

Good Writers Borrow, Great Writers Kill: The Evolution of the Thriller Genre in Thesis
Play *Author*

By

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of MASTERS OF
RESEARCH IN PLAYWRITING STUDIES

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September 2013
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30 July 2014 – Addressing Corrections Made in Thesis Play and Dissertation

I believe the submitted draft of *Author* and my dissertation show I have made the requested corrections as advised by the previous examiners. To begin, I revised *Author* to remove some of the convoluted plots points and attempted to clarify the relationship between Nick and Nola. I believe that in my current draft I have addressed the issues of authorship as it pertains to the book (Nick had the original idea while Nola wrote most of the pages). I have also explained the lack of one manuscript: Nick is the paranoid type who does not use computers because he is afraid hackers could steal his work. This paranoia is also the reason that Nick does not want anyone to know about Nola: he likes to keep the inner workings of his professional and personal life secret from the public's eye. I have considerably revised the plot of the play. In Act One, Nick and Nola are "role playing" for his book (this was similar to my previous draft when in Act Three Nick and the new woman acted out scenes from his book) when Nola becomes ill and Nick forces her upstairs in his apartment. In Act Two Nola reappears in Nick's apartment (this was similar to Act One in previous drafts) unharmed and ready to seek her revenge for letting his role playing go too far. In Act Three (set a few hours after Act Two) Nola traps Nick into admitting on tape that he drugged Nola in Act One and reveals that she going to show the world their relationship (and get the rights to the book). Nick stabs Nola, but she is fine. Nick starts to bleed, and the twist is revealed that Nola died in Act One. The Nola in Act Two and Act Three was a manifestation of Nick's guilt. The significance of Nick's death at the end of the book is that it forces him to recognize his murder of Nola, and that in using her to create his story (or rather steal her story and pass it off as his own), he destroyed her and himself in the process. These revisions were my attempt to evolve the stage thriller just as *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* evolved the genre in the 1970s.

My research essay has also gone through major revisions. I have removed some of the theory and philosophy of authorship. I agree this was a stretch in my previous dissertation, and that the theories did not really connect closely to my play. I added more on the literary genre of thrillers, specifically with the examination of *Deathtrap* by Ira Levin. *Deathtrap* was extremely helpful when I was revising my play and when I was studying the history of the stage thriller. The focus of my dissertation became more the evolution of the thriller, stating that *Author* is an evolved form of the stage thriller similar to how *Deathtrap* and *Sleuth* evolved the thriller genre in the 1970s.

Ashley Lara

Abstract

My thesis play *Author* is an evolution of the thriller play. I studied the history of the thriller genre, outlining a brief journey from the ancient plays of Greece and Rome, the tragedies of William Shakespeare, and the whodunnits and melodramas of the 1800s and 1900s. I examined the pre-existing plays *Sleuth* by Antony Shaffer and *Deathtrap* by Ira Levin, using them as case studies of models of the stage thriller and showing how they influenced the literary genre in the 1970s, creating a new form called *post-modern comedy thrillers*. These two plays were essential in the drafting process of *Author*, serving as guides on how to effectively use and subvert the conventions of the thriller genre to evolve the art form through *double-coding*. The development of *Author* from first draft to the Playwrights' Workshop featured poignant changes, specifically in the use of unreliable narration, that illustrate the continued evolution of the thriller onstage.

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Good Writers Borrow, Great Writers Kill: The Evolution of the Thriller Genre in Thesis Play *Author*

Introduction: A Crime Has Been Committed

“Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.” (Eliot 1920, p. 114)

Plagiarism is not a new phenomenon in the literary field. Take the above T.S. Eliot quote. If it sounds familiar that is probably because it is known today as “Good writers borrow, great writers steal.” Regardless of the original or the new incarnation of the phrase, they both are dangerously playful, describing the Machiavellian pursuit of writers. How far would a writer go to steal the work of another? What types of deception would be involved? Also what would happen if the other writer found out?

I wanted to examine these questions in my thesis play *Author*. The idea was to put two authors, the professional Nick and the amateur Nola, against each other in a fight over who has claim to the book. Both writers have evidence proving they belong on the cover. Nick had the original idea, but Nola was the writer who actually typed up the pages (and used her own ideas in the process). Who was the true author? Was it Nick who had the idea? Or was it Nola, who did the work? Using authorship as a narrative frame I discovered *Author* was developing into a play full of plots twists and turns, manipulative characters, and a blending of reality versus fantasy. I realized I was writing a thriller.

In the development process of *Author* I familiarized myself with the genre. I studied the history of the stage thriller starting with the early plays of Greek and Roman theatres, the tragedies of William Shakespeare, and the detective plays of the 1800s and 1900s (Carlson 1993, pp. 3-5). I discovered that as society evolved so did the conventions and expectations of the thriller genre. Two plays that evolved the thriller genre in the 1970s were *Sleuth* by Anthony Shaffer and *Deathtrap* by Ira Levin. Both play rebooted the thriller onstage through subversions of the elements of traditional thrillers. They went on to become critically and commercially successful. *Sleuth* won

multiple awards including the Tony Award for Best Play in 1970 (Kabatchnik 2011, p. 549). *Deathtrap* was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Play in 1978 (Kabatchnik 2012, p. 84). I chose these two plays to serve as models for my thesis play, guiding me along the way as I wrote *Author*.

What attracted me to *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* over other thrillers was they used authorship as a recurring theme: *Sleuth* featured an aging crime novelist as the protagonist and *Deathtrap*'s plot was a battle over a play between two playwrights. Even though these plays had the conventions of a thriller, they came across dated in the present-day with their references to the detective novels and melodramas of the early 1900s. In order for a thriller to successfully exist in today's society I would have to write a play that both contained some of the same conventions of *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*, but would have different outcomes in order to surprise and thrill the audience. I had to take the stage thriller and, as Eliot described above, make it into something completely different just as *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* did to the thriller genre in the 1970s. After a few drafts, a couple of workshops, and advised corrections I believe I have created an evolved form of the stage thriller in my thesis play *Author*.

There comes a point in every thriller for the master plan to be revealed. This dissertation serves as my master plan, showing the steps I took along the way in developing my play. First I will give a brief history of the stage thriller, examining the conventions and expectations that make up this genre and showing the evolution within the stage thriller. Then I will move to the peak of thriller evolution with breakdowns of Shaffer's *Sleuth* and Levin's *Deathtrap*. I will compare *Author* to *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*, showing that through extensive developments that my thesis play is an evolved form of the onstage thriller.

The Game is On: A Brief History of the Thriller Genre

The thriller has existed on stage since the earliest beginnings of drama. Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* featured elements of a thriller play: Oedipus spends the

play investigating the murder of Laius, only to discover that he unknowingly committed the act. Thrillers continued with William Shakespeare in plays such as *Hamlet*, where the title character searches for the murderer of his father. In the 1800s and early 1900s detective novels began to inspire the thrillers of the stage, including an adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* in 1899 by William Gillette and Agatha Christie's *Mousetrap* in 1952 (Carlson 1993, p. 3).

These *whodunnits*, as they were called, were very influential in the thriller genre, especially in the structure of the plot. Dramatist David Edgar determined the following order of elements in the plot a whodunnit:

1. A murder is committed.
2. Multiple suspects of committing the violent act are introduced.
3. A detective and his assistant/companion are contacted to investigate the crime.
4. A second crime that usually protects the murderer is committed
5. Unexplained clues give way to false accusations and revelations
6. The suspect list dwindles down until the detective uncovers the true identity of the criminal.
7. Following the reveal the detective will explain the clues and tie up any loose plot points (2009, p. 83).

The title *whodunnit* refers to the murderer in question. The quest to discover the identity of the murderer is the driving force behind the plot. Once the murderer is revealed, the play is in its final act, and all is resolved.

