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Dramatic Publishing

ARCANA



SHORT PLAYS AND
MONOLOGUES BY

JOHN LONGENBAUGH

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ARCANA

Comedy/Drama. Short plays and monologues by John Longenbaugh. Cast: 2 to 7m., 4 to 14w. Six short plays and two monologues explore a variety of themes and genres, inspired by the Major Arcana figures in the Tarot. In **Byzantium**, a woman trying speed dating is frustrated by the fact that most men are intimidated by a strong female—particularly the Empress of the Holy Roman Empire. In **Petting Sounds**, sounds of sex from a man's apartment turn out to have an unexpected source, and an even stranger explanation. **The Picnic** features a tableau from a Manet painting that comes to life, revealing a sensual paradise with some disturbing qualities. In **Balance**, a vegetarian tries to explain to her carnivore date why she agreed to go out with him in the first place. **A Cry in the Forest** concerns an intrusive aunt who finds out it's best not to poke too far into her niece's imagination, while **Affairs With the Moon** reveals the thoughts of four women in different places as they talk to a debonair Moon. In **A Wild River**, a reporter from *Rolling Stone* gets an interview with the new pope, who's got some pretty radical ideas, and **Stardust** slowly reveals the connection of two universal rites of passage between two different couples. *Bare stage. Approximate running time: 90 minutes (8 to 10 minutes per piece). These plays may be performed individually or in any combination, in which case royalties may be adjusted upon application. Code: AK4.*

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JOHN LONGENBAUGH



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The plays in *Arcana* were written from 1999 to 2010, primarily for a series of 24-hour theatre festivals in and around the Pacific Northwest. *The Picnic* was originally produced as part of *Erotic Shorts* at the Little Red Studio, Seattle, in 2008. *Petting Sounds* was produced as a live radio play in Seattle in 2000. *Affairs With the Moon* was also produced as a live radio play on KCAW Raven Radio in Sitka, Alaska, in 2011. *A Wild River* was included in a tour of the Northwest, East Coast and England by Northwest Playwrights Alliance in 2013.

Arcana as a full production premiered at the Open Circle Theater in Seattle on September 10, 2010. It was co-directed by Mary Cutler, Evan Tucker, Rob West, Nikki Visel and the author, John Longenbaugh.

Cast

(Actors played multiple roles.)

April Davidson

Anthony Duckett

Katherine Grant-Suttie

Erin Ison

Sarah Rose Nottingham

Brandon Ryan

Arcana

Byzantium.....	9
<i>(1w.)</i>	
Petting Sounds	14
<i>(1m., 1w.)</i>	
A Cry in the Forest.....	19
<i>(2w.)</i>	
Affairs With the Moon.....	25
<i>(1m., 4w.)</i>	
The Picnic	31
<i>(2m., 2w.)</i>	
Balance.....	38
<i>(1w.)</i>	
A Wild River	41
<i>(2m., 1w.)</i>	
Stardust	48
<i>(1m., 3w.)</i>	

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I don't remember when I first turned to the tarot for inspiration in writing a play, but I remember why: I was desperate. In the past 15 years I've participated in several different 24-hour theatre festivals in which a playwright is expected to produce a brand new short script overnight. When you're staring at a blank computer screen at 1:00 a.m. and the play is due at 8:00 a.m., you'll look for inspiration anywhere, including the deck of tarot cards you have sitting on your bookshelf. Fortunately, that was a great place to go looking.

For those of you who don't know about tarot: most of tarot resembles a regular deck of playing cards, though with different suits (cups, swords, staves and pentacles). But the 22 cards known as the Major Arcana are entirely different. Mythic figures (The Hermit, Death and The Fool) alternate with abstract concepts, like The Sun and Temperance, and others like The Hanged Man or The Chariot that don't precisely reflect any known mythology. This a large part of what has fascinated mystics, magicians and philosophers about the cards.

