

The Draper



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*“Had I the heavens’ embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet.
But I being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”*

William Butler Yeats

*“By colliding protons at ultra-high energies,
the Large Hadron Collider could open new frontiers
in understanding of the infinite weavings of space and time,
the microstructure of the mysterious dark matter
that is all around us, its existence inferred
only through its gravitational pull on visible matter.”*

Steve Giddings

CHARACTERS:

PENELOPE MELTON, an orchestral violinist; late twenties

PORTIA MELTON, Penelope's sister, a costume designer; mid-twenties

RACHEL MELTON, Penelope's and Portia's mother, a textile executive; fifty

GEORGETTE FOULARD, Portia's caregiver; late-thirties

NATHAN WOOLSEY, a photographer; early thirties

JULIAN DORNICK, a British-born journalist; mid-thirties

KATRINA SPINDLE, a German-born shopkeeper; mid-sixties

SIEGFRIED SPINDLE, Katrina's German-born nephew; late twenties

TIME:

The present, recent past, and possible future

PLACE:

A stylized set represents various locations in The Garment District of New York City: Portia's apartment, Spindle's Fabric Shop, and glimpses of a parallel universe.

SCENE I

(On a sultry summer evening on a street in the Garment District of New York, a splintered reality is evoked, suggesting interiors and exteriors, among them a store with “Spindle’s Fabric Shop” etched on its sign. Across the street, inside an apartment, stands a young woman, PENELOPE MELTON, who glances about, speaking anxiously, presumably to someone listening.)

PENELOPE

I know you’re watching. I haven’t found your cameras yet, but I’ve seen you too -- in that black van parked down the street. You work for the police or F.B.I. and consider me a suspect, but you’re wrong! In fact, I’m conducting my own investigation, so turn up your receivers because I’m about to inform you of events that occurred before you started violating my privacy, events starting the afternoon of the last Friday in August, when Nathan Woolsey and Julian Dornick were standing across the street, in front of Spindle’s Fabric Shop.

(Standing before the shop, focusing his camera, is NATHAN WOOLSEY. His British friend, JULIAN DORNICK, stands nearby.)

PENELOPE

Nathan was taking pictures of the window when he asked his friend to...

PENELOPE
...move.

NATHAN
Move...

NATHAN
...Julian, you’re reflecting on the glass.

JULIAN
Sorry.

NATHAN
He changes the display every week. Seriously, have you ever seen such awesome combinations of colors and textures? This window belongs in a gallery.

JULIAN
Well, I’ll admit it’s a fine display of textiles.

NATHAN

The whole world's in that window: the silks from China, the cottons from Egypt, the lace from France. I've met the owner. Her husband was in the South Tower on nine eleven showing samples while she was parking, so she witnessed the collapse. She was going to close but downsized instead. It's her nephew who dresses the windows. He said he's on a quest to fathom the fabric of existence, the warp and weft of the universe.

JULIAN

Ah, so he's a philosopher.

NATHAN

A physicist from Heidelberg, a student prodigy -- till he dropped out.

JULIAN

Had a breakdown, did he?

NATHAN

He didn't say.

JULIAN

Well, isn't that what prodigies are prone to? Now don't turn around! We're being spied on by a woman with binoculars. She's across the street, five floors up.

NATHAN

Should I take her picture?

JULIAN

Take mine instead.

(NATHAN snaps pictures while across the street, in the apartment, PENELOPE'S sister, PORTIA, sits in a wheelchair. SHE wears blue butterfly barrettes and holds binoculars focused down on Spindle's Fabric Shop. To the side, stands GEORGETTE FOULARD, Portia's caregiver. PENELOPE continues speaking to the hidden cameras.)

PENELOPE

While Nathan snapped pictures, my sister, Portia, was watching. She was the first to notice, and asked...

PENELOPE

...why?

PORTIA

Why...

PORTIA

...is it that for every five people who walk into Spindle's, only four come out? You've heard of blood farms and organ brokers? What if they're draining or chopping up bodies and selling them online? Or what if there's a back room with a crematorium?

GEORGETTE

Or maybe there's a pit of hungry, flesh eatin' snakes.

PENELOPE

Or maybe the back room has a back door?

PORTIA

It started last week when I saw a limo stop and a guy walk in with blind woman tapping her cane. Later he came out with just the cane. The next morning, a guy and a hunch-backed lady went in pushing a stroller; ten minutes later the guy came out with only the stroller. Then yesterday I saw a woman dressed like a nurse with her arm around an anorexic girl. When she left, the girl was replaced by a bolt of fabric. On top of that, I've seen dozens walk in alone who never walk out.

GEORGETTE

Haven't you got somethin' better to do?

PORTIA

I think people go in there to dispose of ancient grannies, sick lovers, and suicides go in to dispose of themselves. Maybe Mrs. Spindle's been drugged by psychos operating some kind of genocide factory, only it's not ethnic or religious; they specialize in the sick and decrepit.

PENELOPE

So who are these "psychos"?

PORTIA

She hires help, and there's a new guy working for her. It's hard to tell from up here, but it looks like the all victims are women, so maybe it's gender cleansing -- gendercide.

GEORGETTE

What...?

PORTIA

Gendercide! Ever since parents can know the sex of their kids in utero, the girls are aborted. Soon we'll be outnumbered two to one in China, India, and Christ knows where else. They're already kidnapping girls, selling them like dogs and forcing them into slavery.

PENELOPE

So maybe Spindles has a fabric that makes girls invisible.

GEORGETTE

Yeah! And sweeps 'em to heaven up the tunnel of light!

PENELOPE

With a celestial chorus cheering them on!

GEORGETTE

That's the ticket, ha ha!

PORTIA

Or maybe there's a fabric that dissolves flesh, but leaves their livers for transplants.

GEORGETTE

That's fucked up! *(to Penelope)* Your sister's got a sick mind.

PORTIA

I'm serious, I've started taking notes: specific dates and times. Who are these people and where do they go?

PENELOPE

And what if they were never there to begin with?

GEORGETTE

Maybe you're seein' ghosts.

PORTIA

You think 'cause I'm dying, I can see the dead?

GEORGETTE

Maybe.

PENELOPE

Those drugs you're taking have side effects.

PORTIA

But Georgette's seen them too! *(to Georgette)* You said so!

GEORGETTE

Yeah, I've seen folks go in and not come out, but that's 'cause in between I'm fixin' supper or watchin' T V. Besides, I'm not wastin' time starin' at that dingy street. 'Course there's always somethin' new in that window; now take a....

GEORGETTE
...look at that red satin!

NATHAN
Look at that red satin;...

NATHAN
...how it reflects the light.

(The focus returns to NATHAN and JULIAN.)

NATHAN
He has an artist's eye; that window's inspired!

JULIAN
Is it? You might call the arrangement sumptuous, even sensual, but is it art? Is it the result of an aesthetically developed sensibility....

NATHAN
Yes!

JULIAN
...or simply good taste? It's one thing to have an instinct for spacial relationships; it's another to be original.

NATHAN
Oh, shush, Julian, you're such a snob!

JULIAN
Completely, unapologetically.

NATHAN
Hold still!

(NATHAN'S camera flashes as PORTIA peers through her binoculars.)

PORTIA
There's a man down there taking pictures. You see that, don't you?

PENELOPE
Yes.

GEORGETTE
Yeah.

PORTIA
He's given me an idea: that's how I'll get evidence. I'll take pictures of people going in, but not coming out.

PENELOPE

If they're not coming out, how can you take their pictures?

PORTIA

When they enter as couples, then exit as singles.

PENELOPE

Don't you think if there's a place to dump the unwanted people of the world, they'd be lined up the street?

GEORGETTE

Baby, they'd be lined up to Jersey!

PORTIA

Ha! You'd take me there yourself!

GEORGETTE

Damn straight, I'd wheel you right through that door, but not yet. You still got enough juice in you to light up the street!

PORTIA

Yeah, and I'm not leaving till I see my big sister happy -- speaking of which, are you still seeing Herschel?

(The focus shifts swiftly back and forth from the street to the apartment.)

JULIAN

So are you dating anyone?

PENELOPE

No.

NATHAN

No,...

NATHAN

...my last date was a compulsive texter.

PENELOPE

He claims to love music, but when I practice he plugs in his earbuds.

JULIAN

No!

GEORGETTE

No...

GEORGETTE

...way, baby, no way!

PENELOPE

Oh, yeah, baby, and sometimes I see him cringe.

PORTIA

Then to hell with the bastard!

JULIAN

Forget the bitch!

GEORGETTE

There's plenty more sugar in the sea.

JULIAN

Ever consider switching sides?

(NATHAN glances up.)

PORTIA

(staring down at Nathan) Oh, shit, he's looking up here!

(Lights flash as NATHAN snaps Portia's picture and JULIAN looks up.)

PORTIA

He took my picture! That prick just took my picture! *(to Penelope)* Get down there and tell him to fuck off!

PENELOPE

I can't do that!

GEORGETTE

(snatching the binoculars) Hey, that guy with the camera's a hot potato.

JULIAN

Now there's another woman staring down.

GEORGETTE

Check him out! He's a stone cold stud with shoulders a mile wide. *(handing Penelope the binoculars)* Here, take a look.

JULIAN

Now there's three of them.

PENELOPE

You mean the one with the scarf?

GEORGETTE

No, honey, that boy's gay.

PENELOPE

How can you tell?

GEORGETTE

How he shakes his skinny ass, that's how. The one on the right's the stud.

(NATHAN takes a picture of all three WOMEN who back away.)

GEORGETTE

Shit! The cocky bastard!

PORTIA

Damn insolence!

(NATHAN and JULIAN enter the shop as GEORGETTE glances down.)

GEORGETTE

Now they're goin' inside.

PENELOPE

Yes, but will they come out?

(PORTIA returns to gaze out the window as GEORGETTE takes PENELOPE aside.)

GEORGETTE

Penny, baby, we could use some more weed. The pain's bad lately and she's stopped eatin' and gets in those sorry-me fits -- you know what I'm sayin'?

PORTIA

"She" is right here; I'm not deaf! But Georgette's right: I need weed, and you need to forget Herschel. Don't waste your life with the wrong guy or you'll wind up raising kids in a hostile home so they turn out like us.

PENELOPE

We're not so bad.

PORTIA

Then why does mom want to stick me in an asylum?

PENELOPE

It's called "assisted living."

PORTIA

Hah! You mean assisted *dying*! What I really need is an opium den so I can get high then check out. *(to Georgette)* Penny promised to help me when the time comes.

GEORGETTE

What do you mean "help you?"

PORTIA

Drug me, drown me, or shoot me!

PENELOPE

Now I'll wheel you across the street.

PORTIA

Right.

PENELOPE

Look, I've seen the place mom's looking into: it's a pre-war mansion with a pool, a library and dining room with chandeliers, and you'd have your own apartment.

PORTIA

But no Georgette! I finally find someone compatible, and she wants to fire her!

GEORGETTE

Forgive me for sayin' this, but your ma's got a stick up her ass. She thinks I'm too low class, but care-takin' was born in me. I nursed my mama and my sister's babies, plus I give great massages, and check out that manicure.

PENELOPE

Nice.

GEORGETTE

You tell your mama I treat her like my own blood. Never mind, I'll tell her myself -- if she ever comes by.

PENELOPE

She will; she just came back from Beijing.

GEORGETTE

Well, she's missin' out -- she hit the jackpot with you girls.

PORTIA

Did I tell you my shrink says I should make friends with my body and write about it. Can you fuckin' believe it?! She wants me to suck up to my tumors, and who the fuck knows when the rest of me's going to turn traitor. Lately I wake up feeling all shriveled which is what Rabbi Loden says is fatal: the shrinking of the life force that gives people energy -- which is why you have to avoid guys like Herschel. If he doesn't like your music now, he'll hate it later, and then you'll hate yourself and start shrinking.
(to Georgette) Am I right?