Theorist Tzvetan Todorov explained that whodunnits are usually structured like memoirs with a friend or companion of the protagonist acting as the narrator, such as Dr. Watson in some of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* novels. Using this technique lets the reader know that the narrator of the story will make it to the end alive since the companion has recorded the story to be told in the form of a novel (1977, p. 45). This use of a reliable narrator allowed for the audience or reader to trust the protagonist. There was no reason for the audience or reader to suspect what was in the plot was not really happening on the page. Even though these thrillers were works of fiction they were realistic in their presentation of the facts.

While whodunnits were popular in novels and as plays in 1800s and early 1900s, the audiences grew to recognize that the detective (protagonist) would solve the mystery, and that the villain (antagonist) would attempt to block the investigation (Carlson 1993, p. 15). The stage thriller would have to change order to surprise and thrill audiences. This evolution of the thriller started in the 1970s with plays such as *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*. These plays disguised the common conventions of thrillers (i.e. a murder is committed early in the plot) in order to manipulate the audiences' expectations (i.e. the first death is revealed to be fake) rather than fulfil them. The focus with *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* was less on the solving the crime that was committed and more about figuring out which character is the hero and which is the villain (Palmer 1978, p. 6). From *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* a new type of thriller was created: the post-modern comedy thriller.

***Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*: Case Studies on Post-Modern Comedy Thrillers**

Marvin Carlson in *Deathtraps: The Post-Modern Comedy Thriller* defined postmodern artistic expression as being self-referential, foreshadowing the work in progress, and disrupting the foreshadowed events and twisting the audience's expectations (1993, p. 1). In other words, a post-modern thriller presents the elements common in a thriller (crime has been committed, an investigation begins) only to use the elements to misdirect the audience (for example, the protagonist was the killer). The comedy aspect was due to the use of humorous dialogue and the playful ways the expectations of the thriller were subverted to misdirect the audience (1993, p. 14).

One of the first post-modern comedy thrillers was *Sleuth* by Anthony Shaffer. The play features two characters: older detective fiction author Andrew Wyke and his wife's younger lover Milo Tindle. Act One begins at Andrew's country house. He has invited Milo to his house. Milo tells Andrew that his wife Marguerite wants a divorce. Andrew will agree to the divorce (he claims to have grown tired of his wife) and give Milo some jewels for him to sell as a means for financial security since Marguerite enjoys living a certain luxurious lifestyle. The catch is Milo has to break into the house

and steal the jewels so the heist can appear authentic. Then Andrew reveals he really wants to kill Milo for stealing Marguerite. Act One ends with Andrew shooting Milo and the curtain being drawn as police sirens sound off in the near distance (Shaffer 1971, pp. 1-51).

Act Two begins with Andrew receiving a visit from Detective Doppler. Doppler is in his fifties, balding and has a grey moustache. He is investigating the recent disappearance of Milo. Doppler has heard reports that Milo was at Andrew's the night he was reported missing. Andrew admits the last time he saw Milo was months ago. Doppler starts to find suspicious evidence around Andrew's house, such as gunshot holes in walls, blood spatters, a mound of earth recently dug up in his garden, and a monogrammed shirt of Milo's. Andrew admits that Milo was at the house that night, but that they were just playing a game. Andrew says he fired blanks to scare Milo, but denies firing a live round that would have killed him. Doppler does not believe Andrew and threatens to charge him for murdering Milo. Doppler then reveals his true identity – Milo Tindle (Shaffer 1971, pp. 55-72).

Milo says the reason for the disguise was he wanted to get back at Andrew for his behaviour the other night. Milo has also returned to tell Andrew that Marguerite is not coming back, and that she requested Milo to collect her fur coat for her. As he is offstage collecting the coat, Andrew realises he can beat Milo - it will appear that Milo was robbing the house since he has the fur coat. Andrew can shoot him and claim self-defence. Milo returns onstage and Andrew threatens to shoot. Milo says that even if Andrew shoots, he will still lose because he told the police about the other night. Andrew does not believe Milo because he says the police would have already come by the house. He shoots Milo just before police sirens are heard outside Andrew's house. Milo's last words are "Game, set, and match." (Shaffer 1971, pp. 73-93).

Sleuth premiered in 1970 in St. Martin's Theatre in London. The production featured a program with a fake cast list complete with bogus actor biographies in order

to deceive the audience. The list included a detective, a police constable, and an inspector. Before the play begins the audience is manipulated. Shaffer wanted to write a play that teased with the whodunnits and thrillers of the Agatha Christie era, where the audience first had to figure out what was happening instead of who was the killer (Kabatchnik 2011, p. 547). This twist on the genre allowed for the audience's expectations to change, creating a thrill from the unexpected.

Chasing after the success of *Sleuth* was Ira Levin's *Deathtrap* in 1979. Act One starts in the Connecticut countryside home of playwright Sidney Bruhl. His home is filled with artefacts and props from his past shows and relics from Houdini's stage days. Sidney was once the toast of Broadway, but now appears to be in a career slump. He and his wife Myra (who suffers from heart problems) have been living off her money for a few years now, but they worry that without a hit the creditors will soon be knocking at their door. Sidney receives a play titled *Deathtrap* by Clifford Anderson, an amateur writer and fan of Sidney's earlier plays. Sidney thinks *Deathtrap* is a sure to be a hit and jokingly suggests to his wife that he should kill Clifford and pass the play off as his own (Levin 1979, pp. 3-13). In Act One Scene Two he invites Clifford over to his house and they discuss the play. Sidney brings up the possibility of collaborating, but Clifford declines. Unwilling to accept rejection, Sidney slits Clifford's throat in front of Myra. The scene ends with Sidney and Myra carrying Clifford's body outside to be buried in the garden (Levin 1979, pp. 14-33).

Act One Scene Three begins with Myra and Sidney a couple hours after the killing and burying of Clifford. Helga Ten Dorp, their psychic neighbour, comes over to warn them that she had a terrible vision of their house, seeing death happening in their immediate future. Sidney claims she must have seen him writing his new play and that her visions were nothing but fiction. Helga leaves the house, and Myra and Sidney are relieved to have deceived her. They are about to go to bed when Clifford returns, covered in mud and blood, and attacks Sidney. Myra has a heart attack and dies. Clifford

and Sidney reveal this was their plan all along – make Myra believe that Clifford died so that when he reappeared the fright would overwhelm Myra’s heart and kill her (Levin 1979, pp. 34-48).

Act Two Scene One takes place two weeks later. Clifford is now presented as Sidney’s secretary as to not alert suspicion to their crime. They receive a visit from Porter Milgrim, Sidney and Myra’s attorney, who informs Sidney on the small size of Myra’s estate. Porter also mentions to Sidney that he noticed Clifford locking his script in the desk. Sidney thinks that Clifford is writing a play about working in a welfare office (based on Clifford’s previous career experience). Intrigued, Sidney tricks Clifford into opening the desk, and he discovers that Clifford is writing the play *Deathtrap* based entirely on their plot to kill Myra. Sidney tells Clifford the play will not work – the real-life resemblance would bring unwanted attention to the two of them and could cause a police investigation into Myra’s death. Clifford will not take no for an answer. If Sidney will not work with him on *Deathtrap* he will take the play somewhere else. Sidney caves in and agrees to collaborate with Clifford on *Deathtrap* (Levin 1979, pp. 51-72).

Act Two Scene Two begins one week after Scene One. Helga Ten Dorp returns to warn Sidney that she had a vision of Clifford attacking him. Sidney uses this information to try to trick Clifford. He tells Clifford that they need to work on a fight scene to make it more believable in the script. They start role-playing and stage fighting, but the action soon turns real and Sidney shoots Clifford. Yet Clifford is unharmed. Clifford reveals he stocked the gun with blanks and produces a gun with real bullets. He handcuffs Sidney to a chair and says that he is taking the play and leaving, and if Sidney comes after him he will reveal their whole affair. As Clifford packs his things, Sidney breaks out of the handcuffs (they were Houdini’s) and takes a crossbow amongst his home décor and shoots Clifford. Sidney then attempts to light the play on fire (destroying the evidence linking them to Myra’s death), but is stopped by Clifford when

he chokes him and stabs him with the crossbow bolt. The scene ends with both playwrights dead (Levin 1979, pp. 73-85).

