

CHARACTERS

DAVID (*late thirties*)

HENRY (*a teenager*)

GARBO (*a teenager*)

PART ONE

SCENE ONE

DAVID: (*to audience*) Oh, you know, these things happen incrementally.

One night, I put on a piece of music I've always enjoyed listening to. What do those record magazines call it? A desert island disc.

And the music, which used to wrap itself around me and lift me up, well this time it just sat there. Limply. All over the carpet. Kind of twitching around me, but not touching me.

I took it off the CD player and put it back in its case. I walked outside and buried it in a park across the street.

I went back inside and locked the door.

I sat in a chair, very still.

Not long after, I started feeling it all around me. In my food. In my bed. In the newspaper. In the faces of children.

My friend had a funny name for it. What did she call it – ?

Henry and Garbo appear, with bowls of cereal.

HENRY: Mm, this is –

DAVID: Do you like the cereal?

HENRY: It's really delicious. It's satisfying.

DAVID: I used to enjoy eating cereal at night, like a snack before bed.

HENRY: It's ... what is it?

DAVID: Honeycomb.

HENRY: Honeycomb. Is that – Is that the one with the bear on the carton?

DAVID: It comes in a red box. I don't remember a bear.

HENRY: The Honeycomb bear. Isn't there a – ?

DAVID: I don't remember a bear.

HENRY: Am I making this up?

DAVID: Perhaps you're thinking of Sugar Crisp.

Pause.

HENRY: Well. Anyway. It's damn good. *(to Garbo)* Isn't it?

GARBO: It really hits the spot.

HENRY: Fancy cereals don't come our way too often.

DAVID: You looked like you could use something ... a boost ...
SO ...

GARBO: *(to Henry)* A boost?

HENRY: *(to Garbo)* He read us like a book. *(to David)* You read us
like a book.

DAVID: I just thought, you know –

HENRY: 'There's a couple of wacks. A couple of hooligans. Ruffians?'

DAVID: No, I thought –

HENRY: 'A couple of nogoodniks?'

Pause.

DAVID: You've got a unique vocabulary for someone your age.

HENRY: I pick things up. Here and there.

GARBO: He's got a mind like a steel trap. Is that what they say?

DAVID: I thought you could use a hand, that's all. A leg up.

HENRY: It's generous of you. To take us in.

DAVID: A good night's sleep.

GARBO: You got a heart of gold. We can see that.

DAVID: Oh, I don't know ...

HENRY: It's neighbourly. Sitting here with us. It's adventurous.

DAVID: I wasn't doing anything, so, I mean, why not –

HENRY: We could be a couple of psychopaths.

DAVID: I'm not uncomfortable around young people. I mean, people younger than me. Some people are.

HENRY: Not you.

DAVID: No.

GARBO: Yeah, you've been pretty chill with us.

Pause.

HENRY: Of course it's a risk for us as well. A stranger. Inviting you in for a bowl of cereal.

Garbo looks at Henry.

(to Garbo) Could be a snatcher. A molester. A child pornographer. What do you think?

GARBO: He don't strike me as a child pornographer.

DAVID: Oh, well, I'm not so –

Pause.

I do confess to owning a copy of *The Blue Lagoon* once.

Henry and Garbo look at him blankly.

A movie. Brooke Shields and Christopher Atkins. A kind of ...
um ...

HENRY: I remember liking a movie called *Ghost*. I remember getting
all sad over that one. It was on TV. You remember that movie?

DAVID: Yes. Demi Moore. She was involved in pottery.

Pause.

DAVID: If you want some more cereal –

HENRY: I'm stuffed like a pig.

GARBO: I feel all jumpy. In my stomach.

HENRY: Maybe a sugar high.

DAVID: I guess it's not the healthiest late-night snack, but –

Pause.

HENRY: It's nice in here. It's cozy.

DAVID: There's a lot of wood. The walls, the furniture. I think it gives
it a kind of –

HENRY: This table is something.

DAVID: It's not mine. It came with the place. With the rental.

HENRY: It's sturdy. I can see a little family sitting around this table.
A Pilgrim family, maybe.

DAVID: It's an antique. Probably. I don't know. I'm guessing.

HENRY: What makes an antique? Would a Pilgrim's table be considered an antique?

DAVID: I'm not really an antiques dealer or anything –

GARBO: Or a child pornographer. We're really starting to narrow the field.

Pause.

DAVID: There's plenty of room. You can sleep on the rug by the fire.
I can bring you some quilts.

HENRY: Maybe right here on this sturdy table.

DAVID: There's plenty of room, so –

HENRY: Is there anything we can do for you? You know ... some painting? Yard work? Small home repairs?

DAVID: They have a department for that at the rental agency. If there's a problem you just call them and they send someone over, I imagine.

GARBO: A hotline.

DAVID: You pay for it. For the service. For the convenience. It's all part of the package.

HENRY: Well, how 'bout I clean up?

DAVID: You don't have to.

Henry disappears with the cereal bowls.

You have really nice skin. A really healthy complexion.

Pause.