GEORGETTE

Yeah, 'course I'm no expert. I never had a steady guy or even a father -- not that I'm complainin'. It's just a fact, but I got Tiff now, so I'm happy.

PENELOPE

Who's Tiff?

GEORGETTE

My partner, Tiffany.

PENELOPE

You're gay...?

GEORGETTE

Is that a problem?

PENELOPE

No, I...I just didn't know.

GEORGETTE

'Cause I didn't tell you and cause it's nobody's business. Portia guessed, and now she's teachin' me to sew, helpin' me make Tiff a skirt with slits to her thighs.

PORTIA

(gazing out) Now look at Spindle's window. See that striped silk? Wouldn't that make gorgeous curtains for your living room?

PENELOPE

(pause, staring) How many yards would I need?

PORTIA

Eight to be safe. Why don't you pick up the fabric when you leave, and while you're there, look around, investigate.

PENELOPE

What if I don't come out?

PORTIA

You're safe. Like I said, they just take the disposables like me.

PENELOPE

You're not disposable, and I'm not a detective, but I'll definitely buy the fabric.

PORTIA

And check out the new guy she's got working for her.

PENELOPE

Okay.

PORTIA

Thanks, sis, you're the best.

GEORGETTE

Yeah, baby, you're prime -- a real sweetheart.

PORTIA

That's her problem; she's too sweet, too complacent. She was going to compose operas, and I'd design the costumes. We were collaborating on a musical about Sycorax from The Tempest. She composed some awesome songs, then quit, but I sketched all the characters. *(pointing)* They're in a book under that stack.

GEORGETTE

Can I see?

PORTIA

Sure.

GEORGETTE

(opening the sketchbook) Now ain't this a kicker? Who knew you could draw like this?!
Shit, you are some talented lady.

PENELOPE

(glancing at the pages) Why don't we publish or scan them onto a website? You should draw more.

PORTIA

No thanks. All that's left for the doomed to create is our final exits: the how, when, and where. At least I'm dying young, so I'll still be attractive -- unless you throw me under a train and make a mess of it.

PENELOPE

Will you please stop being so morbid.

PORTIA

I like being morbid, but now I'm tired; I need to lie down. Spindle's closes soon, so buy the fabric now.

PENELOPE

Okay. Is there anything else you need?

GEORGETTE

What we need is love, baby, love, ha, ha!

(PENELOPE kisses PORTIA'S cheek, then retrieves her violin and departs.)

SCENE 2

(Chimes echo as sparkling lights reveal the interior of Spindle's Fabric Shop where fabrics are festooned from varying heights in colorful swags of silks, satins, velvets, and chiffons. KATRINA SPINDLE, a middle aged German woman, speaks with JULIAN while NATHAN examines bolts of fabrics.)

PENELOPE

When I entered the shop, Julian and Mrs. Spindle were talking about how...

PENELOPE

...the Garment District's shrinking.

JULIAN

The Garment District's shrinking...

JULIAN

...like a pair of woolly socks. So will Spindles be joining the exodus?

KATRINA

(with a German accent) Never! Years ago we occupied all six floors; we had cutting rooms, sewing rooms, and were the largest supplier of fringe! Now I rent to ritzy lawyers and accountants. Spindles may be smaller, but we still stock the finest fabrics -- no schmatta here!

JULIAN

No indeed. This jade velvet would do wonders for my old chaise.

KATRINA

That is imported from Milan.

JULIAN

But most of your fabrics come from China, right?

KATRINA

Of course, and India. Foreign labor is cheap, so the rich can get richer. Fifty years ago, ninety percent of our clothes were made in America. Now only three percent, but we still have designers -- more than London, Paris, and Milan! So yes, the Garment District is shrinking, but we are still the heart and soul of the city! *(noticing Penelope)* May I help you?

PENELOPE

Hello, Mrs. Spindle.

KATRINA

Ah, Miss Penelope! How good to see you, my dear!

PENELOPE

The shops's looking as beautiful as ever. Actually, I'm here to buy eight yards of that striped silk in the window.

KATRINA

That just arrived from Morocco; you have excellent taste.

PENELOPE

Portia noticed it.

KATRINA

Ah, yes, we see her staring out the window.

JULIAN

You mean the woman with binoculars...?

PENELOPE
Well...

KATRINA
Yes!

JULIAN
Nathan just snapped her picture.

NATHAN
I hope I wasn't intrusive.

PENELOPE
No, she's in a wheelchair and enjoys...looking.

NATHAN
Why not? Every week she has a new window to admire. I'm glad someone else appreciates them.

PENELOPE
Actually, she's focused on the door. She has a vivid imagination and thinks she sees people going in but not out -- that they disappear.

SIEGFRIED
They do.

KATRINA
Sigi!

PENELOPE
Oh...

JULIAN
Well, hello.

(SIEGFRIED, a handsome man in his late-twenties has entered from the back room. He also speaks with a German accent.)

KATRINA
You startled me! This is my nephew, Siegfried.

NATHAN
Hi, this is Julian, and I'm Nathan, the guy who came last week to discuss taking pictures. *(to Penelope)* We're working on a feature for the Times.

SIEGFRIED
Yes, I remember. *(turning to Penelope)* And you are the violinist, Penelope Melton. I notice you walking past on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

PENELOPE
Yes, I...I visit my sister.

SIEGFRIED

We call her “The Sentinel.” You perform with the Philharmonic, correct?

PENELOPE

Yes. Excuse me, but did you just say that people really disappear?

SIEGFRIED

Through the folds. Conduits of deep, magnetic densities that lead to an adjacent universe.

JULIAN

Ha, ha!

NATHAN

Jesus...

SIEGFRIED

You may have heard of string theory which posits eleven dimensions, but I’m certain there are at least twenty, composed of tiny vibrating threads warping and woofing into tapestries of which we are only a minuscule patch.

JULIAN

So you’re a theorist, are you?

SIEGFRIED

Gravitational physics was my field, though time is what interests me most.

JULIAN

Me too. A pity it can’t be slowed or stopped altogether.

SIEGFRIED

Why not? What is time but the measure of movements of objects in space. It is not necessarily continuous or even inevitable, especially if certain leptons move faster than light. In fact, time could be bent, twisted, and folded to envelope people centuries apart.

JULIAN

That would be quite the costume party.

SIEGFRIED

The guests would come from a great parade of universes, each with its own set of physical laws.

JULIAN

The living and the dead?

SIEGFRIED

Somewhere in time, we are all of us always alive.

KATRINA

Siegfried is a clever boy. In Frankfurt, he skipped three grades and won the science prize every year.

JULIAN

I'm impressed.

KATRINA

He was the youngest ever admitted to the University of Heidelberg!

SIEGFRIED

That was years ago.

KATRINA

He was invited to Geneva...

SIEGFRIED

Please, Auntie...

KATRINA

...to observe the Large Hadron Collider!

JULIAN

Aren't you bored here? I mean, can you unravel the mysteries of the universe while unraveling bolts of bunting?

SIEGFRIED

They are not incongruous vocations. After all, the microscope was invented by a linen draper, a Dutchman named Van Leeuwenhoek who ground lenses to count threads. Here I have learned to appreciate the vast variety of colors, the tactility of textures, the play of light on manifold forms.

PENELOPE

Excuse me, but about those people who disappear -- have you actually seen them?

KATRINA

No!

SIEGFRIED

Yes.

SIEGFRIED

It begins when they stroke the fabric and their fingers fall into the folds, followed by their arms. Then before they can cry out, their bodies are drawn in, as if suctioned through the funnel of a vacuum. It all happens quickly -- in the blink of an eye.

JULIAN

In the blink or a wink?

PENELOPE

Where does it happen? Which fabric?

SIEGFRIED

It varies since it is not the fabrics but the shapes they assume -- always on that side of the shop. When the folds curve, crimp, and pucker, they create unique geometric topographies that beckon to certain susceptible people.

PENELOPE

Which people?

JULIAN

Sweetheart, he's pulling your leg.

PENELOPE

My sister says it's the sick and unwanted.

SIEGFRIED

Perhaps. Some left their canes.

KATRINA

Umbrellas! Customers leave umbrellas! Please, Sigi, tell them you are joking!

SIEGFRIED

I did not mean to alarm you.

PENELOPE

Of course, if people really disappeared, there'd be investigations; friends and family would notice.

JULIAN

Oh, I don't know. People hardly look at each other any more; they're all staring at their phones, though, frankly, I love the idea. I'd bring my neighbor, Mister Wigans. He's a surly old sot who keeps his T V on scream level. If I could dispatch him to another universe, my entire building would rejoice.

PENELOPE

But it's only women who disappear -- according to my sister.

SIEGFRIED

More women enter the shop.

KATRINA

Sigi, stop talking nonsense!

SIEGFRIED

Auntie, this is the most conversation I have had in weeks, so I relish every moment. *(to Penelope)* Now please tell us about your sister. We have observed her companion pushing her down the street.

PENELOPE

Portia had lung cancer that spread to her spine.

SIEGFRIED

I am very sorry.

KATRINA

So tragic for someone young. How she loved coming here to find fabrics for costumes.

NATHAN

(pause, to Siegfried) Would you mind if I took your picture? I'll title it "The Window Dresser."

SIEGFRIED

Or "The Window Draper." That is what my Uncle Jacob called himself -- a draper.

KATRINA

My Jacob had a poet's heart. He said God was a draper with a draper's eye, and whenever fabrics fluttered, they were expressing the language of winds and breezes. He believed there was a fabric for everyone, a particular fiber, weave, and color that suited each of us.

JULIAN

Really? So what would Siegfried's fabric be? Spandex..?

SIEGFRIED

Ha! Very clever, but I would prefer this bombazine.

JULIAN

Well, my fabric would be *(pointing)* whatever that is -- linen, right?

KATRINA

Yes, a fine Belgian weave made of flaxen fibers.

JULIAN

I'd like a summer suit of that. So what would you choose for my friend, Nathan?

KATRINA

I would not presume to choose for someone I do not know.

NATHAN

I guess my fabric's denim, and what about you, Penelope?

PENELOPE

I...I don't know.

SIEGFRIED

Perhaps this exquisite Venetian lace.

KATRINA

And what would you choose for me, Sigi?

SIEGFRIED

The finest cashmere from the underbelly of Tibetan goats.

NATHAN

(pointing his camera) Siegfried, would you mind standing by your window?

SIEGFRIED

Only if Penelope stands beside me.

NATHAN

(to Penelope) Is that okay?

PENELOPE

Oh, well,...all right.

*(PENELOPE and SIEGFRIED stand next to each other;
NATHAN'S camera flashes as THEY speak.)*

NATHAN

(glancing up) Is there something weird with your eyes?

SIEGFRIED

Heterochromia iridium: one eye is amber and the other blue. I am told it is extremely rare.

JULIAN

(staring) Fascinating...

(NATHAN finishes taking pictures.)

NATHAN

Thanks, that's great!

SIEGFRIED

Will you be taking a picture of Aunt Katrina?

NATHAN

Yeah, sure.

KATRINA

Oh, no, I am not looking my best.

SIEGFRIED

Please, Auntie, the two of us -- the last of the Spindles.

KATRINA

Ah, if you insist.

NATHAN

Could you stand over there, under the light. *(snapping pictures)* Smile! Good! Great! I'll bring copies by next week.

KATRINA

(to Penelope) Here is your fabric, my dear.

(As PENELOPE takes a credit card from her purse, SIEGFRIED approaches.)

SIEGFRIED

Before you leave, will you play your violin?

PENELOPE

You mean here? Now?

SIEGFRIED

Why not? You can sit in this chair.

PENELOPE

Well, if Mrs. Spindle and these gentlemen don't mind...?

NATHAN

Oh, please play.

JULIAN

By all means!

KATRINA

Yes, dear, please.

(PENELOPE lifts her violin from its case.)

SIEGFRIED

What an exquisite instrument.