Act Two Scene Three begins with Porter and Helga Ten Dorp studying the room. Helga has a vision about the play, saying the deaths that took place were the inspiration behind the play *Deathtrap* that Clifford was writing. Porter think that would make a great play and decides to write it, but Helga stops him and says that she deserves to write it since she had the vision. The play ends with Helga and Porter fighting over who deserves to write *Deathtrap* (Levin 1979, p. 86-88). The end of *Deathtrap* states that in the fight between Helga and Porter, the circle of stealing writing will continue long after the curtain is drawn, therefore deviating from the traditional ending thrillers and whodunnits where the detective solves the crime and all is resolved.

These two plays were among the first to thrillers to use *double-coding*, which is defined as the simultaneous celebration and subversion of conventional expectations of the genre (Carlson 1993, p. 10). An example of the double-coding would be the first deaths onstage in *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*. Both deaths are presented realistically – Andrew shoots Milo at the end of Act One in *Sleuth*, and Sidney chokes Clifford at the end of Scene Two in *Deathtrap*. However there is a reversal of these deaths in the following acts. In *Sleuth* Milo returns in disguise as Detective Plodder in Act Two to exact his revenge on Andrew and reveal his death was not real (although part of his revenge is making Andrew believe he killed him). In *Deathtrap* Clifford appears to have come back from the dead to scare Myra to death, although later it is revealed that this was the plan all along – Sidney and Clifford were lovers, and they knew that if they faked Clifford's death and had him reappear that Myra's heart would give out, and they could in turn live in peace without her. These reversals are parodies of the thriller genre described by Linda Hutcheon use and abuse, then install and subvert the very concepts they challenge (1988, p. 11). Through these subversions of elements the author can trick the audience into believing one outcome (the deaths of Clifford and Milo are true) only

to reveal the exact opposite (the deaths were fake) in order to keep the audience guessing.

While *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* were very influential in the development of my thesis play, I knew that not all the conventions they contained would work for *Author*. Today's audiences would not be as surprised by a fake death followed by a reversal because this technique had already been presented and popularized in thrillers. In current society the thriller exists less on stage and more onscreen, popular in films. Cinematic thrillers can manipulate the audience through with the use of special effects and editing, two technical elements not available to the stage thriller. With audiences accustomed to computerized effects or slick editing, I began to wonder if the stage thriller could evolve onstage without the use of special effects that benefit the cinematic thrillers.

The Game Has Changed: The Development of *Author* and the Inspiration of *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*

Knowing the conventions and expectations of a thriller I started to experiment during the drafting process of *Author*. First of all I changed the name of the play. A very minimal change, but I believe one that has helped tremendously. The original title for my play was *Fine Print*. I thought *Fine Print* would put focus on the book and the lack of an official writing partnership between Nick and Nola. As the play developed, *Fine Print* did not seem to fit the play. I took a cue from Levin and Shaffer and went with a minimalist one-word title: *Author*. I believe with this title change the focus now becomes on the relationship between Nick and Nola. The use of singular form *Author* also suggests that there can only be one author to the book, and sets up a debate on the identity of the true author.

There are many similarities between the characters in *Deathtrap*, *Sleuth*, and *Author*. They feature older, experienced protagonists (*Sleuth*: Andrew, *Deathtrap*: Sidney, *Author*: Nick) and younger, amateur antagonists (*Sleuth*: Milo, *Deathtrap*: Clifford, and *Author*: Nola). Their relationship mirrors the dysfunctional relationship

between Andrew and Milo in *Sleuth* and Sidney and Clifford in *Deathtrap*. The age difference suggests that the protagonists are wiser than their younger counterparts, and therefore will outsmart their rivals and win the game. The younger characters are inferior to the older characters in every way. Nola, Clifford, and Milo are part of the working class (Nola was a waitress, Clifford previously worked as a welfare office clerk, and Milo was a hairdresser) while Nick, Sidney, and Andrew held high-status positions as best-selling authors. Part of a good thriller is a power struggle and with *Author*, *Sleuth*, and *Deathtrap*, the power struggles are directly related to the characters: young versus old, rich versus poor, and experience writer versus inexperienced. These struggles raise the stakes of the games, allowing for the subversions and reversals of identities and deaths that promote intrigue to keep the audience guessing.

The slimming down of characters from the traditional melodramas and whodunnits was also essential to the development of the thriller. *Sleuth* and *Author* contained only two characters (although at times these characters are disguised or act like additional characters) and *Deathtrap* contained five, which was still relatively small compared to whodunnits which usually contained a detective, a detective's companion, a victim, a victim's friend or companion, a murderer, and many false suspects. The smaller casts allowed for the playwright to create a more complex game while maintaining a private world full of intrigue and counter intrigue (Carlson 1993, p. 44).

The removal of the detective character in these post-modern comedy thrillers was more than just trimming the cast. The detective was the stabilising force in whodunits, a central authority character reigning over all other characters. Without the detective the world of the play was destabilised, setting a scene of chaos for the characters (Carlson 1993, p. 51). This promoted a lawless universe in these evolved thrillers. There were no clear cut villains or heroes, and no moral codes to guide the characters. I incorporated this philosophy into *Author*. Just as Clifford and Sidney murdered for their play, and Andrew and Milo deceived each other for Marguerite (or to

just take out their male aggression on each other), Nick and Nola used each other to advance their careers.

One major character difference between *Author* and the two earlier plays was making the younger antagonist character (Nola) a female. In *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* the younger antagonists were male (Milo and Clifford). Despite the prominence of female thriller writers in literary society they were hardly presented so onstage (Carlson 1993, p. 64). Even in *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*, the females were wives of the older protagonists. Marguerite in *Sleuth* is never seen onstage, only spoken about by Milo and Andrew. Myra in *Deathtrap* is presented as a faint-hearted housewife to Sidney. The men treated women as pawns, only used to advance their own ambitions (Sidney and Clifford killing Myra and inheriting her money) or passed around like property (Milo and Andrew both take turns handing over Marguerite). With my thesis play I wanted a female character to challenge the older male protagonist. Nola is my response to the representation (or in the case of *Sleuth*, lack of representation) of a female character in conventional stage thrillers. Throughout the drafting process Nola has always remained a strong character, able to battle equally on her own against Nick.

Once I had the characters sorted I moved to structure. The five act structure of *Deathtrap* was referential to the melodramas of the early days of stage thriller. I felt I could not maintain the action of the play for five acts with just two characters, so I looked to the structure of *Sleuth*. Shaffer's play takes place in two acts and there are just two characters (although at times the two characters disguise themselves as other characters). I thought the two act structure would work for *Author*, but I could not find a way to write the play in two acts that satisfied the audience. Therefore I split the difference between *Deathtrap* and *Sleuth* and structured *Author* in three acts.

While my structure and characters have stayed the same throughout the development process, the plots within those acts have changed drastically throughout development. In the first draft (see Appendix A) the premise was that in Act One Nola

arrives unannounced at Nick's place. They argue over the book and at the end of the act Nola falls down the stairs, although it is unclear whether or not Nick pushed her from offstage. In Act Two Nick wakes up the next morning in a drunken stupor to find Nola alive and well. Nola tells Nick she was not at his place the night before and blames his drinking for making him imagine such things. Then, after Nola finds out about the book deal, Nick strangles her offstage so he can have the book. In Act Three Nick brings home a new woman (Christi) and begin to groom her to become the new Nola. Christi then discovers that Nick wants to kill her (and assumes he has previously killed others) and runs out of the apartment, almost certainly on her way to report Nick to the authorities.