I used to know people who'd spend a fortune on creams and ointments to get a complexion like that.

Pause.

I knew a woman who actually injected something into her face.

Pause.

Not herself. At a clinic. Even still –

Henry appears.

HENRY: I'm just letting them drip-dry, if that's okay.

DAVID: That's fine. Thank you.

Pause.

DAVID: I was just telling your – I was telling Garbo what a beautiful complexion she has.

HENRY: What do they say? Country air.

DAVID: Yes.

HENRY: And clean living.

DAVID: I could use a bit of that, I suppose.

HENRY: What?

DAVID: What?

HENRY: Country air or clean living?

DAVID: Oh, both, I imagine.

GARBO: You got a nice head of hair.

David smiles.

DAVID: How about I get you those quilts?

David disappears.

Henry looks at Garbo.

HENRY: You've got some cereal or milk or something on your mouth.

Henry touches Garbo's face.

David appears with two folded cotton quilts.

HENRY: Wow. Now those are a couple of nice items. Those are a couple of items worth taking care of.

DAVID: They came with the place. You can wrap yourself up in them, sit on the porch and ... watch nature, I suppose.

GARBO: They go nice with the wood.

DAVID: Well, if you need anything –

David hands them the quilt.

GARBO: Good night.

Henry and Garbo disappear.

SCENE TWO

DAVID: (*to audience*) At first they thought it was viral. The word ‘airborne’ was mentioned. Someone told me they thought it had something to do with one’s diet.

And then there were those who just refused to believe anything was happening at all. You know, burying their heads in the sand and all that. But for me at least, it was impossible to ignore.

Things started to be left unattended. Bicycles. Dog shit. Cellphones. Children.

Everyone became a bit blurry-eyed.

I watched a teenager walk directly into a brick wall. He just sat there on the pavement, a little trickle of blood dripping off his forehead onto his K-Way jacket.

One night, there was a report on the radio that a group of people was going to be setting off some fireworks in a park downtown. They handed out sparklers to some of the younger children. But instead of running around in circles making patterns of sparks in the night, the children all just kind of stood around randomly, watching them fizzle out.

There was a bit of a movement. A resistance, if you could call it that. Some people banded together.

They would gather in public spaces across the city and try to instigate random conversations with strangers. And singalongs.

Well, you couldn’t blame them. No one really knew what to do. We were all kind of wandering around like scared little puppies, so –

Sometimes I would call up my friend to talk, you know, to commiserate. Misery loves company. All of that. We’d go for coffee, or sometimes for a drink. I’d sit down across from her and just start blabbering on about, I don’t know, me.

Well, eventually that became unbearable.

I couldn’t listen to myself talk anymore. The same words coming out of my mouth. I would get halfway through a sentence and I would just stop, out of sheer boredom.

Words like ‘discontent’, ‘exhaustion’, ‘perplexed’, ‘isolation’. They didn’t mean anything. They didn’t hold any more weight

than, say, I don't know, hat, or pen, or silo, or dirt. This friend of mine actually suggested I start keeping a diary. Jesus Christ, I thought to myself. I have far too much respect for pen and paper.

I actually did write a few lines one night in my bedroom, in an old address book that had some blank pages at the back for scribbling notes.

I don't exactly know why I had an address book. I never wrote letters and rarely visited anyone, so –

So, I remember writing a few lines about, I don't know, my state or the state of the world, and I drew a little picture of a ... a penis ... or something ... with a face and some of those dialogue bubbles you see in comic books.

God, I thought, a three-year-old could be more creative.

I remember telling someone – we were talking about tattoos (this was ages ago) – and I said something like, 'I wouldn't know what to get. Nothing sticks with me. I am a creature of fads. A faddist.'

A loud sound.

Henry appears naked. He is wrapped in the quilt.

HENRY: I'm sorry.

DAVID: Is everything all right?

HENRY: Did I wake you up? I woke you up.

DAVID: I thought I heard something.

HENRY: I banged my foot. That table –

DAVID: The leg kind of sticks out. I should have left a light on.

HENRY: I shouldn't be creeping around in the dark.

DAVID: Do you need anything? Are you warm enough?

HENRY: A glass of water. It's a bit dry in here.

DAVID: The wood really absorbs the moisture. I was thinking about getting a humidifier.

HENRY: Do you mean a vaporizer?

DAVID: Well, no. I think they're similar, but –

HENRY: Because I think you might have some trouble finding a vaporizer around these parts.

DAVID: That's true.

HENRY: Or a humidifier, for that matter.

DAVID: It's the fireplace. It sucks up all the moisture.

HENRY: You could put a pot of water by the fireplace.

DAVID: That's true.

HENRY: Or some plants. That might help.

DAVID: Maybe.

Pause.

HENRY: Jeepers creepers. Listen to me, keeping you up, talking about humidifiers. It's, what, three in the morning? I'm sorry. I'll just –

DAVID: It's all right. I'm a light sleeper.

Henry disappears.

SCENE THREE

DAVID: (*to audience*) The epidemic started to accelerate and spread. I started to hear rumblings from various corners of the world.