This collection is first in a mini-play cycle I call *Arcana*, inspired by eight of the tarot cards. The subject of these plays isn't a literal translation. You won't find some guy dressed as a jester capering about whacking people with a stick, or a mystical journey to the heart of Jung's archetypes. Instead, I've tried to create a series of characters and situations that reflect what happens when these esoteric symbols interact with the contemporary world.

The plays of *Arcana* translate to a card as follows:

Byzantium: The Empress

Petting Sounds: The Lovers

A Cry in the Forest: Strength

Affairs With the Moon: The Moon

The Picnic: The Sun

Balance: Temperance

A Wild River: The High Priestess

Stardust: The Star

Each of the plays in *Arcana* stands on its own but they can be produced altogether or in smaller collections. For the 2010 production at Seattle’s Open Circle Theater, they were performed in the order above, by a cast of six (2m., 4w.) and different directors in a sort of mini-play festival.

We developed a short “ritual” between acts in which the actors would gather, choose a tarot card and then perform a short tableau based on the card before beginning the play. If you’re feeling more adventurous, the order of plays could even be determined by audience members drawing one of the cards in advance.

The key to each of the plays is simplicity. Even when the tone is overtly comical, as in *Petting Sounds* and *Byzantium*, the more the actors can underplay and take their time, the more effective the end result. Music is important in a couple of the pieces: *Affairs With the Moon* works best with a jazz underscore as indicated, and the opening tableau of *The Picnic* is greatly assisted by a bit of austere classical music—I recommend Mozart’s “Sonata in A Major.”

And speaking of *The Picnic*, the best production note I can give is: take your time. It’s a summer afternoon where any action, even thinking of any action, is an effort.

A final note: I’m often asked if there are more plays in the *Arcana* cycle, and the answer is yes—with more every year. At this point, I have another six completed and eventually plan to have all 22 cards of the Major Arcana represented. When I’ve reached my goal of another eight, I’ll hope to have them published by the good folks at Dramatic Publishing. But if you are curious in the meantime, feel free to contact me at jlongenb@blarg.net to get an overview of what other scripts are either written or in the works.

Byzantium

CHARACTERS

CAROLINE: Empress of the Holy Roman Empire.

(Royal music plays, then a bell dings. Lights up on CAROLINE. She's sitting on a tall chair, wearing an attractive skirt and a fashionable sweater and a name tag that says "Caroline" and "24.")

CAROLINE. Wait. Was that the bell? Is this a drill? Are we ... oh, OK. We're starting? And I should just sit ... ? OK.

(Someone comes up to her.)

CAROLINE *(cont'd)*. Oh, hello. And you are? Dominic. Hello, Dominic. Caroline. Number 24.

(He's holding his hand out to her.)

CAROLINE *(cont'd)*. Well. Yes. OK. Let's shake hands. *(Does.)* I am pleased to meet you as well. Please, take a seat. So. What do you do? Uh huh? Do you consult other people? Oh, they consult you. About what? Oh. Uh huh. And what do you like to ... movies. Well, that's ... uh huh. Who doesn't like a good comedy, right? I don't really know him. What films has he ... ? Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. *The Wedding Singer*. I think I saw that one. On a plane. Actually, I don't see many films. Mostly just when I'm flying. Me? I work in administration. I'm sort of an administrator. I administer things. Oh, it's all right. Good points, bad points. So—do you like dancing? You know, so many men I know, they say the same thing. What do I administer? Uh ... peo-

ple, mostly. Some land. Some resources. Well, the official title of my job is Empress of the Holy Roman Empire. Oh no, it's still around. Yes, a lot of people think that. There was a formal abdication by Francis II to Napoleon in 1806, but it was outside the legality of the post-Republican courts ... Anyway, long story short, still a Holy Roman Empire, and me, its Empress. Uh huh.

(Ding.)