However there were many issues with the first draft. In the January playwriting workshop the audience lost interest when the death of Nola in Act Two occurred offstage. Also they felt that Act Three was a little too melodramatic and convenient that Christi would put together the pieces of Nick's sordid puzzle. In the workshop draft I attempted to correct these problems (see Appendix B). I moved Nola's death in Act One onstage. At the end of the Act Nola falls down and hits her head on the stereo, appearing lifeless. Nick collects her body and pulls her offstage. Act Two stayed relatively the same in this draft. Nola appears, explains she was not in his apartment the previous night (once again Nick was just drunkenly imagining this), and then discovers the book deal. Nola says she will sue Nick for the book rights and reveal their entire relationship. Nick stabs Nola onstage, killing her for good and winning the rights to the book. Much like *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*, the second death in *Author* was the real death. However in *Sleuth*, the play ends after Milo's death. I wanted the circular ending of *Deathtrap*, so I kept Nick seducing a woman (this time unnamed) in Act Three. In this draft, she does not leave or pick up that he is trying to kill her. She plays the game with Nick, showing that even though Nola has died, Nick is still a slave to her image, making the new woman

role play as the character “Nola.” Nick may have survived, like Andrew in *Sleuth*, but the real loss was losing their partners in crime.

The feedback from this draft was mixed. The audience and readers liked the deaths of Nola onstage, but the third act still felt like it did not belong in the play. The idea that Nick is locked in purgatory where he repeats the same behaviour (find a young woman, seduce her for his books, then murder her) was a good idea, but the execution was not working in the play. There was also some confusion as to who was the real author. Did Nola come up with the idea? Or was it Nick? Whereas *Deathtrap* was clear cut (Clifford wrote the play and Sidney was trying to steal the work), *Author* never clearly answered who was the real author. I left this answer ambiguous in my play to create mystery and challenge the expectations of the stage thriller, but the ambiguity was too confusing. I also felt that *Author*’s structure was too predictable in that Nola’s death in Act One was fake, therefore her death in Act Two would be real. *Author* was fulfilling the conventions and expectations of thrillers such *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*, but my play was doing very little to evolve the genre and defy expectations. In order to evolve the stage thriller, *Author* would need a major revision.

The Final Draft of *Author*

In my final draft (see following this essay), I completely changed the play. In Act One, Nick and Nola have just returned to Nick’s place. They just met at a restaurant earlier that night, and Nick invited her back to his place. They drink, engage in flirty dialogue, and Nola starts to ask questions about Nick’s professional life. Nick turns serious, says that his books about murder are “based on real events in his life.” Nola starts to get dizzy and tries to leave, but Nick sinisterly takes Nola upstairs, slightly hinting that he is going to kill her.

In Act Two the scene opens on a cassette tape playing the dialogue between Nick and Nola on that night. After a few moments Nick enters the apartment (after a whiskey run) when he notices Nola standing by the stairwell. Nola goes through that night,

revealing that they were acting out a scene from his book when Nick got carried away and drugged her. Nick apologizes, but Nola refuses. She tells Nick she knows about the book, claims that she wrote it (Nick was always too drunk to notice she was doing all the work), and is going to sue Nick if he does not fork over the money and author credit. Nick threatens to destroy the one and only copy of the original unfinished manuscript if Nola does not collaborate with him on the ending. They agree to act out the ending and record it on a cassette tape.

Act Three begins hours after Act Two. Nick and Nola are drained from acting and role playing. Nick is more intoxicated, and Nola is losing her patience. They act out the death scene where the killer (being played by Nick) is supposed to kill the female character being played by Nola (and also named Nola – Nick thought her unique name would fit the book). Nola, in a nod to Milo in *Sleuth*, attacks Nick and almost kills him, but lets him go once he admits to drugging her. Nola then reveals the entire night was not about the book – it was about getting revenge on Nick for drugging her. Now with the evidence on tape Nola starts to leave, adamant she can destroy Nick's professional and personal reputation. Unwilling to part with his book, Nick stabs Nola with a broken piece of glass. Nola starts to act as if she is in pain, but then starts to laugh. Nick looks down at his stomach. He is bleeding profusely. The big reveal here is that Nola died at the end of Act One, and that the Nola of the previous scenes was a figment of Nick's imagination, a manifestation of his guilt for stealing her work and killing her for success. The final moments of the play with Nick dying on the couch show that he has finally accepted his identity as a killer and a plagiarist. Even as he sits on the couch, moments away from death, he thinks that he is bound to make a best-sellers list just on his soon to be discovered infamous crimes. The play ends with Nola turning out the lights.

I discovered the key to evolving the stage thriller genre was in the death of Nola. In previous editions of *Author*, Nola's death was double-coded just as the deaths of Milo in *Sleuth* and Clifford in *Deathtrap*. In *Sleuth* the audience believes Milo dies in Act

One, only to come back in Act Two, and then die at the end of the play. *Deathtrap* follows the same pattern. Clifford is believed to have died, only to come back from the dead (or in the case of the play, appear to come back from the grave to scare Myra to a literal death), and then die at the hands of Sidney in the final moments of the play. With *Author* the double-coding gets subverted once again. Nola is believed to have been killed in Act One when Nick takes her up the staircase after not-so-subtly hinting that he writes about his killing conquests. When Nola re-appears in Act Two, I was playing off the audience's expectation that the first death was fake, and that at the end of the play she would die for real. However where I diverted from the pattern *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* was that I made Nola's death in Act One the real death, and therefore made her existence in Act Two and Three a manifest of Nick's guilt. The deaths in *Sleuth*, *Deathtrap*, and *Author* highlights "the endless play of the universe ... what is left at the bottom may be far more chilling than amusing." (Carlson 1993, p. 119).

Another big difference between *Author* and *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* was the use of unreliable narration or point of view from the protagonist. This technique common in film thrillers – think *The Sixth Sense* where Bruce Willis' character Malcolm Crowe is revealed at the end to have died when the entire film the audience believed he was a living doctor helping Haley Joel Osment's character Cole Sear with his special ability to interact with the dead. Presenting an unreliable point of view from a protagonist is more difficult onstage. Film can use editing and special effects to fool the audience and subtly misguide them. Even in *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* there were times that the audience may have been withheld information (Andrew shot Milo with blanks at the end of Act One in *Sleuth*, or that Sidney and Clifford planned to scare Myra to death), but the scenes were always presented in the mode of realism. With *Author* I presented my play in a realist tone (no flashing lights or ghoulish sound effects) to deceive the audience into thinking they were watching a realist thriller, when actually most of the play (Act Two and Three) takes place in Nick's mind. I thought that a man like Nick who is losing his mind

and slowly going crazy probably would not realize what he is seeing is not normal. This allowed for a bigger surprise at the end of the play and created a more thrilling theatrical experience.

Conclusion: Author and the Evolution of the Thriller

Just as *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap* evolved the thriller genre, my thesis play *Author* evolved the genre. *Author* first started as a more traditional thriller with the use of conventions of the genre. Then the play changed into a post-modern comedy thriller modelled after *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*. Now in the final draft *Author* has evolved the genre with the use of unreliable narration, revealing in a final twist that Nola in Acts Two and Three was nothing more than a manifestation of Nick's guilty conscience. Film audiences can be easily manipulated with fantastical elements through slick editing and computerized effects, both of which are not easy to present onstage. In *Author* I was able to manipulate the audience by presenting the play in a realistic tone, hiding the illusion until the final moments of the play when Nick kills himself.

I believe the theme of authorship is the strongest tie between *Sleuth*, *Deathtrap*, and *Author*. Andrew, Sidney, and Nick portray the has-been writers who cling desperately to the success they used to have. I believe this drive to succeed, to top the last book and stay relevant in the literary ranks, was what caused these writers to lose their minds. Nick's struggle for control over his career began internally before bubbling up externally in his treatment of Nola. In Act One her death is an accident, a game gone too far. In Act Three Nick tries to intentionally kill her only to realize too late that he has imagined Nola in the past two acts, and is really destroying himself. The only silver lining to Nick is that with the scandal that will erupt following his death, his book could possibly end up a best-seller. *Author* shows the lengths that one man is willing to go to be a success, and the prices he must pay in order to achieve literary acclaim.