The inhabitants of an entire island in the Caribbean – this is what I heard – all gathered on a beach one bright morning and walked into the ocean.

There was a rumour an entire village in the South African countryside just stopped breathing one day.

Insects and bees started just hanging around in the sky. They seemed to have no desire to pollinate or sting anything.

Flowers lost their odour. Herbs lost their flavour. Everything seemed to taste the same. Like dried noodles.

Apparently there was a good Indian buffet across town that still managed to serve up a decent meal. The owner was a small man who kept his spices in a sealed container in his fruit cellar. The papadums were always crisp, and there was a good spicy yogurt dip, I was told.

And so one afternoon – I hadn't eaten in about three days – I thought I would take myself out to lunch.

When I got there I had a sudden wave of lethargy.

There was a long table full of cutlery and dishes of food. A few people lined up. The idea of having to serve myself – getting in line with a tray and tongs, getting my own silverware – it all seemed like too much effort.

I stood outside. I didn't know what to do. I mean, should I stand there, should I walk somewhere else, should I lie down on the pavement?

Looking around, I noticed an advertisement taped to a telephone pole. 'A remote getaway. A cabin in the woods. Peace of mind.'

There was a picture of a raccoon or a chipmunk or something. And a phone number.

And so the next morning, I put some of my clothes into a suitcase.

I left the city.

It seemed that somewhere, deep down, there was still a seed of hope. Somewhere, a desire to save myself.

Henry appears, holding one of the quilts, which is rolled up and covered in vomit.

HENRY: I'm so sorry.

DAVID: It's fine.

HENRY: A lot of work went into this. A lot of handicraft –

DAVID: I'm sure it's replaceable.

HENRY: You'll probably have to pay for it. The rental agency is probably gonna slap you with a bill.

DAVID: It's fine.

HENRY: Did you put a deposit down on this place? Do you have contents insurance?

DAVID: Look, I'm sure it's all covered in the agreement. It's –

HENRY: I take full responsibility.

DAVID: It's no one's fault.

HENRY: Garbo's always had a sensitive stomach. We've been eating a lot of tuna fish lately. Some cheap brown grapes. An old avocado we found in the parking lot. I think the cereal was too much for her. The sugar content.

DAVID: I'm sorry. I didn't know –

HENRY: Why would you? You're not a dietitian. Are you?

DAVID: No.

David takes the soiled quilt and examines it.

DAVID: I think this will clean up. The smell is worse than the stain.
I think a good soak –

HENRY: You bring us into your nice rental cottage. You offer us a leg up. And what do we do? We interrupt your nice rental vacation. We puke all over your nice rental quilt.

DAVID: Look, there's a label here. It's from a department store, so – It's not a big deal. It's cheap. An imitation.

HENRY: Department store goods don't always come cheap.

DAVID: Where is she? Is she – ?

HENRY: I put her outside. Fresh air.

DAVID: Shouldn't you go check on her?

HENRY: People are embarrassed after they puke. They like to be left alone.

DAVID: Well, I'll just go soak this in some water.

David disappears with the quilt.

Garbo appears with the box of Honeycomb cereal. She grabs a handful and starts to eat.

HENRY: He seems tidy and polite. There's plenty of space. A fireplace and a big bathtub. A hammock and a barbecue. What do you think?

GARBO: This cereal isn't very good on its own. It really needs some milk or fruit or something.

SCENE FOUR

David appears.

DAVID: Oh, you're –

GARBO: The hair of the dog. Is that what they say?

HENRY: That's what they say.

Pause.

DAVID: Well – I soaked it in some hot water. I hung it out. Good as new.

HENRY: R-e-l-i-e-f. What does that spell?

GARBO: That spells relief.

DAVID: I wasn't really worried.

HENRY: You're a real renegade. Some people would get all worked up. Some people would go ballistic over something like this.

DAVID: It's not mine, so –

HENRY: Fuck it. It's only puke. Like they didn't puke on quilts in antique times. I bet it happened all the time.

GARBO: Eating caribou and shit. Eating wild berries and mushrooms and beaver and shit. I bet it happened all the time.

DAVID: You're probably right.

HENRY: Even still, it's good of you not to freak.

DAVID: It's just a quilt.

HENRY: A rental quilt.

DAVID: Yes, so –

HENRY: So we're square. You take us in. Give us a leg up. I do your dishes. Garbo pukes on your quilt. I feel bad. You wash it up. Good as new. We're square.

DAVID: Yes. I mean, it's been fine. It's been –

GARBO: You weren't doing anything.

DAVID: No.

HENRY: A real heart of gold.

DAVID: I wasn't doing anything, so ...

Pause.

HENRY: Are we keeping you from something?

DAVID: No, I'm just –

HENRY: If you've got something –

DAVID: No.

HENRY: We can leave.

DAVID: I've got nothing –

HENRY: *(to Garbo)* What do you think?

GARBO: Let's go.

DAVID: You don't have to – Please. I mean –
If you want to stay for a few days – If you want to stay with
me – For a few days –

Henry and Garbo disappear.