PENELOPE

It's handmade of blue spruce.

SIEGFRIED

And the strings?

PENELOPE

Silver threads wound over cords from the intestines of Norwegian sheep. I'm told they produce pitches with unique frequencies. *(pause)* I'll play one of Chopin's Nocturnes.

(The LISTENERS stand, mesmerized as PENELOPE plays while speaking.)

PENELOPE

What I didn't explain was how those frequencies tune me into the secret channels of my listeners' secret thoughts. Portia says they're delusional projections, but I noticed Julian staring at Siegfried...

(While PENELOPE continues to play, the LISTENERS speak their thoughts.)

JULIAN

That chap's fucking bonkers!

PENELOPE

Then I heard Katrina...

KATRINA

If only I could protect him.

PENELOPE

I watched Siegfried's eyes wandering.

SIEGFRIED

Behold the partnered particles dancing:...

JULIAN

What's he gawking at?

SIEGFRIED

...the quarks and squarks,...

KATRINA

What does he see?

SIEGFRIED

...the gluons and muons...

PENELOPE

Nathan looked at him with pity,....

NATHAN

Poor Sigfried.

JULIAN

Poor Sigfried,...

JULIAN

...let's hope he's taking his meds.

PENELOPE

Then he focused on me.

KATRINA

He's staring at her.

JULIAN

He's staring at her.

SIEGFRIED

Remember her well.

KATRINA

His eyes filled....

JULIAN

His eyes filled...

JULIAN

...with lust.

KATRINA

...with longing.

SIEGFRIED

She surrenders herself to the sounds as I surrender...

SIEGFRIED

...my heart.

NATHAN

My heart...

NATHAN

...is pounding. Is it because...

NATHAN

...I desire her?

SIEGFRIED

I desire her.

JULIAN

Now Nathan's leering.

KATRINA

Is it the music or the girl?

KATRINA

Are they in love?

JULIAN

Are they in love?

SIEGFRIED

This moment is transitory;...

SIEGFRIED

...time, stand still!

NATHAN

Time, stand still!

(The LISTENERS freeze as PENELOPE speaks.)

PENELOPE

While I played, I knew Portia would be watching at the window, wondering why I hadn't left. Later Georgette recounted every anxious word.

(PENELOPE continues playing softly while PORTIA is seen staring out the window.)

PORTIA

Where the fuck is she?!

GEORGETTE

Oh, chill, she's probably just lookin' at all them pretty fabrics.

PORTIA

Something's wrong. Why hasn't anyone come out?

GEORGETTE

Maybe they're gettin' acquainted.

PORTIA

Or maybe they're dead!

GEORGETTE

Maybe. Maybe everyone in the world's gonna wind up in that shop till no one's left 'cept cockroaches and buzzards.

PORTIA

Oh, shut up, and get down there!

GEORGETTE

No way, not without you.

PORTIA

I'm serious, damnit! I'm your employer, and I insist!

GEORGETTE

You can insist till the cows come home, but I ain't steppin' outta that door unless you come with me.

PORTIA

You're upsetting me!

GEORGETTE

Tough shit. I'm tired of you sittin' here day after day, so let's go!

PORTIA

But what if he's there?

GEORGETTE

So what if he is?

PORTIA

What if she's met him? What if they like each other?

GEORGETTE

So are you worried about her bein' dead or gettin' it on with a guy you don't even know?

PORTIA

Both, but you're wrong; I do know him.

GEORGETTE

Yeah, okay, but if you actually wanna meet the man, now's your chance, so come on, girl, let's go!

(GEORGETTE turns off the lights as the music fades.)

SCENE 3

(In Spindles Fabric Shop, the LISTENERS appear to be entranced as PENELOPE speaks.)

PENELOPE

By the time I finished playing, I felt feverish; the air in the shop seemed denser and perfumed by a forest of pines.

(The LISTENERS awaken and applaud.)

NATHAN

That was sublime.

JULIAN

Marvelous, darling! Brava!

KATRINA

Enchanting, my dear.

SIEGFRIED

How I would love to hear you play with your orchestra.

PENELOPE

Then come as my guests -- all of you.

(Suddenly, the door opens and GEORGETTE wheels PORTIA into the shop.)

PORTIA

Thank Christ you're here!

GEORGETTE

I told you she was fine!

PORTIA

Oh, dear, have we interrupted a concert?

PENELOPE

No, I've finished. (*gesturing to Katrina*) Mrs. Spindle, this is Georgette, and you know Portia.

KATRINA

Hello, this is my nephew, Siegfried.

(PORTIA offers her hand and SIEGFRIED kisses it.)

SIEGFRIED

What a pleasure to finally meet you.

NATHAN

Hi, I'm Nathan.

JULIAN

I'm Julian.

KATRINA

(*pause, to Portia*) How good it is to see you again, my dear.

PORTIA

My legs don't work, but I can still thread a needle. (*pause, glancing around*) God, this place is gorgeous as ever. (*to Georgette*) Now that we're here, let's look around.

SEIGFRIED

Portia, would you like to see the latest shantung from Shanghai?

PORTIA

Yes, absolutely!

SEIGFRIED

The samples are in the back room. I can bring them out.

PORTIA

Or I could just follow you.

SEIGFRIED

Fine.

(PORTIA follows SIEGFRIED, exiting to the back room while GEORGETTE whispers to PENELOPE.)

GEORGETTE

Well, what do you know? She finally meets her prince. They've been eyeballin' each other for weeks, but don't tell her I told you. *(pause, noticing bolts of fabric)* Whoa, check out this pretty cloth.

KATRINA

(to Georgette) Pongee from Thailand -- in twelve different shades.

(NATHAN approaches PENELOPE while JULIAN joins KATRINA and GEORGETTE.)

NATHAN

I hope I'm not being presumptuous, but I'd like to see you again. Please take my card, and text me if you're free for dinner? *(pause)* I mean, if you're not married or seeing someone.

PENELOPE

No, I...I'm not.

KATRINA

(to Georgette and Julian) These are our finest silks -- produced by the larvae of the Bombyx Mori.

JULIAN

So, Mrs. Spindle, are you adept with a needle yourself?

KATRINA

Of course. I began as an assistant to a dressmaker in Frankfurt, then moved here with my cousin to work for Ezra Spindle -- which is where I met Jacob. He was a cutter then; now they use lasers.

JULIAN

Were you a cutter too?

KATRINA

No, I worked in the sewing room. We were all union workers, very proud, very productive.

NATHAN

(to Penelope) Were you serious about inviting us to a concert?

PENELOPE

Yes, I'll send you a schedule. We're performing a series of Bach's orchestral suites.

NATHAN

Thanks. So do you think Bach composed his melodies by himself or did they already exist for him to discover?

(SIEGFRIED has reentered the shop and approaches NATHAN and PENELOPE.)

SIEGFRIED

Mathematicians ask the same question about equations.

NATHAN

Really? So what do you think, Penelope -- or should I call you Penny?

GEORGETTE

Hey, what the fuck!?! *(to Penelope)* Where's Portia?!

(Pause as THEY stare at the empty wheelchair.)

GEORGETTE

What the hell's goin' on!?

PENELOPE

Portia...?

GEORGETTE

Portia, baby, where are you?!

PENELOPE

Portia? Portia!!

KATRINA

Mein Gott.

SIEGFRIED

Muss sie die Falte gefunden haben.

KATRINA

Nun, was sollen wir tun?!

GEORGETTE

(to Siegfried) Speak English! Where the hell is she?!

SIEGFRIED

I thought she was behind me.

GEORGETTE

Well, she ain't!

NATHAN

Check the back room; she must be there.

PENELOPE

Without her chair...?

(NATHAN and SIEGFRIED dash off.)

JULIAN

Has anyone else entered the shop?

PENELOPE

Not that I noticed.

KATRINA

The chimes would have rung.

PENELOPE

I thought I saw her by the organza.

(NATHAN and SEIGFRIED return.)

NATHAN

There's no one there and the back door's locked.

JULIAN

She must have slipped out the front.

GEORGETTE

She can't walk, so somebody's taken her!

SIEGFRIED

Perhaps she has gone...

GEORGETTE

Where?!

SIEGFRIED

To a world not our own.

GEORGETTE

Well, bring her back to this one 'cause she needs her shots!

PENELOPE

(to Siegfried) How could she...?

SIEGFRIED

The enigma of hidden fields.

GEORGETTE

What fields!?

SIEGFRIED

Less than twenty percent of matter is visible; the rest is dark, magnetic...

GEORGETTE

What the fuck!? Mister, if you're responsible for this...

JULIAN

(to Nathan) Take a picture of the empty chair.

GEORGETTE

I'm callin' the cops!

(NATHAN snaps a picture and the shop lights dim as sirens blare in the distance.)

SCENE 4

(In Portia's apartment, PENELOPE stands alone, speaking to concealed microphones.)

PENELOPE

Within minutes, two cars carrying four policemen appeared. They requested pictures of Portia, then informed us that every day nearly two thousand people are reported missing in the United States, as many as a hundred from the city, and some were last seen in the Garment District. Julian was taking notes; Nathan snapping pictures; and Georgette and I crossed the street to confirm that the apartment was empty.

(GEORGETTE joins PENELOPE who is followed by RACHEL MELTON wearing a business suit.)

PENELOPE

Later we were joined by my mother who blamed Portia because...

PENELOPE

...she's unpredictable.

RACHEL

She unpredictable,...

RACHEL

...capricious, so maybe when you weren't looking, she walked out and flagged a cab.

GEORGETTE

No way, ma'am; her legs are too weak.

RACHEL

What if she's in remission again and didn't let on? Did she take her purse?

GEORGETTE

Yeah, but she still couldn't stand much less go runnin' off -- trust me on this.

RACHEL

(to Georgette) You shouldn't have let her out of your sight!

GEORGETTE

Yeah, I screwed up.

RACHEL

(to Penelope) So you think someone snatched her, just whisked her away? But why?! Why on earth would anyone kidnap an invalid?

PENELOPE

For ransom...? I don't know, but they're checking all the tenants in the building, and they drove Siegfried to the station for further questioning.

RACHEL

Who's Siegfried?

PENELOPE

Mrs. Spindle's nephew.

GEORGETTE

That boy's creepy; stay away from him.

PENELOPE

He thinks Portia's been drawn into another dimension.

RACHEL

You're not serious?

PENELOPE

Afraid so, and Portia had a crush on him.

GEORGETTE

Yeah, but she noticed things, said folks who went into Spindle's didn't always come out.

RACHEL

Did you tell the police?

GEORGETTE
Yeah.

PENELOPE
They're searching everywhere, taking the place apart.

RACHEL
Is this "Siegfried" dangerous?

GEORGETTE
Yeah!

PENELOPE
No.

PENELOPE
Oh, if only I'd gone straight home, then she'd have seen me leave and stayed here.

GEORGETTE
I'm the fool who made her go.

PENELOPE
But if I hadn't agreed to play...

RACHEL
Oh, shush! Let's deal with what's happening now. *(she sighs, glancing around)* I can't believe she's still in this dismal apartment. *(to Georgette)* Did Portia tell you that she and Penny grew up on this street?

GEORGETTE
Yeah.

RACHEL
I'm sure you keep it clean, but I can't help imagining nests in the walls.

GEORGETTE
Then it's a good thing you don't live here. Sorry, ladies, but I can't just sit here; I'm gonna take a stroll, start lookin'.

RACHEL
Before you go, we need to talk. *(pause)* As soon as Portia's found, I'm going to insist she be moved to Hodden House. Please don't take this personally; I appreciate everything you've done, but they have a full time staff; and Doctor Madras said she's going to need a ventilator and round-the-clock nursing.

GEORGETTE
Or maybe she won't turn up so you won't have to bother -- nothin' personal.

RACHEL

How dare you! Don't you think I feel terrible? Responsible! I can't bear to see her suffer.