My examination of pre-existing plays *Sleuth* by Anthony Shaffer and *Deathtrap* by Ira Levin guided me along the development of *Author*. I was able to manipulate and

misdirect the audience through the use of unreliable narration, which evolved the thriller genre onstage. In future developments of this play I would like to experiment more with the philosophical themes on authorship. Right now my play uses authorship as a narrative frame, but I would like to integrate literary theory into future drafts. My work as a playwright – a version of an author, if you will – has only started. I just hope my fate as an author is better than that of the characters I created in my thesis play.

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APPENDIX A

Fine Print First Rough Draft January 2013

By

Ashley Lara

CAST

NICK - mid to late 30s/early 40s, once well-known crime novelist now working on a comeback. Slightly weathered but still well dressed.

NOLA - mid to late 20s. Nick's former assistant and lover. She is claiming that Nick has plagiarism his new novel on her writings.

CHRISTI - 20s, a waitress interested in writing and admirer of Nick's work. Can be double cast with the same woman that plays Nola.

Setting

The living room of Nick's Brooklyn Townhouse.

ACT I

Lights up. The living room of a modern apartment. A leather couch is in the center of the stage, with a wet bar behind it. Nick, early 40s, enters the room from stage left, carrying a brown liquor bag. His hair is slightly wet from the rain outside.

He sets the brown bag down on the wet bar. He checks an alarm system on the wall.

A woman, Nola, late twenties, enters from the stairwell on stage right. Nick's back is to her so she isn't noticed.

Nick dials his mobile.

NICK

Hello? Yes I'd like to report a defective alarm ... Well I just walked into my apartment and my alarm was turned off. I know I turned it on before I left...

Nick turns and sees Nola.

NICK

... What? Oh never mind. I think I know what happened.

Nick hangs up.

NOLA

It's easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask permission.

NICK

What's your point?

NOLA

... I'm sorry.

NICK

Is that all?

NOLA

You're out of milk.

NICK

I didn't think that you drank milk.

NOLA

I don't.

NICK

Why are you -

NOLA
- I tried knocking.

NICK
I was out. How did you...?

NOLA
The spare key.

NICK
I thought I had moved it.

NOLA
You did.

Nola places a key on the wet bar.

NICK
I can't hide anything from you.

NOLA
No you can't. (pause) I was looking for wine.

NICK
In my house?

NOLA
In your fridge.

NICK
I wish I would have known you were coming. I would have picked a bottle.

NOLA
And how would I have told you? You don't like phones.

NICK
I don't like unexpected visitors.

NOLA
Then answer your phone.

NICK
You remembered the alarm code.

NOLA
I haven't been gone that long to forget.

NICK
Did you tell anyone?

NOLA
Seven-two-one-eight ...

NICK
Did you tell anyone about me?

NOLA
No, I didn't tell anyone.

NICK
So you followed my rules...

NOLA
No one knows I'm here if that's what you're worried about.

NICK
Worried? I'm not worried.

NOLA
Maybe you should be.

NICK
You were upstairs.

NOLA
I was looking for you.

NICK
That's a good answer.

NOLA
It's the truth. You can go check if you don't believe me.

NICK
I will. Later ...

NOLA
What should I do with my coat?

NICK
You're staying?

NOLA
You want me to stay.

NICK
I'm not sure yet.

NOLA
That wasn't a question.

Nola places the coat on the back of a chair.

NICK
I have a coat rack.

NOLA
Excellent.

Nola hands Nick her coat.

NOLA
Are you upset?

NICK
No. Why would I be upset to find my former assistant waiting for me in my house?

NOLA
I was a co-writer.

NICK
Officially you were nothing.

NOLA
You paid me.

NICK
In cash, under the table. You could have been a maid.

NOLA
Except I was your co-writer.

NICK
Or a prostitute.

NOLA
If you're upset about the book it's perfectly natural.

NICK
And what book would that be?

NOLA
Our book. The one we're writing together.

NICK
We're not writing a book together.

NOLA
We're not?

NICK
No. I have my own work to do. These crime thrillers don't write themselves.

NOLA
Stealing straight from the headlines are you?

NICK
Headlines are dull. But you were never one to read the paper. You only fetched it.

NOLA
Fetched?

NICK
Like a dog.

NOLA
I'm more of a cat person.

NICK
Did you do something different with your hair?

NOLA
My hair?

NICK
I'm catching up. It's ... longer?

NOLA
No.

NICK
No? Something is different about it.

NOLA
It's down. I usually had it pulled back while I was here.

NICK
I like it.

Nick takes Nola's hair and starts to play with it.

NOLA
Do you want to keep talking about hairstyles?

NICK
No. Do you?

NOLA
No.

NICK
Good. That's settled. Now ... where the fuck have you been these past three weeks?

Nick roughly tosses her hair back to Nola.

NOLA
Out.

NICK
You just left. Fucking vanished.

NOLA
I know. Miss me?

NICK
After everything I did for you. You know I find it very unprofessional that you would just walk out. You could have told me. Even left a note.

NOLA
I know about your deal.

NICK
Ah yes the deal. The deal ... could you be more vague?

NOLA
You're going behind my back. You're publishing it without my name.

NICK
You're wrong.

NOLA
I thought we had an arrangement. You said you would help me with my writing.

NICK
I did help you. I looked at your work, gave you feedback...

NOLA
You kept making promises. You said you would introduce me to people.

NICK
You left. I can't introduce you to people if you're not here.

NOLA
You said you would help me if I helped you.

NICK
You got me coffee.

NOLA
No. That's not what I meant.

NICK
I never forced you to do anything against your will. What happened between us was consensual.

NOLA
Oh god stop. I'm not talking about the sex. I'm talking about the work. About my ideas.

NICK
Your ideas?

NOLA
I had ideas.

NICK
Everyone has ideas.

NOLA
You didn't. You were stuck. You hadn't published anything in what, five years? That's why you needed me. That's why I helped you write the book.

NICK
Needed you?

NOLA
You asked me to help you with ideas. I gave you the idea for the book...

NICK
I will agree we discussed ideas, but in the end it was decided that I was to write the book.

NOLA
Both of our names were to appear on the cover.

NICK
Yours would be on the cover if you wrote it. Listen honey -

NOLA
- Don't call me that.

NICK
Sorry. Look I have name recognition. I've written bestsellers. My first book was on the New York Times' list for twenty-five weeks.

NOLA
Not at number one.

NICK
Oh I'm sorry - how many have you had on that list? ... You may have had limited input on the novel, but that's it.

NOLA
I had more than limited input and you know it. And now you're passing the entire thing off as you own. What a low thing to do.

NICK
Oh Nola... You're mistaken. There is a book deal, but it's not ... here sit down.

Nick tries to touch Nola's arm.

NOLA
Don't. Don't do that.

NICK
Sorry. I was just trying...

NOLA
I can manage.

NICK
Would you like a drink? I have ...

NOLA
No. I don't want a drink. I want to know...

NICK
Look I will tell you, but you have to ... I can't talk to you like this. Just calm down.

NOLA
Fuck you. I'm calm. I want to know about the book.

NICK
Listen there is a book deal, but it's my book. It's one I wrote before I met you.

NOLA
Bullshit. You're lying.

NICK
I'm not. I can't tell you about it ... I shouldn't have even said I had a deal.

NOLA
Don't pull that crap with me. I want know about your deal.

NICK
Would you just ... I'll tell you, okay? First I'm going to have a drink.

NOLA
Jesus Christ...

NICK
Hey. HEY. It's my place. I'm having a fucking drink.

*Nick starts to fill two glasses with whiskey.
Nick crosses to Nola and hands her the drink.*

NOLA
Is this? ... No. I don't like whiskey.

NICK
Then don't drink it.

Nick clinks his glass with hers.

NOLA
You didn't look for me after I left.