CAROLINE (*cont'd*). Oh, there's the bell! Wow, that goes quickly. OK, well, very good meeting you, "Number 16." Me too. Bye now. (*Slight beat.*) Hello ... Braden. Very nice meeting you. No, please, take a seat. Caroline. Number 24. Uh huh. No, it's not my age. That's sweet. And what do you ... designer! Web designer. Well, good work. I think it's very well designed. Uh huh. So, Braden, do you like travel? Uh huh. No, I've never been on a motorbike. Just one of those things. Right. What do I ... I'm an administrator. No, not a mid-level position exactly. Sort of top. Executive. I'm the Empress of the Holy Roman Empire. Yes, a lot of people think that. Nope, still around. Well ... it's a job. You know? There's good and bad. I attend a lot of banquets and award ceremonies. There's a lot of correspondence I have to keep up on, meetings with European Union officials, that sort of thing. But good bennies. I broke my leg skiing two winters ago—look at that. Didn't pay a cent. I'm sorry? Why am I here? Well ...

(Ding.)

CAROLINE (*cont'd*). ... Oh, there's the bell. Well thank you. Braden, number 29, right. I think they have the list of phone numbers. OK. Yes indeed. Bye.

(Someone else comes over.)

Petting Sounds

CHARACTERS

TOM

DOROTHY

(Sounds of two people having sex. It's very loud. Onstage is TOM, sitting in an armchair and reading a book contentedly. He's wearing a bathrobe, pajamas and slippers. He doesn't seem to be aware of the sounds. There's a forceful knock at the door which he doesn't hear at first, then he goes over and opens it. Standing at the door in her bathrobe is DOROTHY. The noise of people having sex continues.)

DOROTHY. Hi. Umm, I live across the hall.

TOM. Oh, hello! I don't think we've met. I'm Tom.

DOROTHY. Dorothy. Uh, I came over because ...

TOM. Would you like to come in?

DOROTHY. Thank you, but actually I just wanted to tell you ... *(Looks past him into the room, hearing the sound of sex continuing on.)*

TOM. Please come in. Can I get you something to drink?

DOROTHY *(stepping just barely into the room)*. Actually, I was just trying to sleep.

TOM. Warm milk's the ticket. I could fix some for you. I've got a microwave.

DOROTHY. No, really, don't bother. *(Looking for where the sound of the sex is coming from.)* What I mean to say is I was trying to sleep, but I heard, uh ... these walls are kind of thin, you know.

TOM. You're telling me. Tissue paper and beeswax. I can hear my neighbors gargling in the morning.

DOROTHY. Precisely. And, well ... I'm right across the hall.

TOM. Really? How long have you lived there?

DOROTHY. Two years.

TOM. Isn't that funny? I've lived here for five years and you've been there all this time and this is our first meeting.

DOROTHY. Right.

TOM. That's the terrible thing about apartments. I mean, you read these stories about murders being committed and old ladies getting eaten by their cats and people who live right next door doing absolutely nothing. We're all living in our own little worlds here and we like to pretend that there's no one past our walls.

DOROTHY. I've noticed that.

TOM. Like we're all living in little huts out in some village somewhere. On the moors or some other godforsaken place.

DOROTHY. Sure.

TOM. That's very sad. We talk so much about the need to build communities in the modern world, and yet we don't even take the time to get to know the people living across the hall.

DOROTHY. Yeah, it's awful. Listen, umm, I came over here because, well, I couldn't get to sleep.

TOM. Right. Insomnia's a terrible thing.

DOROTHY. It's not really insomnia. It's those sounds.

TOM. Sounds?

DOROTHY. The sounds. From here. From your apartment.

(TOM is still not getting it.)

DOROTHY *(cont'd)*. The sex sounds.

TOM *(suddenly hearing what up to now has just been background noise)*. Oh! Oh, I'm so sorry. *(Goes over and turns down his stereo. Instantly the sex sounds fade down to about half.)* There. Oh, I didn't realize. My apologies.

A Cry in the Forest

CHARACTERS

BEATRICE: an awkward and unfashionably dressed teenager.

CHLOE: an affluent suburban housewife, Beatrice's aunt.

(Lights are low. BEATRICE is sitting with a diary. She's writing by flashlight. Then she stops and reads back aloud what she's just finished.)

