's mother, enters. She is in her fifties. She has a very concerned countenance. Daniel reacts immediately to her.

DANIEL

Mom!?

She pauses, but does not acknowledge him in anyway.

Mom!

He half-rises. A bit quieter, so as not to cause a scene.

Mom, over here!

She proceeds to the back corner where the health pamphlets are in the stand. She pulls a folder, overstuffed with loose-leaf paper, out from her purse. Upon consideration, she removes a number of pamphlets and places them in the folder. Daniel quietly stares in wonder, as if it might be his fault that she does not notice him. Faintly, finally:

Mother...

No response. Ruth sits next to Claymon, a few seats from Daniel. For the duration of this scene, Daniel observes the action with an alternating mix of curiosity, fear and boredom.

Ruth pulls out a notebook from her purse. She begins reading different documents and brochures from her folder, and scribbling notes in her notebook with a mournful thoroughness, a sad sensitivity.

The Business Man's cell phone rings, and he picks it up. A few moments of inaudible conversation, then he says aloud:

BUSINESS MAN

It's not enough!

Just then, Nurse B enters from the door in the room's upstage left corner. She carries a clipboard.

NURSE B

Wilkins, Carol?

HERMAN

We're over here.

Carol turns her head to the nurse slowly, moving the breathing tube device by her feet to make room.

NURSE B

Well, how we doin' today? Pleasure to meet you.

She extends her hand, which Carol shakes weakly, followed by Herman.

The folks in the office sent me out. They told me no'one had talked to y'all 'bout your financial options? We're s'posed to keep y'all up to date regardin' expenses and payment, an' our records show it was time fer 'nother consultation.

Herman and Carol nod; clearly a troubling topic. Nurse B addresses Herman more, looking only over at Carol for confirmation.

Now, I can't tell from these records if she's got in'surance, or'f she's on Medicare.

HERMAN

Well, the *insurance* comp'ny gave us some trouble after her last stay, so they had... we had to drop our coverage. But we're still tryin' to get another comp'ny to pick us up, and my sister out in Belton told her that --

NURSE B

--Well now, y'all keep us posted about that. But in the mean time, I oughta give her this brochure 'bout payin fer treatments on Medicare.

She shows Carol the brochure, then hands it to Herman.

And also, I better give you this loans sheet. It calc'ulates how much the costs'll vary and inn-crease, given the treatments the Doctor thinks we still need t'do.

Herman takes this, too.

And here's yer statement from the last two-week period – they had a problem mailin' it, somethin' 'bout a bum address?

Nurse B hands over the statement.

HERMAN

We had to move her, 'cause she'd actually been livin' in --

NURSE B

--Now, let me tell ya what's on that statement. Five-days of outpatient treatment, two weeks ago, that ran up to... fifty-five thousan' dollars.

This knocks the wind out of Herman, and Carol's eyes grow large and fearful.

HERMAN

Sorry ma'am, did you--

NURSE B

--Yessir. And her white blood cell counts have fallen through the basement, so we had to give her a shot last week to boost her immune system. If she caught a cold, way she is now... we just don't want that one bit.

HERMAN

I wasn't told 'bout that shot.

Carol says something quietly and Herman has to lean over to hear. She tries to speak up.

NURSE B

Now, that shot cost, let's see,

Looks at her papers, shakes her head and grits her teeth before saying it.

About six thousan', two hundred dollars. And then--

Looking to Carol for confirmation

That shot s'posed to make the blood cells grow agin. But it also upsets the bone marrow, somethin' terrible. An' she was in a world o'pain. So we had the Doctor write her a script for some Vicodin, which had a copay of fifty dollars.

HERMAN

Did anyone take you to pick that up?

Carol shrugs, she can't remember. Herman's look toward her has taken on frustration, exasperation.

NURSE B

Now – like ya said, if y'get another in'surance comp'ny, your new plan should cover lots of them bills. But both ways, you ought to read over our kit for financin' the rest o'the treatments, cause so far y'all been fallin' a little short.

CAROL

Weakly.

They never told us about any shots.