NICK
No I didn't look.

NOLA
I wasn't asking a question.

NICK
I know.

NOLA
Most people would have looked.

NICK
You're an adult. I wasn't worried.

NOLA
You should have been.

NICK
That sounds threatening.

NOLA
That's why I said it.

NICK
You're just a waitress.

NOLA
Was a waitress.

NICK
Just a waitress who occasionally writes words.

NOLA
I could have been dead.

NICK
Then that would have made a fascinating headline.

NOLA
I met someone.

NICK
True love?

NOLA
Maybe. He appreciates me. He thinks I'm talented.

NICK
That's a line. I think I used it on you once.

NOLA
I was improving. I was getting better...

NICK
You were getting better, but not better than me.

NOLA
You were never going to help me. That's why I left.
You were afraid of my talent.

NICK
Everything I said was to fuck you. You were just a fuck. That's all. I didn't look for you because I didn't care. I was relieved that you left. I was getting bored.

NOLA
You're just upset I left before you had the chance to get rid of me. I take it you're the one that usually tells them to leave.

NICK
Them?

NOLA
The other women you bring back here. Did you bring any back while I was gone?

NICK
That's none of your business.

NOLA
That's a no. What happened? Couldn't find anyone willing to go out with an obsessive compulsive dick?

NICK
Those rules...

NOLA
I couldn't call you because you thought someone was tapping your phone...

NICK
I made that up. All the rules were bullshit.

NOLA
Then why make them up?

NICK
To watch you play along. I was surprised you followed them. I find that a certain kind of woman usually follows these rules.

NOLA
A certain kind of woman?

NICK
Sluts mostly...

NOLA
I thought I was just a waitress.

NICK
I don't think they're mutually exclusive. Not in your case.

NOLA
See you knew I was talented. But your biggest mistake was underestimating me.

NICK
No. I sang a country song at a karaoke bar once. That would probably be my biggest mistake.

NOLA
How much of an advance did you get?

NICK
It's my book and I'm not telling you.

NOLA
Yeah you said that before ... it was two million right?

NICK
... What?

NOLA
Good. I have your attention.

NICK
It was a lucky guess.

NOLA
I was surprised to know that your first leg of the book tour was Los Angeles. You always said no one reads books in Los Angeles unless they've been optioned for a film.

NICK
Wrong. It's Boston. And that's all you're getting out of me.

NOLA
It was Boston but Harry changed it to Los Angeles.

NICK
What did you say?

NOLA
Harry Brown. That's who you're publishing your - excuse me - our book with?

NICK
You don't know Harry.

NOLA
Oh but I do. I should have said this earlier. I'm fucking him.

NICK
Him?

NOLA
Harry.

NICK
This is a joke.

NOLA
Well it is funny ... you tried to screw me out of a book deal by bad business, whereas I'm screwing you out of a deal by ... screwing.

NICK
Did you tell him about us?

NOLA
No. Relax. I even gave him a fake name.

NICK
I still don't understand how the two of you met.

NOLA
I haven't explained that yet because someone keeps interrupting. Now three weeks ago a courier from his office showed up here with a package. Don't worry I didn't answer the door. I did open the package that was left outside. It was our manuscript. Except for my name was missing. And you changed the title. "The Missing One?" Horrible...

NICK
The package wasn't opened when I got back...

NOLA
Because I got a new fucking envelope and fucking forged the rest. It's not that hard. Anyways, I randomly met Harry on the street outside of his office, got him to take me upstairs, where I -

NICK
- Spare me the gory details.

NOLA
I was going to say I snooped around his office while he was off taking a piss ... I found some documents of your deal, but not enough. I wanted to keep a close eye on you. All I had to do was keep Harry interested. Go on a few dinners, have a few drinks...

NICK
Does he order for you? He'd always order me chicken,
but I don't like chicken. You know what chicken
tastes like? (pause) Chicken. It's too rubbery.

NOLA
No he doesn't order for me. I get to order whatever I
want. He gave me this.

Nola shows off the necklace around her neck.

NICK
Is that real gold?

NOLA
Probably. He's not cheap.

NICK
It looks cheap. It makes you look cheap.

*Nick rips off her necklace and tosses it. The
necklace lands on the couch.*

NOLA
Hey. You'll pay for that.

NICK
I'll write you a check for two dollars.

NOLA
You're just jealous.

NICK
Hardly. You're not that good.

NOLA
Yes I am.

NICK
No one likes a bragger.

NOLA
Or a thief.

NICK
Fuck off ... So you know about my deal with Harry.
Lots of people have deals with Harry.

NOLA
I'm not finished.

NICK
The suspense is killing me.

NOLA
I can sue you.

NICK
For what?

NOLA
Plagiarism. You stole it from me.

NICK
You'll need proof.

NOLA
I have proof.

NICK
Like what?

NOLA
I can't tell you that. It's confidential.

NICK
You're bluffing. You don't have any proof.

NOLA
I'm really not.

NICK
You came here to muscle me. You want me to confess.

NOLA
If you have something to confess, I won't stop you.

NICK
You sound fairly convinced.

NOLA
I am.

NICK
If you had the proof you would have sued me already.
That's why you're here. You need me.

NOLA
I don't need you for anything...

NICK
You weren't upstairs looking for me. You were hoping
I would be out for a long time so you could look
around my study.

NOLA
I just came here to talk.

NICK
I don't believe you.

NOLA
That's not my problem.

NICK
You really want to go up against me in court? I'm a well-known writer -

NOLA
You're not that well-known.

NICK
I'm sorry. I'm Nick Walters. Crime novelist. Who the fuck are you? An amateur with some pathetic short stories on cocktail napkins.

NOLA
You have a past.

NICK
We all have pasts.

NOLA
Not like yours.

NICK
No. Not everyone is as successful as I am when it comes to writing. Maybe you should spend less time devising these ridiculous schemes and more time writing, you'd be better at this.

NOLA
I don't have a record for stealing other people's work.

NICK
I don't have a record.

NOLA
Five years earlier you were sued...

NICK
... I'm not the first writer to be sued.

NOLA
... Are many sued for plagiarism?

NICK
Let me guess. Harry told you.

NOLA
No. I found out on my own. You must have paid a lot of money to keep that story buried in the press.

NICK
It wasn't a popular story because it wasn't true. I didn't steal.

NOLA
True or not, someone of your calibre would definitely attract media attention for a story like that. I

(MORE)

NOLA (cont'd)
thought at first the story was hidden because you had a lot of friends in the press, but I know you don't have many friends.

NICK
So Nancy Fucking Drew, what's your point?

NOLA
That's why it had been five years. You couldn't write because no one wanted you.

NICK
I was taking a break... It had nothing to do with ... besides I wasn't convicted. It didn't even go to court.

NOLA
Because you settled.

NICK
That doesn't make me guilty.

NOLA
It doesn't make you innocent.

NICK
That was a whole ... misunderstanding. I wanted to go to court. I wanted to fight it. But my lawyers ... they thought it would be better to avoid all the media.

NOLA
It still fucked you over, didn't it?

NICK
I was taking time off from writing. Every writer does it from time to time.

NOLA
Not five years. It must have been hard, seeing others get work while you were drinking alone.

NICK
Talk to Harry. He'll tell you the truth.

NOLA
I did -

NICK
- He knows I was innocent.

NOLA
Actually he said you were guilty.

NICK
... He wouldn't say that.

NOLA
He said you were jealous of the other writer.

NICK
You're just fucking with me.

NOLA
I'm not. I wish I could think of something so great but it's the truth. Harry knows you were guilty as fuck.

NICK
No that's not right ... I'm innocent...

NOLA
He couldn't wait to tell me. I asked him in passing about you and that's the first thing he told me.

NICK
Why would he publish my book if I was guilty?

NOLA
Because he's an idiot like you.

NICK
Hey just because you blow the guy every now and then doesn't mean you have power or anything over me.