GEORGETTE

Yeah, I know, 'cause you hardly ever visit.

RACHEL

That's because my business -- which pays your salary -- forces me to travel! If you had children, you'd know it's hell watching someone you brought into the world enduring a hideous, humbling decline. My beautiful, bright shining daughters should be living healthy, fulfilling lives. It's all so wrong, so unfair; parents are supposed to die first.

PENELOPE

My mother thinks people aren't really adults till their parents die.

GEORGETTE

Oh, yeah? *(to Rachel)* So when your folks pass, you can do what you want -- no questions asked?

RACHEL

That's right, and mine "passed" years ago. But now people cheat; they live on and on with chronic diseases, burden their children, and their moronic doctors let them.

GEORGETTE

That's true, without doctors, God would let folks pass sooner, in their own beds.

RACHEL

Absolutely, though God has nothing to do with it.

GEORGETTE

Well, I'm a Christian, so I know He does, but when we meet I'm gonna slap him silly. What God needs is a good lickin' for lettin' sweet girls like Portia get sick when she should be dancin', datin' and drawin' pictures.

RACHEL

(checking her phone) Look, I'm useless here; I'm going back to the office. I'll find out who to contact, make sure the right people make Portia's case a priority. *(kissing Penelope)* Call me the minute you hear anything. Good bye, Georgette.

PENELOPE

Good bye, mom.

GEORGETTE

Bye, ma'am.

(RACHEL departs.)

PENELOPE

Georgette, if we don't find Portia, promise you'll tell me everything she ever said that I didn't get to hear.

GEORGETTE

Sure, baby, but it ain't all pretty. I mean she had issues, stuff she was stuck on -- like the geek across the street.

(As GEORGETTE evokes the past, PORTIA wheels herself in while SEIGFRIED dresses the shop window.)

GEORGETTE

She'd be sittin' by that window just watchin', waitin' for...

GEORGETTE

...that man at Spindles!

PORTIA

That man at Spindles,...

PORTIA

...is so handsome. He's obviously a European aristocrat: the blue blooded Duke of Damask. I know he senses me watching, and when he looks up, we lock eyes, and I feel the blood rushing through my veins.

GEORGETTE

Oh, yeah?

PORTIA

Watch when he drapes the fabrics, how he moves like a dancer. Sometimes he glances up, and I nod. Then he smiles as if he's decorated the window just for me, as if he knows I'm a wreck, and he's doing it out of pity so I'll have something to look at.

GEORGETTE

Maybe he's just flirtin'.

PORTIA

Then maybe I should flirt back? Maybe I'll unbutton my shirt...

GEORGETTE

What are you thinkin' -- shovin' your titties in his face!

PORTIA

Hardly "in his face" from here. Have you noticed he's always alone? So maybe he's unattached -- a poet living in exile.

GEORGETTE

Or a convict, hidin' out with mama.

PORTIA

The Spindles never had children. Oh, I wish he'd look up here!

GEORGETTE

I bet he's illegal, probably can't speak a word of English.

PORTIA

Who needs words? I'll pretend he's draping that pearly pink satin on my naked shoulders
Oh, god, he's looking up! Oh, Jesus, he's waving! (*waving back*) Ohhh, ohhhh, ohhhh...

(PORTIA wheels herself away as PENELOPE and
GEORGETTE return to the present.)

PENELOPE

At least he was a distraction.

GEORGETTE

Distraction?! Girl, she wanted to spread him on a bagel and suck him down with coffee!

(PENELOPE grasps a scrap of blue fabric near the
window.)

PENELOPE

What's this...? Georgette look, it's Portia's favorite color. Where did it come from?

GEORGETTE

The window's open so it must've blown in from outside.

PENELOPE

There's no wind.

GEORGETTE

Then it must've fallen from the next floor up.

PENELOPE

Maybe...

GEORGETTE

Hell, it could've dropped from the beak of a bird.

PENELOPE

Or Portia dropped it from “a world not our own.”

GEORGETTE

Yeah, but I’m gonna keep lookin’ in this one -- you comin’?

PENELOPE

I’ll leave the door unlocked -- in case she lost her keys.

(Violin music is heard as GEORGETTE and PENELOPE walk, circling the perimeter as PENELOPE speaks.)

PENELOPE

I assume that’s when you broke in and planted your spyware, so you know that for the next three days and nights Georgette and I posted pictures and questioned everyone we met from Thirty-fourth to Forty-second Street between Fifth Avenue and Ninth. Mother’s friends put pressure on the mayor, so there was a citywide search with volunteers combing the boroughs in all directions. And did you read the newspaper and internet articles with titles like “Material Witness” and “Fatal Fabrications.” We thought Spindles would close, but new drapings adorned the window, and curious customers went in but not always out. I know because I’m staying in Portia’s apartment, and in-between rehearsing and performing, I’ve become “The Sentinel.”

SCENE 5

(PENELOPE returns to the apartment alone. As SHE speaks, NATHAN and JULIAN enter.)

PENELOPE

The week after Portia disappeared, Nathan and Julian stopped by in the evening with..

PENELOPE
...the pictures.

NATHAN
The pictures...

NATHAN

...I took of you and Siegfried came out well, don’t you think?

(PENELOPE and JULIAN glance at the pictures.)

NATHAN

You can see the adoration in his eyes.

JULIAN

I see deception. *(passing by the window)* And he sees us! Is he always gawking up here?

PENELOPE

(while waving) He usually waves, then goes away. See, he's going back inside.

JULIAN

Beware degenerate stalkers.

NATHAN

Julian thinks he's nuts.

JULIAN

Worse, I think he's a perverse predator who knows more than he's saying. I've done a background check on ole Sig and he's for real: a genuine prodigy, quite the rock star till he wiggled out and was locked up along with his medical records. When they released him, he went to live in Frankfurt with his father who crashed on the autobahn nearly two months ago -- so Sigi came here to bunk with Auntie. It turns out his father and grandfather repaired clocks, so his interest in time is a family tradition.

PENELOPE

What about his mother?

JULIAN

A seamstress whose specialty was rabbinical robes. She was raised in Valcea, Romania, where according to local legends, the souls of the dead escape their graves and incarnate themselves as moths. Like vampires they suck the blood of the living till they were caught and impaled on pins. Draw your own conclusions, but you have only to look at the man: with his venomous eyes and pale skin, it's obvious he never sees the sun. Of course, I'm being facetious, but the neighbors say he's reclusive, stays home, while Auntie trots off to temple, keeps kosher, and observes the Sabbath.

PENELOPE

None of us really know him.

JULIAN

We know canes and umbrellas were found with fingerprints belonging to nine missing women, but that only proves they entered the shop. The statistics are shocking: dozens of women gone missing every day and most are never found. Even in your sister's case, they haven't made progress -- despite the publicity.

PENELOPE

And anxiety -- thanks to your exploitive articles *(to Nathan)* with *your* pictures!

JULIAN

Oh, bollocks! We've made Spindles famous; business is booming, and my blog's gone viral. In fact, the Times asked me to write a profile -- which is why we're here or rather, why *I'm* here. (*pause*) Penelope, dear, I need your help. Ole Sig and his Auntie won't speak to me, but since he's obviously smitten with you, perhaps you could serenade him while he tells you what up. I'd be forever in your debt, and you'd be helping the investigation.

PENELOPE

I'm already investigating -- as a duty to my sister. When I'm practicing by the window, I notice it's still happening: women walk in but not out, so I record the dates and times.

JULIAN

Have you told the police?

PENELOPE

Not yet.

JULIAN

Have you been back to the shop?

PENELOPE

No.

JULIAN

Why not? Is it because you sense something sinister?

PENELOPE

No!

NATHAN

For chrissake, Julian, stop badgering her!

JULIAN

Sorry, love. Look, so far all we know is that since Sigi arrived, the women missing -- and that's just the *reported* missing in this area -- are all ages, races, religions, and ethnicities; some rich, some poor, some married, single, straight, and gay. There's only two things the majority have in common: they're seriously ill and they sew -- and not just buttons. They're accomplished stitchers of clothing, costumes and curtains, and one was a designer with terminal pancreatitis. So it's possible Sigi's set up a clandestine website directing women to the shop which provides some freakish form of euthanasia.

PENELOPE

There's no proof of that. My mother spoke to the captain in charge who installed...

(RACHEL appears, facing PENELOPE.)

PENELOPE
...cameras.

RACHEL
Cameras...

RACHEL
...cover every inch of Spindles! He showed me one of the videos. The shop was full of people with Katrina at the cutting table. Then off to the side was a frail, jaundiced woman examining bolts of taffeta -- then suddenly she wasn't there. There was no slow fade; just one second she was visible and the next -- poof! Only when he slowed the video, could you see that she was swept through a fold, as if someone was pulling her through by the hand.

PENELOPE
(*to Rachel*) Just like Siegfried said.

RACHEL
The police accused him of tampering with the equipment, but their technicians proved he hadn't. He kept two computers in the back room which were confiscated. One had files filled with equations which they sent to mathematicians at Princeton, Columbia and N. Y. U. Of course, Siegfried's still a suspect, but Katrina told them you're to blame.

PENELOPE
Me?! Why...? Does she think I hired someone to snatch my own sister?!

RACHEL
As a matter of fact, that's exactly what she thinks. It seems our dear Portia told her doctor who told the police that you were helping to plan her suicide. Is that true?

PENELOPE
No! I mean, yes, she asked me, *begged* me, and I agreed, but only to...to please her. Oh, god, I wasn't serious; I would never...

RACHEL
Shush, calm down, dear; I believe you. Tomorrow I'll speak to Katrina myself.

PENELOPE
If you do, be careful, just...

PENELOPE
...don't touch the fabrics!

JULIAN
Don't touch the fabrics!

(RACHEL departs as the focus returns to the apartment.)

JULIAN

That's my advice to every woman who enters the shop. Of course, I'm no physicist, and Sigi's theories all sound like cheap sci fi, but then so did drones, Skype, and nano-technology, but that's not the point. What we need to know is how Sigi does whatever it is he's doing, so all I'm asking is that you chat with the man. Here's my card with my private number. Now I'm off, au revoir. *(to Nathan)* Coming...?

(NATHAN shakes his head as JULIAN departs.)

NATHAN

I have some pictures of your sister I took on the sly. *(handing over a photograph)* That's when she was wheeled into the shop.

PENELOPE

(pause) She's smiling; Portia rarely smiled. May I keep it?

NATHAN

Of course. Here's one of Siegfried kissing her hand.

PENELOPE

May I have that too?

NATHAN

Sure. *(pause)* So do you ever escape from here?

PENELOPE

Of course. *(pause)* At yesterday's rehearsal one of my strings snapped, but I'm the one unstrung, always drifting, distracted, looping back through memories of Portia.

NATHAN

(pause) Even though you miss her, do you ever think she might be in a better place?

PENELOPE

Maybe. She said if you're cursed with a ravaged body, you had to find fulfillment in death, and she fantasized about trading lives with people she thought were wasting theirs -- especially me. Portia loved telling me what she'd do if my body were hers.

NATHAN

Like what?

(As PENELOPE continues, PORTIA appears standing.)

PENELOPE

She said she'd dye my hair red....

PENELOPE

... wear boots, and date artists.

PORTIA

Wear boots, and date artists!

PENELOPE

(to *Portia*) Would you still play the violin?

PORTIA

Of course! It's the only interesting thing about you, but my music would be original and played all over the city in places where people died -- like the crash sites and burned out buildings. My melodies would alter toxic vibrations, resolve wars, poverty, and affect the fetuses of pregnant women so they'd give birth to girls. That way I'd change the gender ratio, since the world would be safer with women in power. Of course, there are good men out there, but you'll never find one.

PENELOPE

Why not?

PORTIA

Because you have terrible taste.

PENELOPE

Well, if you think you can do better...

PORTIA

I can't; I don't have time.

PENELOPE

You don't know that; you really have to change your attitude!