BEATRICE. "Dear diary: In the middle of my summer, in the middle of my life, three weeks before my 16th birthday, I find myself lost in a dark forest. I won't attempt a full account of the tragedies that led me here, since I soon may have to use your creamy pages for kindling. The Range Rover exploding with my father still inside, the lingering death of my mother from dysentery, the vicious cougar that carried away Aunt Chloe, the rushing torrent that swept off my cousins Alex and Clarice on the third day ... it all still seems like a horrible nightmare. I would sob if I was not trying to conserve my strength for whatever lies ahead. Here I am, hundreds of miles from the farthest outpost of civilization, and it may be days, weeks, before a search party should come. By that time it will be too late."

(Her pocket starts ringing. She reaches down, barely looking and turns it off.)

BEATRICE (*cont'd*). "Abandoned. Alone. Surrounded by the awesome eerie silence heard only in the darkest of dark woods. I am far, far from the life I knew. In a place where no human voice, save mine, can so much as utter my name."

CHLOE (*offstage*). Beatrice!

BEATRICE. “Yet even as I face a horrible lingering death, I feel strangely alive. There is comfort in the luxuriant green all around me, the fleeting glimpses of birds and small animals, in the cold, silent stars above ...”

CHLOE (*knocking*). Are you in there?

BEATRICE (*lowering her voice*). “In my own wild soul that finds an echo in this wild, inhuman place.”

(*CHLOE enters, well-coiffed, styled and manicured. BEATRICE closes her diary.*)

CHLOE. Why are you sitting in here in the dark? (*Switches the lights on.*) What are you doing?

BEATRICE. Nothing.

CHLOE. Your mother called.

BEATRICE. Oh.

CHLOE. She said you weren't answering your cell.

BEATRICE. The battery's dead.

CHLOE. Is it?

BEATRICE. Yes.

CHLOE. Well, anyway. She wants you to call her back. Apparently your car's died and your father's insisting that the new one has to be a Range Rover.

BEATRICE. I'll call.

CHLOE. Good. Well ... (*Starts to leave.*)

BEATRICE. Could you turn that light out?

(*CHLOE stops, then comes back into the room.*)

CHLOE. Beatrice?

BEATRICE. Yes, Aunt Chloe?

CHLOE. Do you really want to spend your whole two weeks with us like this?

BEATRICE. Like what?

CHLOE. A gorgeous day, and you're indoors with your nose in a book?

BEATRICE. Sort of?

CHLOE. I know you like to read and scribble things in your diary, but you could be out there having some fun instead of hiding in here.

BEATRICE. I get sunburned.

CHLOE. That's what sunscreen is for! And Vitamin D is good for your complexion!

(No response.)

CHLOE *(cont'd)*. You know, your cousins are going over to Wild Waves this afternoon.

BEATRICE. Uh huh.

CHLOE. Clarice said she'd loan you a swimsuit again.

BEATRICE. That's nice of her.

CHLOE. I know it's a little baggy but it does the job. And I've talked to Alex about last time and the you-know-what, and he says he's sorry.

BEATRICE. That's nice of him.

CHLOE. He just likes teasing his cousin!

(BEATRICE gives her a look.)

CHLOE *(cont'd)*. Or you can go to the mall.

BEATRICE. Uh huh.

CHLOE. Your mother said you need to get new clothes for school. Don't you want to get new clothes for school?

BEATRICE. I guess.

CHLOE. We've got a Banana Republic. Don't you like Banana Republic?

BEATRICE. I guess.

Affairs With the Moon

“I had had an affair with the moon, in which there was neither sin nor shame.”

—*Laurence Sterne*

CHARACTERS

BERTIE: a young woman, about 15.

JO-JO: an older woman, 40-60.

SALLY: a young woman, late teens or early 20s. Clothes and hair are mussed, with maybe a few leaves mixed in.

TAYLOR: in her 20s, wearing a wedding dress.

MOON: played by a man.