NURSE B

Well, there's a whole lotta stuff that we don't *know*'ll happen... unless it happens. So it's hard to give y'all accu'rit statements from the beginnin'. Whatever we gave you then, that's just ... projections.

She hands Herman a few more stapled packets.

Here, go over these with yer family, it should help ya sort it all out.

Herman stares in disbelief, back and forth from the papers to his mother.

Hope this was some help.

Nurse B stands to exit.

HERMAN

Defeated:

Thank you, ma'am. We'll try'n read it.

NURSE B

Take care, Missus Wilkins. Doctor says ya gotta git nice and strong agin – next week's an *in-patient* week. We'll be seein' ya.

She exits out the rear door.

DANIEL

Rhetorically:

Is that how it is here?

Silence. He addresses his comments to the people in the Waiting Room, but no one looks up. This only intensifies his speech, which he delivers with hollow moral indignation.

Is this how we treat the aging and dying? This isn't right. Someone should know this isn't right.

A pleading look at Ruth, who doesn't look up from her papers:

Mom. Mother.... MOM!! Someone should do something! MOM!!!

The lights change a bit to indicate an hallucination of sorts. There is noise behind the back door, and Daniel stands to see what's going on. Nurses A and B enter. The nurses should have office/medical items in their hands – clipboards, syringes, thermometers, blood pressure pumps, vials, etc.

During the course of Daniel's monologue, each of these characters set on a patient: Nurse A on Claymon, Nurse B on Anne, Herman on Carol. Slowly at first, the nurses urge their patients to rise. This is done with much difficulty. But through gestures, the nurses should show they are insistent on getting the patients up and moving.

With increasing speed, the nurses begin to push their patients from behind. Claymon has trouble with his walker, and Anne is of unsure step. Herman pushes Carol in her wheelchair.

Eventually, this should create an almost running circle of patients, trailed by nurses who are gesturing for them to speed up. The circle's course should go around the central row of chairs. Some fast-faced dance music or something more bizarre (director's choice) should be played, and Daniel must speak louder and louder as the music's volume increases. At appropriate points in the monologue, he pulls aside one of the patients or gets in their face.

DANIEL

Oh, I guess we all know. These old folks had their time. And time has weakened them so... But we live in a mobile society – it's appearances – you see! You have to *demonstrate* your agility, your ability.

The Business Man's phone rings, interrupting Daniel, who waits. The Business Man answers the call, and starts grumbling, as if in the midst of exasperating negotiations.

There's new technology, new broken machines to fix – coffee to make and uppers to take. You gotta be *explosively*

He jumps

energized here, folks!

BUSINESS MAN

Shouting

It isn't enough!

The Business Man gets off his phone, pulls a checkbook from his suit pocket, and begins writing checks feverishly, letting them fly as he tears them out of the book.

DANIEL

It's freedom, man! Don't be satisfied with less – more careers, more money in the system. Against that, *their* differences come out so harsh. Their second Great Depression. They just don't function here. You want this thing to work? You gotta *put* everyone to work. It's an economy, stupid. Unproductive activity has been poisoned – it's sick. Family time? Send the one year-olds to day care with formula for breast milk. Liberate the women and make them profitable, goddammit!

BUSINESS MAN

More! This will not be enough!

DANIEL

Make careers, not babies. Replace family life with professional care. Privatize that shit.
Someone's gotta make a buck.

The patient closest to Daniel bumps into him. He shouts in anger:

And put the grandparents in retirement homes, money down. Just get'em moving already!

By this time, the patients should be in their original positions. Any music should stop. The patients sit themselves in their old seats, without help from the nurses, who exit. The lights return to normal. Ruth should be attempting to continue her reading and transcribing, but tears have welled up on her face. She wipes them during the next monologue and tries to compose herself.

DANIEL

Out of his trance.

These old folks had their time. *We* give meaning to the world of today: the things we find in it. We look into their eyes, we can't find anything. It seems they can't understand... we're in the dark. We will never find out what only they can know. We can't process it at any speed. We don't know how *not* to digitize and compress. But they're still here, muscling it out with incommunicable wisdom, living it through. They come to pray, to each others' funerals, and to their own waiting room... They should feel sorry for themselves. Or ashamed.