PORTIA

Obviously mummy dearest hasn't informed you of the latest test results. Like it or not, this hot body's on its way to being smoke and ash, but I'll float down to haunt you if you don't stop wasting your talent playing other people's music.

PENELOPE

Those "other people" are Bach, Beethoven, and the world's greatest composers, and I'm playing in the best orchestra in the country! Why can't you be happy for me?

PORTIA

Because you're not happy with yourself; because I resent your getting to grow old; because suffering doesn't ennoble people like me -- it just pisses us off. My shrink says I'm in the "anger stage," so I'm taking it out on you because you act like you have all the time in the world -- well, you don't!

PENELOPE

Why not? Are you planning to kill me?

PORTIA

No, you'll be extinct soon enough. In fact, you've already got gray hairs and you'll probably get fat like Grandma Melton. You have her genes, so you'll get diabetes and lose your toes, maybe your legs -- not to mention your sight.

PENELOPE

I think I'd better go.

PORTIA

Right, before I humiliate you even more.

PENELOPE

You don't really, because I think I understand. You've been cheated and it's totally unfair. Mom's angry too, and so am I because I'm losing my only sister, and who else is going to witness my hideous decline?

PORTIA

You'll find somebody, some guy to watch you rot. He'll be a dick, but you'll have your music; you'll travel, have kids, but I won't even see who I would've become! And I would've been fucking great! The hottest designer in the city!

PENELOPE

In the country!

PORTIA

In the world!

PENELOPE

Designing Broadway musicals!

PORTIA

Operas and ballets! Yeah! *(pause)* I told my shrink I have this fantasy that my body's just a jumpsuit and the scar on my chest is a zipper that opens me up, and inside is a cloned Portia who pops out perfect.

PENELOPE

(pause) If only there was something I could do...

PORTIA

Would you have given me a kidney?

PENELOPE

Sure, and a lung, and a slice of my liver -- you already have my heart.

PORTIA

I know. *(pause)* If you're serious, if you really want to help me, there is something you can do -- when the time comes.

(PORTIA departs and PENELOPE turns to NATHAN.)

PENELOPE

If it's true that everyone has a fabric that suits them, then Portia's would be a burlap so coarse it would make her bleed. *(pause)* It's funny, but I even miss her insults.

NATHAN

Did she have a boyfriend?

PENELOPE

Not really -- until she started mooning over Siegfried.

NATHAN

(glancing out the window) Speak of the devil, isn't that him? You can see him behind those sheer drapes. Turn off the light!

(Pause as PENELOPE turns off the light, and THEY stare at SIEGFRIED inside the shop.)

PENELOPE

What on earth...?

NATHAN

He's wrapping himself like a mummy.

PENELOPE

The fabric's translucent, like chiffon.

NATHAN

Wait till Julian hears this. What's he up to, the crazy bugger?

PENELOPE

People wrap themselves for comfort.

NATHAN

I have to get a picture!

PENELOPE

Please don't!

(The camera flashes, then the light in the shop is switched off, plunging PENELOPE and NATHAN in darkness.)

NATHAN

Damn, I think he saw us! *(pause)* Hey, you're shivering; let me wrap you for comfort.

(NATHAN embraces PENELOPE.)

SCENE 6

(Morning in the apartment where PENELOPE appears alone, tuning her violin, seeking hidden cameras while RACHEL faces KATRINA in the shop.)

PENELOPE

Since you were spying on my most intimate moments, you know Nathan didn't leave until morning. Later I saw my mother entering Spindles to confront Katrina who was complaining about the police, how....

PENELOPE

...they resent his genius.

KATRINA

(to Rachel) They resent his genius!

KATRINA

But what can you expect from bureaucratic bullies who cannot comprehend an original mind. What is it you want?

RACHEL

Some answers to a few questions.

KATRINA

We have heard enough questions -- from reporters, meddlers, the police touching everything! I am sorry about Portia, but we have nothing more to say.

RACHEL

Apparently you're telling everyone that Penelope's to blame! Now she's a suspect, but there are videos of women disappearing when she was nowhere near here! How could she possibly be responsible?! Look, I realize the publicity has been un...

KATRINA

Lies! Lies! It is all lies! Did you see the police?! They drove Siegfried away like a common criminal? In front of everyone!

RACHEL

Yes, but he's back now; he's free.

KATRINA

Men like Siegfried will never be free.

RACHEL

Why not? What happened to him? Please tell me; I want to understand, to be a...a friend.

KATRINA

Hah! What friend?! We never see you; now you're a fat cat executive, taking business out of the country. Shame on you!

RACHEL

Believe me, Katrina, I'm just a small spoke in the spinning wheel of commerce.

KATRINA

That wheel leaves tracks of poverty while you live like the Queen of Sheba!

RACHEL

Yes, but I also had a husband who drank himself to death, and left me with a dying daughter who I'm told spent hours staring out the window -- at Siegfried.

KATRINA

He cannot help that women find him charming.

RACHEL

(pause) I heard that Siegfried's father was your brother?

KATRINA

(pause, she sighs) Yes, Helmut. When Siegfried's mother died, he was only five, so Helmut left him with our mother who felt compelled to describe her memories.

RACHEL

Of the war? Was she in the...?

KATRINA

No camps! They allowed her to keep her shop because she was an excellent tailor, famous for uniforms -- even those with swastikas. She was resented and beaten by hooligans on both sides. Poor Sigfried endured her bitter tears, but who knew then that morbid melancholia could be passed through generations? Who knew it could erupt years later and cause Siegfried to lose everything -- his sleep, his appetite, his scholarship.

RACHEL

I'm sorry...

KATRINA

The doctors call it “vicarious traumatization,” and in boys like Siegfried it can induce catatonia, which sounds like a tropical resort, so I imagine an island he escapes to.

RACHEL

But now he's on the island of Manhattan -- and *you're* his refuge.

KATRINA

And he is mine. *(pause)* At first I did not want him here, but what a godsend: he assists with orders, arranges stock, and delights in draping the fabrics. *(pause)* Remember when you worked in your parents shop?

(RACHEL nods, smiling.)

KATRINA

Your grandparents came here to be with American Jews, descendants of the great craftsmen and textile merchants of Europe. Now look at us: surrounded by Asians. No one speaks the same language. Well, here is a Jew they cannot drive away. *(she sighs)* But I miss my Jacob. Though it was years ago, I still see the tower crumbling into clouds of soot. You know what else I saw? Fragments floating, spiraling down, wisps of reds, greens, and yellows, and what do you think they were? *(pause)* Swatches! Swatches of silks and satins! Samples from Spindles's fabrics, and still they keep falling.

RACHEL

Where?

PENELOPE

Where...?

KATRINA

In my dreams.

(RACHEL departs, as wisps of fabrics fall around PENELOPE and lights fade.)

SCENE 7

(PENELOPE speaks while entering Spindles Fabrics.)

PENELOPE

The next morning, I went to Spindles where Katrina greeted me with a hostile...

PENELOPE

...hello.

KATRINA

Hello.

PENELOPE

I wonder if I could speak with Siegfried?

KATRINA

He is working in the back, and I would prefer you leave him alone.

(SIEGFRIED enters but is not seen by the women.)

KATRINA

I am afraid he feels too much for you; he watches your window and frets about the missing women and wonders who is responsible.

PENELOPE

Well, I'm not! How could I be?!

SIEGFRIED

We all live in a world of someone else's making.

KATRINA

Sigi!

SIEGFRIED

The question is: *whose* world has been made?

KATRINA

The lady was just leaving.

SIEGFRIED

Please, Auntie, let her stay.

KATRINA

Fine, then *I* will leave! Try not to be late for supper!

(KATRINA departs.)

PENELOPE

You just asked, "whose world has been made?" Why would it be mine and not yours?

SIEGFRIED

Because my world would be populated by beautiful, talented women like yourself.

PENELOPE

And mine would be populated by healthy people with fulfilling lives.

SIEGFRIED

(pause) So why are you here?

PENELOPE

To find out why sick, desperate women really come to Spindles -- to escape or to die?

SIEGFRIED

The “why” I cannot answer, but the how is obvious: there are portals here, hypothetical tunnels -- like wormholes. I am trying to solve the problem through electro- dynamics which explains how light and the material world interact. Can women vanish in beams of invisible waves then reappear elsewhere? Can subatomic particles weave a reality that reconciles relativity with quantum mechanics and desperate human beings?

PENELOPE

Well, can they?

SIEGFRIED

So far I have no answers; neither do the police, and no one thought to bring a compass, but look: *(unpocketing a compass)* If I stand by the velvets against this wall, the magnetic north loses power and the needle goes haywire, but why this wall? This shop? This city? The detectives drew the drapes aside to see if there were hidden doors, but they neglected to look behind, to the linings of the drapes themselves. Neither did I until yesterday.

(SIEGFRIED draws aside and reverses the velvet drape, revealing hundreds of blue MOTHS clasping the cloth as PENELOPE steps back, appalled.)

SIEGFRIED

Moths: hundreds of them, clinging to the fabric. Last night I purchased a new computer and spent hours cross-checking images. Although I am not a lepidopterist, they are not like any moths I have seen.

PENELOPE

(pause) What if they're not from here? Portia and the women fly out and the moths fly in, so maybe instead of wormholes there's moth holes?

SIEGFRIED

Ha, ha! But did the moths fly through, simply materialize, or did they come in the mail from Wujiang, China? This would not be our first shipment of infested fabric. When Aunt Katrina sees them, she will call an exterminator.

PENELOPE

Just don't let Julian see them or he'll claim they're your Romanian ancestors.

SIEGFRIED

Ah, yes, he calls me “The Vampire Physicist.” In other articles, I am “The Demon Draper” and “The Garment District Golem.” As for my Romanian roots: my ancestors may have been superstitious, but my mother’s family were educated Jews who swatted moths like flies.

PENELOPE

They’re so bright, are you sure they’re not butterflies?

SIEGFRIED

Butterflies prefer the sun while moths fly at night and these emit sounds by vibrating their bodies. They are too high pitched for human ears, but I recorded and amplified them. Listen.

(SIEGFRIED hands a pair of earphones to PENELOPE.)

PENELOPE

(pause, listening) My god, there’s a melody, like a waltz played by microscopic violins.

SIEGFRIED

How strange to see them clinging to a synthetic velvet instead of the usual woollens.

PENELOPE

(removing the earbuds) Does that matter?

SIEGFRIED

Everything matters, even our own spacial positions affect particles at all levels in everything we observe, which means true objective reality is impossible to perceive much less measure -- so trust your instincts.

PENELOPE

What if my instinct is to consult a psychic?

SIEGFRIED

Ha! There have been several here already. One claimed to see veiled figures wafting about. You realize if we uncover a conduit to another universe, it will start a revolution in physics. The scientists who captured the elusive Higgs boson are upgrading acceleration to glimpse dark matter, but imagine finding particles that move faster than the speed of light? That would mean the possibility of intergalactic travel.

PENELOPE

But to where?

SIEGFRIED

Who can say? There could be a hyper-dimensional broadcloth right in front your nose.

PENELOPE

Could Portia be there -- watching us?

SIEGFRIED

There are questions for which no explanations seem possible, not even in principle.
(*pause*) Love, for example, does not lend itself to scientific analysis.

PENELOPE

No, and some people aren't given time enough to find it.

SIEGFRIED

Time can be a miser, but is still composed of moments, some transcendent or you might say "divine." For me, your music creates divine moments.

PENELOPE

Then I'll play for you every day if you help me find Portia.

SIEGFRIED

I wish I had the talent, never mind the tools which may not exist, or perhaps the tools are familiar -- like your violin.

PENELOPE

Ever since Portia left, I've been trying to reach her through music, playing her favorite Mendelssohn and Brahms, but what if she's trying to reach *me*? Sometimes scraps of fabric appear from nowhere, and I wonder if Portia's dropping them from wherever she is. They're never bigger than a napkin. (*reaching in her purse*) Here's one.