NOTES

This is a bit of a dreamy piece. The actors, particularly the actor playing the moon, should resist the urge to rush or play up the comedy. The comedy's there, but it'll come out a lot easier if you just take your time. The four women don't interact with one another. At times they're talking to the moon. At times the moon talks back. A suggestion: this plays well with music. I suggest something like Miles Davis' "All Blues."

(A warm summer night with a full moon.)

BERTIE, JO-JO, SALLY & TAYLOR. I saw the moon last night.

BERTIE (*seated in a Ferris wheel*). I was way up top of the Ferris wheel, right at the top, all alone in my seat, colored lights and music and the noise of the crowd below, and I saw this little boy look up, and I followed his look, and there it was.

JO-JO (*sitting by herself on her fire escape, perhaps drinking a glass of wine, meditative*). There he was.

BERTIE. The moon.

MOON (*entering, is a pretty cool customer. Makes a slow cross from one side of the stage to the other during the course of the play, a long low orbit between the actors and us*). That's right.

SALLY (*lying down in the woods*). It's funny. I always think of the moon as a guy.

MOON. In Germany I'm known as "*Herr Mond*."

SALLY. He was shining through the leaves of the trees, green-white light like mentos, floating slowly in the hot summer air like a ghost.

MOON. I do have a certain ghost-like quality.

TAYLOR (*standing on the balcony of a resort hotel*). He looked very romantic. Out there, over the lagoon. His reflection dancing on the water below.

MOON. You look absolutely lovely in my light.

TAYLOR. Really?

MOON. Man. Wish I had a camera.

JO-JO. Every time I see the moon, I think ...

SALLY. Of a story I read once, where everything wasted on the earth is found in big storehouses on the moon. Money, unanswered prayers, pointless tears ...

MOON. I keep it all carefully labeled. I've got big warehouses full of talent, for example. You all waste a lot of talent down there.

TAYLOR. He looks so perfect. He looks like what I imagined he would look like on this night.

MOON. Golden. Sweet.

TAYLOR. My honeymoon.

MOON. Did I tell you how gorgeous you look?

TAYLOR. Oh. I don't think you used that word before.

MOON. Gorgeous.

TAYLOR. Really?

MOON. Really.

SALLY. I wonder what I've wasted that's up on the moon now.

MOON. Time! I've got acres and acres of time! This part of me? It's called the Sea of Tranquility! Just hundreds of miles of nothing but time!

SALLY. I wonder if he's got my virginity.

MOON. I don't think it's here.

SALLY. It'll be there soon. I lost it about an hour ago.

JO-JO. Every time I look at the moon I think ...

BERTIE. The kid down below is pointing up at the moon. He's pulling on his mom's hand. I think he's crying.

MOON. What's wrong with that kid?

BERTIE. Oh, I get it. He thinks it's a big balloon.

MOON. That's one dumb kid.

BERTIE. Yeah. You do sort of look like a balloon though.

MOON. How?

BERTIE. You're round, and you're up in the sky ...

MOON. If he thinks I'm a balloon, that little boy is in for a whole lifetime of disappointments.

BERTIE. You think so?

MOON. Definitely.

JO-JO. He reminds me ...

SALLY. Where is Greg?

BERTIE. Don't you think it's a good thing to have ambitions?

MOON. Well, sure. If he's planning on being an astronaut or something, fine. But thinking I'm a balloon? That's delusional.

JO-JO. Why am I thinking about him right now?

SALLY. I am so lost. I have no idea where the car is. This pale, mint green light messes everything up. Sun rises in the east, right? So how about the moon?

MOON. Don't ask me. I just come from over there and go over there. Look for moss. I think it's supposed to grow on the north side of trees.

SALLY. You're no help.

The Picnic

“Out of God’s blessing, and into the warm sun.”

—Traditional proverb

CHARACTERS

CYNTHIA

LAURENCE

MAURICE

GWYNN

(A sunny grove, in which there are a group of four picnickers, two men, two women. LAURENCE and MAURICE lounge on the grass, fully clothed. One of the two women, CYNTHIA, is completely nude and looking out towards the audience. The other woman, GWYNN, is towards the back of the stage, her dress hiked up, wading in a lake. The scene duplicates Manet’s painting Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe. The characters begin speaking very slowly, holding their positions. Over the course of the next couple of minutes they begin to move and become more natural. Recommended music: Mozart’s “Sonata in A Major.”)