NOLA
No. I have power over you and Harry. Right after you tell him that I wrote the book, I can blackmail him for more money.

NICK
You think you have an insider's view, but you don't. I have connections.

NOLA
You don't have half the connections you think you have. You barely have Harry Brown.

NICK
Fuck Harry.

NOLA
I did that already.

NICK
I can go somewhere else. He's not the only one interested.

NOLA
Face it. You're past your prime. No one wants you.

NICK
You're just an opportunistic slut.

NOLA
I prefer the term creative problem solver.

NICK
Fucking isn't creative. You might tell yourself that at night, but it's not.

NOLA
Not the way you do it.

NICK
So you know about my past, you know about my future. What do we do now?

NOLA
You put my name back on the cover, and give me part of that advance and any additional financial rewards you receive.

NICK
If I don't?

NOLA
Then I'll be really sad. And I'll take you to court and sue you.

NICK
You don't want to do that. Court's boring.

NOLA
I like my odds.

NICK
You think you'd win?

NOLA
I only play games if I know I'm going to win.

NICK
Even if I call the police and tell them you broke into my house?

NOLA
I used the spare key.

NICK
Right. The spare key. Except ...

Nick removes two identical keys from under the wet bar.

NICK
I didn't place the spare outside. After you left I removed it. Which means you must have made a copy while you were with me.

NOLA
So change your locks. And your alarm code. For a crime novelist you're really shitty at all this.

NICK
It's still breaking and entering.

NOLA
I didn't break anything.
Nick throws his whiskey glass on the floor.

NICK
It's not too late to start.

NOLA
What are you doing?

NICK
Creating a scene. If you didn't break anything then someone has to.
Nick throws a lamp on the floor.

NOLA
This doesn't prove I broke in.

NICK
You're in my house. Uninvited. I don't like uninvited guests.

NOLA
Then change your locks.
Nick grabs her arm.

NICK
I don't know who are.

NOLA
Let go of me.

NICK
You're just some crazy woman who broke into my apartment.

NOLA
You're hurting my arm.

NICK
Get out of my home.
Nola hits Nick in the face. He laughs.

NICK
You've got quite the arm on you.

NOLA

You're fucking insane.

NICK

I thought you would hit me, but I wasn't expecting it to be that rough.

NOLA

I was defending myself. You were going to hurt me.

NICK

Don't worry. You'll probably get off easy. Unless you have a criminal record.

Nick picks up his phone.

NOLA

I'm not the criminal here.

NICK

I really couldn't have planned this any better. You see, I left the alarm code the same because I thought you might come back.

NOLA

Then what about the spare key?

NICK

That was clever to make a copy. I just thought you'd break a window, but it never occurred to me that you'd make a spare.

Nick stars dialing.

NOLA

What are doing?

NICK

I think I have all the proof I need in order to call the police on you. Of course, this little call might put a slight hiccup in your lawsuit with me. But you would get a lot of media attention. Everyone would know your name.

NOLA

No. You can't. Then you'd be telling someone I'm here.

NICK

Like I said, the rules are bullshit. And if I don't have any record that you worked here, then how would I know you?

NOLA

We've met before. At the restaurant. I was your waitress.

NICK
Ah yes. I could say you were stalking me ever since that night. That's a good motive.

Nola tries to grab the phone.

NOLA
You bastard.

NICK
Nola you're in my way.

NOLA
Don't do this. Please don't do this.

NICK
You did this to yourself.

NOLA
They won't believe you.

NICK
It's my house not yours. I think that would be enough to get you of here.

NOLA
You don't want to call the police.

NICK
Nola just give up. You lost. (listening to phone) Goddamn automated message. Good thing this isn't a real emergency.

Nola crosses to the stairs.

NICK
Where are you going?

NOLA
I'm going upstairs.

NICK
Stay down here.

Nola starts to run up the stairs. Nick follows, reaching for her. She kicks him, knocking him to the ground and causing the phone to fall out of his hands. Nick gets up and follows Nola offstage. A fight is heard.

NOLA
Stop it.

NICK
You little bitch...

NOLA
Let go of me!

NICK
If you wish.

A loud crash is heard offstage. Nola's body falls to the landing on the stairs which is partially visible onstage.

NICK
Nola? ...

Nick picks up Nola's body. It's lifeless and limp. He touches her neck for a pulse.

NICK
Shit. Shit shit shit shit...

Nick runs onstage.

NICK
It was an accident. If she only would have gone back down the stairs.

A voice is heard coming from the other end of the phone. Into phone:

NICK
Yes? Hello? ... I'm sorry there's been an accident (a thought hit him)... it was a pocket dial. My phone accidentally dialed this number. I'm so, so sorry. Have a good evening.

Nick hangs up the phone and tosses it on the couch. He runs up to Nola's body and drags it onstage.

NICK
Downstairs. The basement. I do hope this time you stay put.

Lights down as Nick drags her body offstage through the kitchen.

ACT II

Nick is asleep on the couch. The bottle of whiskey is empty and laying on its side on the coffee table.

Sounds of someone walking upstairs. Nick wakes up.

NICK
Hello? Who's there?

Nick stumbles up. He notices Nola's coat is on the coat rack. He takes it off the rack and holds it.

Nola enters from the stairs, carrying a satchel. Her hair is up in a ponytail.

NOLA
Sorry to wake you. What are you doing with my coat?

Nick turns and sees Nola.

NOLA
You look like you've seen a ghost. Are you all right?

NICK
What are you doing here?

NOLA
I'm back. I told you I would come back.

NICK
No. That's impossible. Last night you were here -

NOLA
No I came back today.

NICK
You broke into my house.

NOLA
What? Are you still drunk?

NICK
The basement ... you were in the basement...

NOLA
Why would I be in the basement?

NICK
You fell. I couldn't risk ... that's where I put you ... with your coat ...

*Nick runs offstage through the kitchen. A sound of a door opening and Nick going down stairs.
Offstage:*

NICK
You're not down here.

NOLA
No. I'm up here.

Nick returns onstage.

NICK
I touched your neck.

NOLA
You said "put." Why would I have to be put in the basement?

NICK
There wasn't a pulse.

Nick touches Nola's neck.

NOLA
Stop it. You're freaking me out.

NICK
I need to know if you're alive.

NOLA
Of course I'm alive. I'm standing right here.

NICK
But that's impossible!

NOLA
Why is it impossible?

NICK
Because last night you died.

NOLA
What?

NICK
I swear to god it was an accident.

NOLA
Hold on. You think I died last night?

NICK
Yes. You fell down the stairs.

NOLA
This is crazy. I thought I could leave you for three weeks and maybe you'd be better ...

NICK
You were here. You had to be here.

NOLA
What happened to your head?

NICK
What?

NOLA
Your head...

Nola touches the bruise on Nick's head. Nick shrugs away.

NICK
You hit me last night.

NOLA
I couldn't have hit you if I wasn't here.

NICK
You were here.

NOLA
You probably fell down. That looks nasty. Might have even given you a concussion.

NICK
You were here and you hit me.

NOLA
Here sit down. Let me get you something to drink other than whiskey. And an aspirin.

Nola exits offstage to the kitchen. She returns with a glass of water. She hands the glass to Nick and picks up the whiskey bottle.

NOLA
Did you drink this entire thing yourself?

NICK
No. You had some.

NOLA
I don't drink whiskey.

NICK
Last night you did.

NOLA
Last night I was driving back from my three week vacation. I couldn't have been here.

NICK
Prove it. Prove to me that you weren't here ... that I imagined everything that happened.

NOLA
I can't prove it. Not right now at least. I can come home later and get some receipts maybe. Will that work?

NICK
Later? Why not now? I think you should go now.

NOLA
No. I'm staying here until you stop talking like some fucking psycho. For now you'll just have to trust me.

NICK
How did you get into the apartment this morning?

NOLA
I used the spare key.

NICK
You're lying.

*Nick crosses to the wet bar and opens a drawer.
He pulls out one key.*

NICK
I moved the spare inside.