SIEGFRIED

Cotton flannel.

PENELOPE

Here's another.

SIEGFRIED

Raw silk.

PENELOPE

They remind me of remnants we collected as children when we were planning a memory quilt, or maybe they're sample swatches like the ones Katrina saw when the towers fell.
(*pause*) If we're living in a world of someone else's making, what if it's Katrina's?

SIEGFRIED

Then it will be the dark, desolate world. Katrina married Jacob who was her second cousin, so a Spindle married a Spindle -- a double curse. I used to think that only a small quantity of pleasure could be assigned to a Spindle. I was afraid I had used up my quota learning to sleep without nightmares that were not even mine. Be careful what stories you tell children.

PENELOPE

Even true ones?

SIEGFRIED

They are the worst. My doctor said she has two kinds of patients: those who fly like hawks seeking intensity, and those who fear it, shielding themselves like clams. My Oma's stories made me an extreme case of the clam. But since coming here, I prefer flying, especially when I see you.

PENELOPE

And I see you. Two nights ago you were wrapped in chiffon.

SIEGFRIED

Ha! You must think me mad, but I was creating a cocoon, attempting to find new perspectives through meditation, so I focused on the weave of the threads, and whispered to myself, "be a moth, be a moth, be a moth."

PENELOPE

What happened?

SIEGFRIED

Nothing. My mind wandered to depressing thoughts about life being nothing but the fabrication of illusions -- even you may be an illusion.

PENELOPE

Well, I'm not, and neither are these moths.

SIEGFRIED

Then I will trust my blue eye to stay focused on reality.

PENELOPE

Why the blue eye?

SIEGFRIED

Because it perceives beauty and could stare at you for hours.

PENELOPE

Portia stared at you. *(pause)* Were you attracted to her?

SIEGFRIED

Yes, but not in the way I am attracted to you which is physically and desperately. *(pause)* I see you brought your violin. When you first played here, when your bow touched the strings, I thought of Schwarzschild's radius: the point at which light reflecting off an object loses so much energy, it falls into an abyss from which nothing can be retrieved. That is how I felt: at a point of no return. I call it "Spindle's radius." When I am with you, I forget I want to be someplace else.

PENELOPE

Where?

SIEGFRIED

In Geneva accelerating particles, but you accelerate my heart, and your music makes everything I ever wanted seem...irrelevant.

PENELOPE

Oh, Siegfried...

(PENELOPE embraces then kisses SIEGFRIED who responds with passion. Then THEY step apart, gazing at each as the door opens and NATHAN appears.)

NATHAN

Hello? *(to Penelope)* There you are! Am I interrupting anything?

PENELOPE

No!

SIEGFRIED

Yes,...

NATHAN

Did you forget we're going out?! I made reservations!

PENELOPE

Oh, no!

NATHAN

I've been ringing your doorbell for ten minutes!

PENELOPE

I...I'm so sorry. Could you call and say we'll be late?

NATHAN

I've already called; I have a car waiting.

PENELOPE

Sorry, Siegfried, I'll play for you tomorrow. *(to Nathan)* I just need to grab my purse!

(PENELOPE seizes her violin and dashes off.)

NATHAN

(pause) Look, I think I know how you feel about Penelope. I'm pretty sure I feel the same, so whatever happens, I hope things work out and we all stay friends.

SIEGFRIED

That is not possible. Perhaps you and I could be friends, but Penelope will always mean more to me.

NATHAN

I guess she'll make her choice.

SIEGFRIED

What choice? What do I have to offer? I have become the poor relation in the spare room -- not to mention a suspected criminal. So much for the hubris of thinking I was destined to do great things. *(pause)* That is what draws me to Penelope; she seems to accept me for myself and not what I might have become.

NATHAN

But can't you still become what you wanted to be?

SIEGFRIED

Physicists blossom early -- like musicians and chess players. I am already a relic.

NATHAN

Look, I don't know how Penny feels, but I'm sure she's pleased that you appreciate her music in a way some of us don't.

SIEGFRIED

You will. But appreciation does not provide a stable future -- a home, children, vacations in Florida -- the American dream.

NATHAN

Stability isn't everyone's dream, and it looks like Penny can provide for herself.

SIEGFRIED

Even if I won her heart, I might crush it -- with the feelings I have suppressed in her absence. I never felt this way, this urge to please and protect a woman. *(he sighs)* Please forgive me; I am rambling, full of self-pity; I do not sleep well.

NATHAN

(pause) Does she come by often?

SIEGFRIED

We are attempting to solve the mystery of what your friend calls “The Case of the Vanished Virgins,” though how can he know that?

NATHAN

He can’t; Julian takes outrageous liberties. You’d probably like to kill him.

SIEGFRIED

At first, but between his lies and the police dispersing my files, I have attracted the curiosity of several professors. They invited me to Princeton next Thursday.

NATHAN

Jesus, that’s fantastic! You’re going, aren’t you?

SIEGFRIED

Yes, my aunt wants me to apply to the universities here, to become a professor myself, though I would need financial assistance.

NATHAN

So apply for scholarships. There might even be grants for housing, so you could move and study full time.

SIEGFRIED

Ah, yes, then you can court Penelope while Siegfried lies buried in the graveyard of grand unified theories.

(PENELOPE returns, wearing a shimmering shawl.)

PENELOPE

Siegfried, I brought you a present: a C D of our Viennese waltzes.

SIEGFRIED

Thank you...

NATHAN

(taking Penelope’s arm) We really have to hurry! So long, Sig!

(PENELOPE and NATHAN depart. Then SIEGFRIED slides the C D into a player. As a waltz resounds, HE pulls down a swathe of sheer fabric, wrapping it around himself. Lights dim as HE sits, cocooned, while the SHADOWS OF MOTHS appear, fluttering.)

SCENE 8

(In the apartment, RACHEL and GEORGETTE sit by the window. In another area, presumably at different times, are NATHAN and JULIAN, while PENELOPE stands in the center, addressing the hidden cameras.)

PENELOPE

Were you listening to them dropping by in shifts? Mother and Georgette in the mornings, then Nathan and Julian at night. Georgette noticed...

PENELOPE

....the police.

GEORGETTE

The police...

GEORGETTE

...are back, prowlin' the streets -- something's up! And that crazy mother's starin' up here with his goo goo eyes. He probably gets all juiced up just hearin' you play.

RACHEL

Really, Georgette, your language!

PENELOPE

Siegfried's not an ogre; he's just...lonely.

GEORGETTE

Oh, yeah? Then how come I wanna to go down there and slap him till he tells us what the fuck's goin' on!

PENELOPE

He doesn't know!

GEORGETTE

Bullshit!

(GEORGETTE and RACHEL freeze as NATHAN and JULIAN address PENELOPE.)

JULIAN

So what did you find out?

PENELOPE

I'm not your spy, and you're lucky the Spindles don't sue you for slander! You've turned them into a freak show!

JULIAN

Why are you so defensive? Have you two bonded?

PENELOPE

We're friends.

JULIAN

Are you more than friends? Are you fucking?

PENELOPE

That's none of your business!

NATHAN

Jesus, Julian!

NATHAN

Lay off! Let's not forget her sister's still missing.

JULIAN

Trust me, after this much time, "the missing" are presumed...

NATHAN

Julian!

JULIAN

Sorry, love, the question remains...

JULIAN

...where are the bodies?

GEORGETTE

Where are the bodies,...

GEORGETTE

...that's what I wanna know!

(Now the focus moves swiftly from one side of the apartment to the other with PENELOPE in-between.)

GEORGETTE

What if I bring my Ouiji Board?

RACHEL

It's unfortunate that the police know about...

RACHEL

...your suicide pact.

JULIAN

Your suicide pact...

JULIAN

...gives you a motive. This place might be bugged.

PENELOPE

(to Rachel and Georgette) Julian thinks this place is bugged.

JULIAN

Infrared lasers can pick up voices through glass.

PENELOPE

(to Rachel and Georgette) They're listening!

JULIAN

Microcams fit on the nib of a pen.

PENELOPE

(to Rachel and Georgette) They're watching!

JULIAN

There's closed circuit T V cams mounted up the street.

GEORGETTE

Soon you won't be able to piss without some fucker starin' up your ass!

NATHAN

My advice is to...

NATHAN

...avoid Spindles.

RACHEL

Avoid Spindles!

PENELOPE

How can I investigate if I can't visit the crime scene?!

RACHEL

That's not your job!

NATHAN

That's not your job.

GEORGETTE

I guess only God has the answers. Even before we're born, He knows our stories.

RACHEL

So what's Portia's? A Grimm fairy tale.

JULIAN

A gothic horror.

PENELOPE

A mystery.

PENELOPE

Once upon a time...

RACHEL

Once upon a time...

JULIAN

Once upon a time...

JULIAN

...Portia was dispatched by a villainous physicist with mismatched eyes.

RACHEL

...Portia was cursed and crippled, her bones turned to stones.

PENELOPE

...Portia spied a loose thread in the fabric of fate and followed it to a room with giant looms for a sisterhood of weavers who wove a shroud to protect the planet, and lived...

PENELOPE

...happily ever after.

JULIAN

Happily ever after...

JULIAN

...is a fairy tale, love; we're all of us doomed.

NATHAN

No wonder your sister was depressed: it's...

NATHAN

....this apartment!

RACHEL

This apartment...

RACHEL

...has to go! Let's sell it, then never set foot in the city again!

PENELOPE

How can you say that? All our friends, our work, everything's here! These rooms hold memories; even Portia's perfume's been absorbed in the walls and every object she chose and cherished.

RACHEL

They've also absorbed her suffering, and ...

RACHEL
...it's affecting you.

NATHAN
It's affecting you,...

NATHAN
...living here; you're paranoid.

RACHEL
Now listen: I've been offered a position with a textile firm in Los Angeles.

NATHAN
I'm thinking of moving to Montreal;...

NATHAN
...come with me!

RACHEL
Come with me.

PENELOPE
I can't! I just sold my condo to a cellist. I'm moving in.

RACHEL
You can't be serious,...

RACHEL
...is it Siegfried?

NATHAN
Is it Siegfried?

JULIAN
Methinks the girl's smitten.

PENELOPE
All I know is I feel a compelled to be here. Now please excuse me; I have to practice.

NATHAN
(checking his phone) Let's talk later; I have to shoot a wedding.

JULIAN
(checking his phone) I have an interview.

RACHEL
(checking her phone) I have a meeting.

GEORGETTE
I have a question.

(RACHEL, NATHAN and JULIAN depart.)

SCENE 9

(GEORGETTE approaches PENELOPE.)

GEORGETTE

You ain't hot for that geek across the street?

PENELOPE

Why would I tell you? You hate him.

GEORGETTE

Yeah, but I ain't a good judge of men. *(pause)* You gonna answer my question?

PENELOPE

No! Now I really need to concentrate -- stay if you like.

GEORGETTE

No, thanks. I've got myself a new patient, but before I go, you should know Portia was makin' a present for you. *(opening a drawer)* It's in here.

GEORGETTE pulls forth a very long scarf and hands it to PENELOPE as PORTIA wheels in from the past.)

GEORGETTE

Embroidered by her own hands. She said she was makin' the wings...

GEORGETTE

...periwinkle blue.

PORTIA

Periwinkle blue's...

PORTIA

....her favorite color.

GEORGETTE

Sit down, you're white as chalk. I asked if you had a thing for butterflies, but she said...

GEORGETTE

...they're moths.

PORTIA

They're moths.

GEORGETTE

(pause) Why is it so long? We could wrap it 'round the block.

PORTIA

I'm making it long enough to hang myself -- with Penny's help. I'll leave a note and kick the chair out myself so she can't be accused of murder.

GEORGETTE

(to Portia) Damn it, girl, you can't ask Penny to watch you danglin' like a scarecrow! She'll have nightmares, palpitations.