Pause.

That would kill me.

[Omitted: Act I, Scenes 4 & 5]

Act I. Scene 6

In this scene: Claymon (now in a wheelchair), Phil, and Anne sit around the Waiting Room, in the same arrangement as Scene 5.

Nurse A, Nurse B and Secretary B will also be used (with no lines) as doctors in the external space outside the Waiting Room.

The Business Man has taken off his jacket. He sits in the back right corner next to the shelves of brochures. He is counting stacks of money on the floor, shaking his head, and periodically muttering, "Not enough!" The light above him is noticeably dimmer than in the rest of the room.

Ruth now sleeps tensely in her seat. Her eyes are clenched shut, in consternation and pain, as if ready to spring awake at the slightest danger.

The lights fade to a seductive red over both the Waiting Room and the external area of the stage. In this open area, we see Aria, a young woman in a tight sweater and jeans, enter proudly. She walks behind the Waiting Room and out of view.

DANIEL

There's nothing I can do about that.

Nurse A enters to give a pill to Claymon, who is sleeping in his wheelchair. Nurse A shoves it in his mouth, but Claymon doesn't open his eyes. As Nurse A exits through the Waiting Room's back door, Aria enters through it. No one looks up but Daniel.

Only instincts.

Aria sits in the middle row, in a chair adjacent to Daniel, blocking his sightline to his mother. He tries to steal a glance at Aria, holds it too long, and she catches him. He looks down. Her look indicates Daniel is beneath her.

She's not perfect. She could be perfect. No. It's a projection. I can hear it, the creak of its clicking yawn. Might as well put it on the wall – as tasteful and original as those Impressionist prints. It tastes like airports.

Aria looks at him. He senses it, returns her gaze, and she looks away, annoyed.

DANIEL

It wouldn't be worth it. Every separation breaks you down, worse than the love built you up. It's not a sound investment.

BUSINESS MAN

Counting cash.

It's not enough!!

DANIEL

Would she stay here for this? Can she tell me what the fuck it is?

Pause.

But she won't come into that back room. And it would be worse if she did. Because when she leaves, a year later, two years later, I'll blame her for leaving after having *seen the back room!*

Aria takes off her sweater and is wearing a revealing white tank top under it.

The amazing... the first year even. It's like an epiphany: the resplendent radiance of the divine. A false moment that you could pluck out of time and live eternally.

He looks at her long and covetously. She wears a sly contentment on her face, aware of how she's tormenting him.

Its very existence already implies loss.

She pulls off her pants. She now looks very much like a morning-after-lover. She rummages through her pants, pulls out large headphones from a pocket, puts them on, and starts rocking out to music we can't hear. She starts walking around. Other patients look at her. The Business Man slows his counting to loosen his tie and gawk. Phil is conspicuously sneaking peaks from above a magazine he is reading.

I know how I'll feel. It's an eclipse. Misdiagnosed as a meteor shower.

Fuck, this is hell.

Aria picks up a magazine, and removes a pull-out poster of a tropical beach, which she displays to the audience.

DANIEL

Hell is seeing the places to the music of the one who isn't with you.

Daniel falls silent in exasperation. He keeps looking at her, as if on an impulse against his will, then looking away, ashamed. Finally, she walks slowly, closely to him. She sits down next to him, between him and Anne. She then picks up the magazine and begins reading, as if nothing has happened.

What do you want from me?

Silence.

Oh, come on, what?

She keeps reading.

BUSINESS MAN

Slamming down a stack of money.

It's not enough!

Aria points to Daniel's crotch and smiles greedily.

DANIEL

Testicles? What about 'em? So that you can make more problems – more me's, more you's? Is it testicles this is about?

At this word she looks up, suddenly very serious. Daniel notices this and pauses, waiting for a response. She keeps him in suspense a bit. It is also clear that everyone else in the Waiting Room is listening in to see what she will say. She finally shrugs, as if to say, "almost, but not quite right."

Fine, vernacular then. You want my nuts?