CYNTHIA. It is such a day.

LAURENCE. The lake, the grass, the blue sky through the leaves ...

MAURICE. I could not eat another bite.

GWYNN. Dessert.

MAURICE. Where?

GWYNN. In the basket.

(MAURICE starts to look.)

GWYNN (*cont'd*). No, no. Not until we've digested. Have some cheese if you're hungry.

MAURICE. What kind of cheese do we have?

LAURENCE. What kind do you like?

MAURICE. Camembert.

CYNTHIA. That's the kind we have.

(CYNTHIA pulls it from the bag and gives it to MAURICE.)

LAURENCE. And some more wine?

CYNTHIA. There's another bottle somewhere.

MAURICE. I never get drunk anymore.

LAURENCE. No?

MAURICE. Sometimes giddy. But I never get the spins.

LAURENCE. I feel that I'm tipsy all the time.

CYNTHIA. That's the summer sun. It's like fine wine.

LAURENCE. Look. A single cloud, wandering about like a lost calf.

CYNTHIA. Moo, cloud.

(They all look up at the cloud and moo at it lazily.)

GWYNN (*to CYNTHIA*). How's your tan coming?

CYNTHIA (*standing, turning elegantly*). You tell me.

GWYNN. An excellent tan.

LAURENCE. Exquisite.

CYNTHIA. Thank you.

LAURENCE. You'll soon be as tan as a wood nymph.

CYNTHIA. This is my ambition.

LAURENCE. A noble ambition.

MAURICE. What is for dessert?

GWYNN. Don't you want to be surprised?

MAURICE. Yes.

LAURENCE. Is it cake?

CYNTHIA. Yes.

MAURICE. Wait ... it's chocolate cake. With a coconut flake topping.

CYNTHIA. Yes.

MAURICE, LAURENCE & GWYNN. My favorite!

LAURENCE (*to CYNTHIA*). You look marvelous. (*Calling back.*) Gwynn? Doesn't Cynthia look marvelous?

GWYNN. Exquisite.

CYNTHIA. What are you doing, Gwynn?

GWYNN. I'm chasing the little fishies with my hand. They seem to like it.

LAURENCE (*to CYNTHIA*). Would you care to make love?

MAURICE. Excuse me?

CYNTHIA. Now?

LAURENCE. Yes.

MAURICE. Excuse me? That IS my wife.

LAURENCE. I know.

GWYNN. We all know.

CYNTHIA. Yes, let's make love. Shall I put anything on?

LAURENCE. Did you bring anything special?

CYNTHIA. Did you see my undergarments?

LAURENCE. Frills?

CYNTHIA. Very frilly.

LAURENCE. I love frills.

MAURICE. Excuse me. Cynthia ...

CYNTHIA. Yes?

MAURICE. Are you really going to have carnal relations with Laurence?

CYNTHIA. Well ... yes.

Balance

CHARACTERS

RUTH: wears a pretty dress, but looks a bit bedraggled.

(RUTH enters the room.)

RUTH. I don't really ... OK. Just a brief ... this is the den?
(Stops.)

(She looks around the walls. At first she's shocked, then horrified, then she tries to think of something nice to say.)

RUTH *(cont'd)*. Wow. I don't think I've ever seen such a collection of mounted heads in one place before. And you actually killed all of these animals yourself? Uh huh? Even the squirrels? Huh. And they're stuffed why? Well, if my best friend owned a taxidermy store, I might do the same thing. It must be great, having all this to remind you of the thrill of seeing these animals for the first time. Alive. Oh, no, let's save the gun collection for some other time. Just looking at these brings the smell of gunpowder right to my nostrils.

(She is asked to sit down.)