PORTIA

She'll be too busy serenading me. I'll want you to cook my last meal: Maybe your fried chicken, cheese puffs, and peach cobbler -- with plenty of champagne, and don't forget: I don't mind people sitting Shiva, but no ceremony, and no obituary -- not that I've accomplished enough to warrant one. *(pause)* Rabbi Loden says Jews shouldn't be cremated, but I'm thinking of having my ashes scattered right here on the streets of the Garment District.

GEORGETTE

Aw, sugar, you're gonna be missed.

PORTIA

Maybe, but I don't want people wasting their lives caring that mine's gone to hell, though it's made me such a bitch. Christ, Georgette, when do I get over the "anger" phase and move on to "acceptance"?

GEORGETTE

Baby, you've moved on; you're just takin' the "anger" with you. Hell, I'd be the same.

PORTIA

Thanks for that. *(gazing out the window)* Hey, there goes my Duke of Damask. *(waving)* Sometimes his freaky eyes are filled with tears 'cause he knows I'm fucked. Christ, I'm sick of people's pity, so maybe I'll change my mind about the hanging.

GEORGETTE

Well, thank you Jesus for that.

PORTIA

Instead I want an amazing and spectacular death, a fucking phenomenal death that will never ever be forgotten, ha, ha!

PENELOPE

(covering her ears) Oh, please stop, Georgette! Stop!

(PORTIA departs laughing.)

GEORGETTE

Sorry, but you said tell you everythin'.

PENELOPE

(pause) Did she really say that -- “a phenomenal death”?

GEORGETTE

Yeah, like she was plannin’ to drop a bomb.

PENELOPE

Or drop a stitch that opened a seam in the fabric of time. So what if she’s succeeded? Think about it: before Portia mentioned it, did you ever witness people going into Spindles and not coming out? And why do I keep finding scraps like they’re materializing from some astral plane? *(pause)* What if she’s always with us, always hovering nearby?

GEORGETTE

Shush, girl, you’re givin’ me the willies.

PENELOPE

(glancing around) It’s weird but I can’t shake this feeling that I’m being watched -- not just by Portia, but the police.

GEORGETTE

Then at least you’ve got yourself an audience, ha, ha!

(Several scraps of fabric fall as GEORGETTE gasps and PENELOPE smiles.)

SCENE 10

(PENELOPE speaks to the concealed microphones as NATHAN appears drunk, a glass of wine in his hand.)

PENELOPE

Later that night, Nathan stopped by, and after three glasses of wine, said...

PENELOPE

...we need to talk.

NATHAN

We need to talk...

NATHAN

...about Sigfried. Do you think your sister’s influenced your feelings? I mean, maybe you’re trying to fulfill her fantasies.

PENELOPE

I have fantasies of my own, thanks. *(pause)* Besides, Portia saw Sigfried as romantic royalty, but to me he’s an exotic exile with a curiosity about everything.

NATHAN

Especially you, but can you imagine a future with an exotic?

PENELOPE

Maybe he likes being exotic; maybe he doesn't aspire to a normal life.

NATHAN

Actually, he does; he told me.

PENELOPE

Well, I doubt that he meant it. If Siegfried had a family, they'd distract and ruin him.

NATHAN

And he'd ruin them, 'cause he's a bore, lecturing about colliders and black holes. He's the black hole, and you've fallen in -- along with the rest of his cult. (*gazing out the window*) Christ, can you believe all the groupies he's attracted? Julian has a theory: he thinks since Sig's mother died and he was left with his nutcase granny, he felt betrayed by the first women in his life and wound up resenting them all. Then somehow he figured out a way to -- oh, shit, he's looking up here; he's waving!

PENELOPE

So wave back!

NATHAN

(*waving quickly*) You love all this adoration, don't you? You're vainer than you think, but it's your life, your decision, and you'd probably trade us both for your sister.

PENELOPE

It's not a contest, Nathan.

NATHAN

But if it were?

PENELOPE

Then I'd trade everyone I know for just one more hour with Portia. (*pause*) Every morning since she left, I wake up thinking of all the things I should've said and done.

NATHAN

It seems to me you've done plenty. It's not your fault you're still alive and sexy and driving me (*stomping the floor*) fucking crazy!

PENELOPE

What was that...?

(NATHAN picks up a dead moth by its wing.)

PENELOPE

Put it down. Listen, Nathan, I...I'm sorry, but I have to learn Paganini's Caprices...

NATHAN

Forget Paganini. (*approaching her*) Come here, beautiful...

PENELOPE

They're virtuoso pieces...

NATHAN

(*embracing her*) I'll show you a virtuoso.

PENELOPE

You're drunk! (*backing away*) Now I need to practice -- alone!

NATHAN

(*embracing her again*) Let's practice together -- a sex tête-à-tête, ha, ha!

PENELOPE

(*pushing him away*) No! Now please leave!

NATHAN

(*grasping her*) I can't keep my hands off...

PENELOPE

(*pushing him away*) Stop it! I mean it!

NATHAN

Oh, come on...

PENELOPE

I'm serious!

PENELOPE

Leave now or I'll scream!

NATHAN

Okay, fine, I'm leaving, but I may not come back.

PENELOPE

That's your decision.

NATHAN

No, it's yours.

PENELOPE

Do I have to make it now?

NATHAN

(pause) No, but soon. Tick tock, tick tock, tick-fucking-tock!

(NATHAN staggers off as wisps of fabric fall.)

SCENE 11

(PENELOPE approaches Spindle's Fabric Shop.)

PENELOPE

The next evening I spied Katrina leaving, then walked across the street to see Siegfried who said...

PENELOPE

...I missed you.

SIEGFRIED

I missed you,...

SIEGFRIED

...my dear. I was afraid you might forget me.

PENELOPE

Forget you?! How could I forget the strangest man I've ever known? Turn around, there's a moth on your back!

(SIEGFRIED turns, revealing a moth on his shirt which PENELOPE'S flicks away.)

SIEGFRIED

I am afraid the beasts have been feasting on our fabrics. My aunt called an exterminator who sprayed, then captured specimens. He thinks they may be an aberrant species, escapes from one of the universities. *(holding his laptop)* Look at this magnification. Usually only larvae eat fibers; adult moths prefer nectars, but these possess needlelike teeth and devour everything -- even the metallic lamés.

PENELOPE

There's something I have to show you.

(PENELOPE retrieves the scarf from her purse.)

PENELOPE

Portia embroidered this scarf for me. Notice how her moths are the exact same size and color.

SIEGFRIED

Even the wing patterns are similar...

PENELOPE

(pause) When I last saw Portia, she was sitting right here by the organza. There must have been a particular fold that only she sensed, then slipped into. But sometimes I wonder if the shop emanates a kind of consciousness, if certain rooms attract misery and create their own reality. It may sound crazy but how did this particular shop let its powers be known? How did sick, dying women know to come here? The police think you've set up a secret network.

SIEGFRIED

Ah, yes, a website for the woebegone, a dial up for the desperate. What utter nonsense, but now everyone knows: If you are female and afflicted, come to Spindles! If you are crippled and blind, come to Spindles!

PENELOPE

If you're addicted or demented,...

SEIGFRIED

If you no longer matter and have ceased to care,...

SIEGFRIED

...come to Spindles!

PENELOPE

...come to Spindles.

SEIGFRIED

On the news, they are using spindle as a verb: "to spindle" or "be spindled" or "the suspected spindling of Miss Chintz from Chelsea." Why do people assume that the fold leads to a finality? I believe it leads to a continuum, a portal of perpetuity. I should call it "Spindle's Continuum Hypothesis." Of course, if our doors are locked by the Department of Health, no one will be spindling anywhere. *(grasping Penelope's hand)* Come here, look at this.

(SIEGFRIED leads PENELOPE to a netted hamper.)

PENELOPE

Cocoons...?

SIEGFRIED

They've entered their pupal phase, producing cocoons with their salivary glands, but have you ever seen such lustrous threads? Now here, take this and pull.

(SIEGFRIED takes one end of a lengthy thread and PENELOPE the other, and THEY pull.)

SIEGFRIED

See how it shimmers and glows from within, so perhaps it's a super-silk that can conduct electricity.

PENELOPE

Amazing...

SIEGFRIED

Perhaps it can be woven into fabrics that reflect light and heat, and cool the deserts.

PENELOPE

Yes! We could stretch it on spokes of a giant wheel between the earth and sun, like a parasol that protects the planet. If we're living in a world not our own, it must be Portia's! She loved parasols!

SIEGFRIED

But moths repulsed her.

PENELOPE

How did you know that?

(PORTIA appears as SIEGFRIED speaks.)

SIEGFRIED

We spoke when she followed me to the back room to see our shipment of...

SIEGFRIED
...shantung silk.

PORTIA
Shantung silk...

PORTIA

...is my favorite fabric. (*stroking the silk*) Isn't it a wonderful irony? I mean, how this lustrous beauty comes from such grubby, disgusting little beasts?

SIEGFRIED

One of nature's enigmas...

PORTIA

(*pause*) You have such finely sculpted hands; you must be an artist.

SIEGFRIED

My gift is for the mathematics of space and time.

PORTIA

Great, so can you calculate how to slow things down? That way we could hang here for hours, while the others think we've been gone a few minutes. Can you do that?

SIEGFRIED

I could try. *(closing his eyes, then checking his watch)* I'm afraid the hands keep advancing at their inexorable pace.

PORTIA

Damn! *(pause)* Has Penny told you how sick I am? Shush! Don't answer, but I'll tell you a secret: Penny's madly in love with you and spies on you when you're not looking.

SIEGFRIED

Ah, but you are the one I see.

PORTIA

(pause) Your voice is just as I imagined, but your eyes are scary. I shouldn't talk; mine are turning yellow from pills that wreck my liver. I'm hoping to check out before I start looking worse -- sorry I'm such a downer.

SIEGFRIED

Please, feel free to express yourself. After all, we are acquainted in our way -- like old neighbors.

PORTIA

But we'll never be more because you and the rest of the world will march on without me.

SEIGFRIED

Sooner or later the parade ends for everyone.

PORTIA

(pause) I'm glad we've finally met -- before time runs out. That's such a funny expression, isn't it? As if time were something tangible you could run out of -- like milk.

SIEGFRIED

There is also ontological time, the time we live in the memories of friends and the mind of god -- if there is a god. My uncle believed that god was a draper, draping swathes of sands, grasses, and forests on the surface of the earth. What I want to know is the fate of consciousness -- if it perishes with the body or endures beyond.

PORTIA

If it endures, could I haunt you?

SIEGFRIED

Please do.

PORTIA

I knew you'd be kind. Now about Penny: I lied, she doesn't really love you. I'm on drugs that make me even more obnoxious than usual. The truth is Penny's awesome and talented, and she hardly ever loses her temper no matter how much I provoke her. You should get to know her.

SIEGFRIED

I will try.

PORTIA

Could you do more than try? Could you make an effort?

SEIGFRIED

Yes, I will.

PORTIA

Thanks. (*grasping his hand*) Promise you won't forget me.

SIEGFRIED

Never.

PORTIA

Will you kiss me?

SIEGFRIED

With pleasure.

(SIEGFRIED bends to kiss PORTIA who responds, then wheels herself away while PENELOPE stares at a moth on her finger.)

PENELOPE

If only they could speak. Why are you here, Mister Moth? And where are you from?

SIEGFRIED

A feedback loop from another universe...? I keep trying to imagine their perspective, cocooning myself, hoping to glean insights. Would you like to join me?

(PENELOPE smiles as SIEGFRIED enwraps them both in yards of translucent fabric.)

PENELOPE

This is weird.

SIEGFRIED

Looking through this veil of voile, do you feel a fluttering in your fingers, a light uplifting of your arms?

(Their arms move slowly in unison like wings.)

SIEGFRIED

Though we are constrained by gravity, can you feel a connection, a magnetic bonding with other creatures across the vast fields of infinity?