To the audience:

I would never say this!

To Aria, clearly self-conscious that this speech is a farce. He could even have a forced, hearty-masculine accent:

DANIEL

Nuts, you know? Nuts, the kind that you need a metal tool to crack. Or how 'bout brass balls? Unbreakable, no shit brass business balls – the kind that clear the clouding in our heads and make us men!

Aria shakes her head no. He drops the accent.

You think I don't have 'em? It's so apparent?

Aria pulls out an egg from her mouth, with a combination of seduction and revelation in her eyes. She holds it up.

Eggs? Nah, sorry lady. Eggs are for the female, you see.

Ruth suddenly opens her eyes violently, turning quickly upon Daniel and Aria.

RUTH

In a demanding, anxious tone:

What will hatch?!

In the vacant area of the stage outside the waiting room, the lights come up. Michael is on a stretcher, surrounded by three doctors with surgical scrubs and masks over their uniforms. Michael is never visible from within a circle of them. Against the back wall, there is a large screen, onto which CT-scan photos are projected. The doctors point to different areas of the large projection with swords. They rotate in and out, walking on and offstage with bloody butcher's knives and translucent bags with the radioactive symbol visibly printed on them. They affix these to rolling poles. Each bag is connected by a tube to the patient. Nurses A, B and C remove their outer scrubs, revealing their nurse uniforms. They reach under the stretcher and retrieve bags of blood that sit atop pillows. As they leave in a procession, carrying these bags like entrées at a restaurant, red lines appear on the projection, spreading like veins through the CT image. Daniel has a look of subdued horror throughout.

ARIA

It will spread like I kicked you... *there*.

She points to his crotch.

Up into your guts, upsetting your stomach. Bad news if you can't breathe. Like I kicked you in the eggs.

RUTH

Watch your language young woman! That's vulgar!

All the patients shake their heads in disapproval.

ARIA

I only speak the truth. What I speak *is* the truth. This is important. There's more to tell you.

Aria rises to leave, but doesn't touch her clothes. Blackout over the exterior stage. Ruth rummages through her purse on the ground for pen and paper. This search takes an abnormally long time, and is quite loud. The three nurses come in, and begin calling names of patients.

Whenever they call out a name, the patient meekly raises his or her hand. The nurse then walks over and takes them into the back room. Eventually they start calling out the names of patients who aren't there. For these, the nurses walk to empty chairs, and mime helping a sick person stand up and walk to the back room.

BUSINESS MAN

Bad year. It's not enough.

NURSE A

Jones, Claymon.

DANIEL

To Aria.

Could *you* tell me?

NURSE B

Wellemeyer,/ Anne

NURSE C

/Henderson, Betsy

ARIA

The nurses will tell you. The doctor will tell them.

NURSE D

Kowalski, Phil.

DANIEL

I want to hear it from you!

NURSE A

Barnes, Carol.

DANIEL

Desperately.

You're beautiful, please, /life, please, tell me!

NURSE B

/Stevens, Laura and MacFarlane, Walter.

Aria is at the entrance door, but hesitates. She walks back slowly, through the emptying room, and pauses in front of Daniel.

RUTH

Don't touch him! Daniel, don't let her touch you!

Daniel looks up at Aria confusedly. He tries to crane his head to look at his mother, perhaps ask her why, but Aria grabs his face between her palms. She holds it for a moment, shakes her head disapprovingly, and withdraws her hands, stroking his cheek. She then walks out with a decided pace. The lighting goes to a deeper red.

DANIEL

Pleading.

Why did you even come!?! Don't leave me with them!

Ruth looks angrily at Daniel, but he doesn't see. At this point, Ruth and Daniel are the only ones visible in the room. The Business Man still sits in his corner, but there is no light there, he is entirely in shadow. Nurse C re-enters to cover the mirror/sliding window with black paper.

RUTH

No! Don't cover that! *That* hasn't happened--

NURSE C

--No, ma'am, it's for him now. It's best he not look in the mirror. Coincidence.

DANIEL

I don't want to hear about it.

RUTH

Better that we ask.