RUTH *(cont'd)*. What an interesting chair. Do you ever bump your head on the horns? No, I guessed that this wasn't ordinary leather. Listen, Roy, I really want to thank you for ... no, I'm not really a hard liquor kind of gal. Not even Jäger, no. I've actually got to be going. I certainly will never forget this evening. It was completely unlike any first date I've ever had.

(He compliments her appearance.)

RUTH (*cont'd*). That's sweet, but I really felt a little overdressed. If I had known we were going to a rifle range, I would have chosen something else. Maybe some khaki. That's sort of in again, right?

(She gets up to go.)

RUTH (*cont'd*). Next week is pretty booked up. Right before tax season. Then there's Easter, which is a big deal with my family. And then my trip this summer, and before you know it, we're in the mad rush of the holidays. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I don't think a second date is a good idea.

(He's hurt.)

RUTH (*cont'd*). Please listen. I think that we've established that we're two very different people. And it's not just the Ron Paul thing. We're just different. Very, very different. It's not like it's anyone's fault.

(He asks her a question.)

A Wild River

CHARACTERS

PAUL: wears a religious robe.

PETER: a journalist, wears a tie and jacket and carries a pad and paper.

GRACE: an energetic and attractive young woman, dressed in tasteful robes.

(Music: Benedictine monks. Onstage are two chairs, a small table sits between them, with a small religious-themed statue, preferably of a female, saint and a plate on it. PAUL and PETER enter. PETER is clearly nervous.)

PAUL. In here.

PETER. Thank you.

PAUL. Please sit. Water?

PETER. No, thank you.

PAUL. Something else? Tea, coffee, apple juice, orange juice, Coke or Pepsi ... ?

PETER. You have both?

PAUL. It is our policy to not choose favorites.

PETER. No, I'm fine, really.

PAUL. All right.

PETER. Thank you.

PAUL. You are welcome.

(A pause. PAUL sits across from PETER. A longer pause.)

PETER. So. Big changes here, huh?

PAUL. Yes. A new beginning.

PETER. I never thought I'd see the day.

PAUL. You and several billion other people.

PETER. It's historic.

PAUL. It is larger than historic.

PETER. You're right. It's a miracle.

PAUL. Not necessarily, no. Here, that word means something very specific. There are criteria. Elaborate criteria. We send priests to interview people, take statements, do research ... it can take years.

PETER. Right. I just meant ...

PAUL. The Church doesn't leave anything to chance. The election of the supreme pontiff was not a matter of chance. You are not here by chance. You are sitting in that chair, preparing for the most important interview of your life, because the Pope, the wearer of the three crowns, the pastor and physician possessed of all power both in heaven and earth, requested you to be here.

PETER. Me specifically?

PAUL. The supreme pontiff likes your writing.

PETER. Are you sure?

PAUL. Yes. Particularly your interviews in *Rolling Stone*.

PETER. I wouldn't think my writing ... I don't normally interview someone like this.

PAUL. I am aware of that.

PETER. Celebrities, rock musicians ...

PAUL. The Pope is a not a celebrity.

PETER. I didn't mean ...

PAUL. The Pope is the representative of God on earth.

PETER. Of course. (*Beat.*) I guess I'm just sort of awe-struck.

PAUL. That is a proper state of mind for this interview.

PETER. So, uhh, what's the proper way to address ...

PAUL. Your holiness.

PETER. Not Holy Father ... ?

PAUL. We're still working all of that out. These are early days. (*A sound flourish.*) The supreme pontiff approaches!

(*PAUL turns towards the approaching Pope [GRACE] and genuflects elaborately. PETER stands up, sits down, tries the genuflection, gets lost, kneels. GRACE enters drinking a diet Pepsi.*)

GRACE. Thanks, fellas. You can both stand. The Pope says you can stand.

PAUL. Your eminence, this is Mr. Peter Kettle.

PETER. Your holiness.

GRACE. Mr. Kettle. I'm a fan.

PETER. Really?

GRACE. I loved your Macy Gray interview.

PETER. Thank you.

GRACE. That woman's got a voice, huh? (*Sings a little Macy Gray.*) Hey, Paul, we got some Macy Gray?