PENELOPE

I'm trying; there's a distant humming.

SIEGFRIED

The curse of being a moth would be forsaking the feel of human flesh, the sensuality of another being, especially one who makes music and whose tears shine like jewels. *(pause)* Are you thinking of her...?

PENELOPE

Are you?

SIEGFRIED

Yes. Like Portia, I want to stop the clock; to stay like this is all in the world I want.

(THEY embrace, falling into the folds as lights dim.)

SCENE 12

(NATHAN, JULIAN, GEORGETTE and RACHEL are revealed inside the apartment, presumably at different times. PENELOPE approaches and stands among them.)

PENELOPE

But clocks don't stop, and the days moved forward, bringing hotter temperatures, growing hysteria, and visitors in shifts hoping I could offer something more than the solace of "Adagio for Strings".

GEORGETTE

Baby, you know....

JULIAN

No doubt you've heard...

NATHAN

I'm sure you're aware that every shop on...

NATHAN

...the street's been infested!

RACHEL

The street's been infested;...

RACHEL

...whole bolts of cloth consumed overnight!

JULIAN

It's a parasitic pestilence!

GEORGETTE

A fuckin' plague!

RACHEL

Probably from Beijing...

JULIAN

From Romania...

GEORGETTE

From outer space!

NATHAN

Of course, they're blaming...

NATHAN

...Spindles.

RACHEL

Spindles...

RACHEL

...reported the first infestation.

JULIAN

I'm told you've been lured to the Mothman's lair.

NATHAN

It's one thing to dispatch sickly females, but why breed a mutant species?

JULIAN

I'm no psychiatrist, but if Sigi's granny was the Nazi's tailor, what better way to destroy her livelihood than to eliminate her materials -- hence the moths.

GEORGETTE

Everything's unravellin' -- all my clothes, curtains, carpets!

JULIAN

I opened my closet and swarms flew in my face;...

JULIAN

...it's revolting!

RACHEL

It's revolting!

NATHAN

They've been spotted in Queens.

RACHEL

Tracked to Brooklyn!

GEORGETTE

The Bronx!

JULIAN

The whole sodding city!

RACHEL

Everyone's buying cats, and at least...

RACHEL

...they're fumigating.

NATHAN

They're fumigating.

GEORGETTE

I blame the geek! There's been nothin' but trouble...

GEORGETTE

....since he came to Spindle's!

JULIAN

Since he came to Spindle's...

JULIAN

...bloody hell's broken loose!

GEORGETTE
I'm leavin'...

RACHEL
I'm leaving...

NATHAN
I'm leaving...

...the city!

GEORGETTE

...the state!

RACHEL

NATHAN
...the country! If you're coming, you'd better hurry: tick tock, tick tock, tick tock!

(NATHAN, JULIAN, RACHEL and GEORGETTE
depart as PENELOPE'S bow strikes the strings.)

SCENE 13

(Shadows of fluttering wings appear as PENELOPE
approaches Spindle's Fabric Shop.)

PENELOPE
Did you notice the Department of Health finally stopped their ineffectual spraying? They keep threatening to quarantine the entire city, but you can't keep insects from flying wherever they want -- not to mention fleeing New Yorkers. There's barriers everywhere, so it looks like we're in a state of siege, and whenever I cross the street, I'm accompanied by the thrumming of a thousand wings.

(PENELOPE confronts SIEGFRIED and KATRINA,
their clothing dappled with MOTHS.)

KATRINA
(to Siegfried) Close the door! Step away from the window!

SIEGFRIED
My aunt thinks I'm going to be shot.

KATRINA
His life has been threatened! They broke in and stole our new computers!

PENELOPE
Did you call the police?

KATRINA
It was the police! And your beasts have consumed our best fabrics!

PENELOPE

My beasts?!

KATRINA

Have you thought of the eventual consequences?! Soon we may all be naked -- not a pretty picture!

SIEGFRIED

Like "The Emperor's New Clothes," we'll wear suits of invisible threads.

KATRINA

This is no time for joking! You will not be laughing when you are stripped of your dignity!

PENELOPE

Maybe that's their purpose. I mean, if we're all naked, there might be fewer wars because we couldn't tell our friends from our enemies. We'd all be more conscious of our bodies, our shared humanity.

KATRINA

And *inhumanity*! You could still tell the races!

SIEGFRIED

The men from the women.

KATRINA

And the fat and wrinkled old from the slender bodies of youth. (*pause, she sighs*) You smile, Sigi, but never think the old no longer need to be touched. Now you cannot know, but when you are older and wake with an empty pillow beside your own, you will still sense the aching, yearning needs of the heart.

SIEGFRIED

Oh, Auntie...

KATRINA

(*stroking fabrics*) There were days I thrust my own hands into folds, hoping to be taken to wherever they go. (*glaring at Penelope*) Tell me where. Where?! Where do they go?!

PENELOPE

How would I know? Please, stop accusing me; I know you hate me...

KATRINA

Nonsense! I do not *hate* you. I admire your talent, (*glancing at Siegfried*) but it pains me to see lives ruined, hearts broken.

SIEGFRIED

Please, Auntie, I am not a fragile tea cup.

PENELOPE

I believe Siegfried can become whatever he chooses. I don't care what, I just hope to be there when he does. (*to Siegfried*) Why can't you convince your aunt that I'm not to blame!

SEIGFRIED

Because you are.

(Pause as PENELOPE steps back, stunned.)

KATRINA

You heard him. (*to Siegfried*) Now tell her! Tell her we know! (*pointing*) It's you! You! You are The Demon Draper! It was you all along!

PENELOPE

(*to Siegfried*) But Portia...? I thought we agreed...

SIEGFRIED

No, you assumed.

PENELOPE

But how...?!

SIEGFRIED

You tell me. How does someone will the existence of transits through time? Wormholes require exotic matter that feeds off negative energy. Speaking metaphorically, there is plenty of negative energy -- especially now -- but yours appears to have taken form.

PENELOPE

But why? Why *me*? Most days all I do is eat, sleep, practice and perform. I'm a good violinist, but not the greatest, not the best. Portia always wanted me to compose, to be original, but I stopped, so how could someone whose life is so predictable, so *ordinary*, possibly be responsible!?

SIEGFRIED

Believe me, you are *not* ordinary. *(pause)* We believe it began when your sister started to visibly decline. She would stare out the window waiting for you.

KATRINA

You were dependable as a clock: always the same days, same time, carrying your violin with your back bent, your brow furrowed -- tell her, Sigi.

SIEGFRIED

With the windows open, we could hear you playing. On the last day of June, you played a strange, haunting melody over and over. Do you remember?

PENELOPE

That was my one and only composition. Portia kept asking me to play it again and again.

SIEGFRIED

We found it enchanting, and when you finished, when your bow left the strings, we both noticed how everything fell silent: the traffic, the people, the birds! Life on this street seemed suspended -- as if pausing to reflect on its own existence. An hour later a woman entered the shop and dematerialized. A few days later others came...and went.

KATRINA

We couldn't believe our eyes. We were terrified, but still uncertain of the cause until your sister came and...whoosh!

SIEGFRIED

Don't you see? You and your violin possess powers most of us never dreamed possible. It seems the fabric of the universe is made of strings after all, a microscopic symphony of vibrations that carry your thoughts whenever you play, so what thoughts are you sending to the universe? Thoughts of...

SIEGFRIED

...Portia?

PENELOPE

Portia.

(PENELOPE turns as PORTIA appears, repeating an encounter from the past.)

PORTIA

If you're serious, if you really want to help me, there's something you can do: when the time comes, you have to help me die.

PENELOPE

(pause, she sighs) But what if I screw up and you wind up in a coma?

PORTIA

So don't screw up. Look, maybe we'll get lucky and I'll have an accident. I could choke or have a heart attack.

PENELOPE

A drunk driver could hit you.

PORTIA

Sure, or a stray bullet! Or bricks could fall on my head. Too bad we're not Indians, then you could leave me in the woods.

PENELOPE

Right.

PORTIA

If we were Eskimos, you could dump me on an ice floe. *(pause)* Look, don't worry, we'll think of something.

PENELOPE

I don't know; I...I think you're asking too much of me.

PORTIA

You'd give me a kidney but you won't help me die?

PENELOPE

It's not the same. The kidney would keep you alive; but you're asking me to -- I can't even say it!

PORTIA

At least say you'll try!

PENELOPE

Okay. *(she sighs)* You know, sometimes when I'm practicing, I imagine you falling.

PORTIA

You mean off a roof?

PENELOPE

Off an edge or a ledge.

PORTIA

To where?

PENELOPE

To a dark space that starts out small then grows until it's huge, infinite.

PORTIA

Do you push me?

PENELOPE

No, you fall, then float.

PORTIA

Am I alone? I don't want to be alone.

PENELOPE

Then no, there'll be others, whoever you want.

PORTIA

The damned and desperate -- women like me. So where do we land?

PENELOPE

Someplace better.

PORTIA

How can it be better if you're not there? *(pause)* Hey, don't start bawling! Maybe we'll get lucky and I'll stroke out in my sleep. In the meantime, you have to promise, so say it! Say "I promise," say it,...

PORTIA

...I promise.

PENELOPE

I promise.

(PORTIA departs as PENELOPE turns to SIEGFRIED.)

PENELOPE

So you think because of something so personal, so pathetic, like not keeping a promise...?

SIEGFRIED

Intentions have power; you *did* keep your promise.

(Scraps of fabric fall and PENELOPE catches them.)

KATRINA

Mein Gott, what are these?

PENELOPE

Remnants from the past materializing...?

KATRINA

From Spindle's samples...?

SIEGFRIED

From a world not our own...

PENELOPE

Fabrics that comfort the sick...

KATRINA

That bring back the dead...

SIEGFRIED

The fabric of infinity.

(PENELOPE leaves as shadows of MOTHS appear.)

SCENE 14

(Violin music is heard as GEORGETTE, RACHEL, NATHAN and JULIAN appear pacing, speaking into their smartphones while SIEGFRIED and KATRINA stand in the shop. THEY are all speaking at presumably different times, their clothing spattered with MOTHS.)

RACHEL

(to Georgette) I suppose you've heard: she quit the Philharmonic to play in the parks!

GEORGETTE

(to Rachel) I saw her on the streets.

JULIAN

(to Nathan) She's in the subways!

KATRINA

(to Siegfried) She's in the subways,...

KATRINA

(to Siegfried) ...on the platforms.

JULIAN

(to Nathan) On the trains!

SIEGFRIED

(to Katrina) But isn't it wonderful that she's...

SIEGFRIED

(to Katrina) ...composing again!

JULIAN

(to Nathan) Composing again,...

JULIAN

...is she? Has quite the following, I hear.

NATHAN

(to Julian) Like the Pied Piper and his rats.

JULIAN

(to Nathan) Only they call her...

JULIAN

(to Nathan) ...The Naked Fiddler.

GEORGETTE

(to Rachel) The Naked Fiddler.

(SIEGFRIED, KATRINA, RACHEL, GEORGETTE,
NATHAN, and JULIAN freeze in time.)

EPILOGUE

(PENELOPE appears in her apartment, her nearly nude body covered with MOTHS, speaking to the hidden cameras.)

PENELOPE

If you're still listening, you can disconnect your spyware, because I'm leaving to live with Siegfried who insists I keep playing since my music seems to affect the cosmic folds and frequencies. I'm sure you've noticed there's a glimmer of hope in the Garment District. The moths appear to be dwindling, and a local factory is processing their threads into a super-silk that Siegfried and I are draping in Spindles window. Katrina's still managing the shop where people are lining up to buy the silks in seven shades of blue while others are searching for folds in the fabric of infinity. Oh, yes, it's still there, waiting for us -- when we're ready.

(PENELOPE smiles slyly, then plays her violin as scraps of fabric fall and lights fade to black.)

The End