Nurse A and B wheel in a rolling bed from the back door. Daniel automatically strips to his underwear and undershirt, and crawls onto the bed, which is placed in front of the middle row of chairs. Nurse B and C then exit. Ruth takes notes throughout the following dialogue, looking up or opening her mouth to ask questions, but no one is paying attention to her.

NURSE A

She checks his blood pressure with a cuff. To Daniel:

You can write all this up in a book sum'day!

DANIEL

Oh, please don't say that. Tell me about all this fluid in my mouth.

Nurse A grabs his wrist firmly and starts counting off his pulse with her free hand. Nurse B re-enters wheeling around a pole with bags of IV fluid hanging off it. Nurse C re-enters pushing a small metal cart, atop which sits a few clear glass vials and an IV kit. The IV kit's tubes should be rigged to be full of fake blood. Nurses B and C put an IV in Daniel. They should go through every step of this process – sterilizing his arm with alcohol, putting a needle on it (as if inserting it), taping it down, and replacing the needle with the kit that attaches to the IV tube, which they then connect with one of the bags.

NURSE B

There's a pamphlet on that.

DANIEL

Pointing to the shelves filled with pamphlets.

Oh there, with all that shit on support groups?

NURSE C

Why don't you look into it?

Nurse C unhooks his IV tube from the bags, and hooks it up to small glass vials she has carried in. They fill with blood from the tube. She walks out with these, and Nurse B reconnects the IV cord back with the bags of fluid. Daniel moans softly. Nurse C quickly re-enters holding more clear glass vials.

DANIEL

I don't seem to have the time or energy now, do I? Besides, I don't feel like being grouped with all those dying people. Not a good... reinforcement.

NURSE B

They'll tell you what we can't.

NURSE A

We only know what the Doctor tells us.

DANIEL

You don't know anything!

NURSE A

We only know what the doctor tells us. You can put in a call. Again.

DANIEL

I haven't called anyone.

NURSE C

You called your mother.

Off-stage, we hear Michael call "MAAAAAM!!"

NURSE A

And she called us. We called the Doctor. We told you what he said.

DANIEL

You didn't say anything.

RUTH

But he'll be okay, right?

The nurses look awkwardly, one to the other. Finally, Nurse C steps forward. Nurses B exits.

NURSE C

In the 1970's--

DANIEL

--No, please, not you.

NURSE C

It seems to be easier to hear – and more authoritative – in a proper accent.

DANIEL

No, I need something a little more – well it's grating the way we talk, but--

He looks at Nurse A.

NURSE A

Of course – y'just need somethin' that reminds ya'of home. You've been away awhile.

Well, in the 1970's... you'd be dead. Then, total freak acc'dent, some doctor stumbles 'pon the wunnnder drug, Sysplatinum.

Nurse B re-enters, pushing a smaller and lower bed with Michael on it. He is wearing a t-shirt much too big for him, and his legs are tucked under hospital blankets. They roll the bed next to Daniel. Michael slides out of the blankets and onto the floor. He sits under Daniel's bed. Nurses B and C wheel the bed back out the exit. Ruth smiles at Michael with recognition, but he cannot see her.

MICHAEL

Sysplatinum? Tell me something I will understand.

During this description, the light comes up on the empty area of the stage outside the waiting room. An oversized, vintage pinball machine is there, and another (identical) little boy is playing it, his back to the audience. He is slumped over it, not standing tall. The machine slants unnaturally upward so the audience can see it. It makes a lot of sound as Nurse A talks, forcing her to speak even louder over it.

NURSE A

Fine, then. Now, it's like a pinbawl game. Press on the buttons real hard, and you can bounce around, light shit up... set pers'nal high scores. Ya'can even hide in a round piece o'plastic with pulsatin' light – warm knowin' you cain't die, long as bulbs are changin' color. Yer fingers even relax on the side buttons. Ya just wait.

Blackout over the pinball machine. She should say this quite loudly but also prosaically, bored, as if she's reading the ingredients of a medicine.

NURSE A

Better to experience dyin' without the death. Git through with it now. That's chemo.

Blackout on the Waiting Room.