PAUL. I'm sorry?

GRACE. Tell a couple of the Swiss Guards to go out and get some Macy Gray. The music around here's kind of a downer. Anyhow ... (*Sitting.*) So, let's get this thing started. Sorry I don't have long. Still have to finish my big speech for the induction.

(*GRACE pulls out a cigarette and a lighter, then offers one to PETER.*)

GRACE (*cont'd*). Cigarette?

PETER. No, thank you.

GRACE (*starts to light cigarette, but then stops*). Kidding, kidding. I don't smoke.

PETER. Oh.

Stardust

CHARACTERS

REBECCA

CATHERINE

KATIE

BEN

(Two older women sitting in chairs in a waiting area, which is open on one side to the twilight of the evening. They're both wearing heavy coats. REBECCA has two large suitcases. There's a table with a pitcher of water and two glasses between them.)

REBECCA. And that's the last thing I remember. I think.

CATHERINE. You think.

REBECCA. Only later ... there may have been some ... singing. Is that possible? That I would remember that?

CATHERINE. Sure. Anything's possible.

REBECCA. Well, it was pleasant. Some song I liked, I think. Not what you would expect, given the circumstances. I think it was "Stardust." You know that one?

CATHERINE. I think so.

REBECCA. Well, it was something like that. Romantic. *(Beat. Hums a bit of "Stardust.")* It feels like we've been waiting for an awfully long time.

CATHERINE. It does, doesn't it?

REBECCA. Is there a schedule posted somewhere?

CATHERINE. Not that I've seen. Glass of water?

REBECCA. Thanks.

(CATHERINE hands REBECCA a glass of water. Note: each time they do this, it's with the easy satisfaction of a pair of smokers enjoying a cigarette. Shift: a summer night. KATIE and BEN, a young couple, are standing watching the sky, near the water.)

KATIE. Did you see that?

BEN. What?

KATIE. Another one. There! Another one!

BEN. Where?

KATIE. You didn't see either of those?

BEN. Where are you talking about?

KATIE. There. Over there. Over the water. There! Next to that star!

BEN. You're pointing towards a whole lot of stars.

KATIE. That one right there. On the tip of my finger.

(BEN edges closer.)

BEN. I'm still not sure I'm seeing the one you mean.

KATIE. Get closer.

(He does. KATIE snuggles up to him.)

KATIE *(cont'd)*. That's better.

(Shift back to the waiting area.)

REBECCA. So then we moved to the house in Baltimore...
no, wait. Not Baltimore. It all seems a long time ago.

CATHERINE. Maybe it was.

REBECCA. Maybe it was. Life stops being a novelty. At some point. You remember your first kiss ...

(KATIE and BEN kiss, her initiating.)

REBECCA (*cont'd*). But not your third.

CATHERINE. Not distinctly, no.

REBECCA. No. And it's the same way with the second house and the third car and the fourth job.

CATHERINE. I guess you're right. (*Indicating suitcases.*) They're not going to let you take all that, you know.

REBECCA. Why not?

CATHERINE. Weight allowance, to begin with.

REBECCA. What weight allowance?

CATHERINE. Didn't you read the brochure?

REBECCA. I never even saw a brochure.

(CATHERINE produces a brochure and hands it to her. She looks at it. Shift.)

KATIE. There! You see that one?

BEN. No.

KATIE. You must have seen it.

BEN. I didn't.

KATIE. Look over towards the water. (*Beat.*) See?

BEN. Oh there! Yes!

(Shift.)

REBECCA. "No firearms, no flammable materials, no pets ..."

CATHERINE. Can you imagine people trying to take a pet?

REBECCA. "No food, no liquids, no lighters or matches, no lotions or gels, no knives or nail files, no books ..."

CATHERINE. That's the one that gets me. I've always enjoyed a good book.

REBECCA. "No magazines, no manuscripts, no Bibles or daily devotionals, no brochures ..." Now does that make sense?

CATHERINE. They'll probably have entertainments of some sort on board.