NOLA
No I moved it inside this morning.

NICK
You have a copy.

NOLA
I don't have a copy.

NICK
You made a copy. I put the copy in here last night.

NOLA
Why would I need a copy if you have a spare?

NICK
Where is the copy?

NOLA
There isn't a copy.

NICK
You used the key to enter my house so you could gather evidence.

NOLA
Evidence?

NICK
For your case. You're suing me for plagiarism. Did you hide it?

Nick takes out her coat and looks through the pockets.

NOLA

I'm not suing you.

NICK

Where's the key?

NOLA

I may have helped you with the book, listened to some ideas here and there, but I didn't write it. You wrote it.

NICK

Did Harry put you up to this?

NOLA

Who's Harry?

NICK

Harry Brown. My publisher. You know him.

NOLA

Why would I know him?

NICK

You know him.

NOLA

I don't think so.

NICK

Last night you said you were seeing him.

NOLA

I didn't say that because I wasn't here.

NICK

You said you were sleeping with him.

NOLA

I've never met Henry -

NICK

Harry.

NOLA

Whatever his name is, I've never seen him before in my life.

NICK

I wouldn't just make this up.

NOLA

Actually I think you would.

NICK
I'm not crazy.

NOLA
You think that last night I died and you put my body
in the basement.

NICK
Yes.

NOLA
Well it does sounds familiar.

NICK
Because it happened.

NOLA
Because you wrote it.

*Nola opens her satchel and pulls out a
manuscript. She flips to a section.*

NOLA
It's in your book. (reading) "William disposed of the
woman's body the best way he knew how. He had an old
cellar. In this cellar he had a deep freezer. Deep
enough to hold her body until he could think of a new
place, a better place to put her." See?

Nola hands the manuscript to Nick.

NICK
So last night...

NOLA
What you think happened last night was just a bad
dream.

NICK
I could have sworn you were here last night.

NICK
(pause) This manuscript...

NOLA
Keep it. Those are my notes, although feel free to
take them as you will. Oh and thanks for naming the
victim after me. That probably didn't help your
little nightmare.

NICK
I'll change it to something different.

NOLA
Thanks. I'd appreciate that.

NICK
I gave you this to read?

NOLA
Yes. You wanted my opinion on some things. You gave it to me before I left.

NICK
I don't let anyone see my manuscripts.

NOLA
I'm not just anyone.

Nola brushes Nick's hair off his forehead and kisses him.

NICK
I'm sorry.

NOLA
I know. Just promise me you'll quit drinking.

NICK
Don't worry. I think it be a long time before I drink that much again.

NOLA
I think we both need some coffee.

NICK
Yes. Coffee would be good.

Nola exits to the kitchen.

NOLA (O.S.)
I can't believe you put my body in the basement.

NICK
It was just a dream.

NOLA (O.S.)
Still, the basement? I would have thought you had more respect for me.

NICK
Next time I'll think of something better

NOLA (O.S.)
Let's hope there's not a next time.

Nola re-enters.
You're out of milk.

NICK
Didn't you tell me that already?

NOLA
No. Look I'm going to go out and get some.

NICK
You don't drink milk.

NOLA
No. But I use it in my coffee.

NICK
Just drink it without.

NOLA
No. I can't. I'll be right back.

Nola collects her purse. She puts on her jacket.

NICK
Hey wait.

Nick gets up and crosses to her.

NICK
Are you happy with us?

NOLA
Sure.

NICK
It's unconventional I know.

NOLA
I don't mind it.

NICK
Most women wouldn't put up with it.

NOLA
I'm not most women.

NICK
I guess you're not.

Nick leans in and kisses Nola. Nick takes Nola's arm by the wrist.

NOLA
Ow.

Nola pulls away from Nick.

NICK
What?

NOLA
Nothing. Don't worry about it.

NICK
Let me see.

NOLA
No. It's fine. I'm going to go get that milk...

NICK
If it's nothing then let me see it.

NOLA
I'll show it to you when I get back.

NICK
You can show it to me now.

NOLA
Nick I'll be right back.

Nola turns to leave. Nick grabs her arm and pulls up her sleeve, revealing a bruise from when he grabbed her last night.

NICK
How did you get this?

NOLA
Would you please let go of me?

NICK
Last night in my dream I grabbed you by the arm and hurt you.

NOLA
I wasn't here last night.

NICK
A claim you can't prove.

NOLA
I can explain...

Nick lets go of her arm.

NICK
I thought I was going mad.

NOLA
You are going mad.

NICK
I cared for you.

NOLA
You thought that I died and then put my body in the basement. Doesn't sound very caring to me.

NICK
You were dead. I checked your pulse.

NOLA
Obviously you were mistaken since I'm standing right here.

NICK
Is this part of your act? To catch me?

NOLA
You are always paranoid someone's out to get you. That's why you have those rules.

NICK
You still followed them.

NOLA
I followed them to get close to you.

NICK
You're admitting then that you used me to get to my book.

NOLA
No. I used you to get your connections. After all, you weren't using any of them. Nobody wanted to work with you after that scandal.

NICK
You're a nobody. I made you who you are.

NOLA
I'm not some character that you created. You didn't make me. Face it - you're a has been writer who drinks too much and has not grip on reality.

NICK
I know exactly what's happening ... You're trying to trick me.

NOLA
That's the paranoia.

NICK
You weren't coming back, were you?

NOLA
I don't understand. I came back.

NICK
Today. You weren't going to get milk. You were going to Harry.

NOLA
I don't know Harry.

NICK
You took the manuscript, scribbled some notes in the margins, and were going to use it to sue me.

NOLA
I can't take it to someone I don't know.

NICK
You're fucking know him and you know it. It's all part of your plan to destroy me.

NOLA
Why would I destroy you? From the looks of things you're doing a fine job of that yourself.

NICK
I'm not crazy. I might be a drunk, but I know I'm not crazy.

NOLA
I don't think you do.

Nola collects the rest of her things to go.

NICK
You can't leave.

NOLA
What are you going to do? Throw me down the stairs and hide my body in the basement?

NICK
I'm not done talking to you.

NOLA
Well I'm done talking to you. I can't believe I've been putting up with this for so long. I don't want to see you again.

NICK
Where did you put the key? The one you made?

NOLA
You need some time alone. Away from me.

NICK
You kept it, didn't you?

NOLA
You need help. Professional help.

NICK
So you could break in again when I'm not here.

Nick grabs Nola's satchel. She struggles with him but he pushes her away. He then opens it, tossing everything out. He's on the floor, searching though the items.

NOLA
You asshole.

NICK
It's not here.

NOLA
Give that stuff back to me!

*Nola tries to collect her things again. Nick
finds a key.*

NICK
What is this?

NOLA
I don't know. It's probably an old key. What could
you want with it?

NICK
You thought you could hide this from me?

NOLA
I'm not hiding anything!

NICK
The necklace. Last night you were wearing a necklace.
One with your name on it. You said Harry gave it to
you.

NOLA
I don't know Harry, I don't have a necklace.

NICK
In my dream you were wearing it. Now how could I my
dream be so specific that I would know you had a
necklace like this?

NOLA
Maybe you saw the necklace in a shop somewhere. Then
your subconscious used it to create an image of me.

NICK
You're leaving because I caught you.

NOLA
Goodbye Nick.

Nola tries to leave. Nick grabs her arm.

NICK
No. I don't think so.

NOLA
Please let go of my arm.

NICK
I don't know anything about you.

NOLA
You never asked.

NICK
Where are you from?

NOLA
Can you stop? My arm...

NICK
I can't. If we were together for a year don't you think it's funny I don't know anything about you?

NOLA
I thought that's what you wanted. You said all that extra stuff was boring.

NICK
Why are you doing this?

NOLA
I'm not doing anything.

NICK
You are. You're not playing fair.

NOLA
This isn't a game. You're sick. You need ...

NICK
I'm not sick. Don't say that.

NOLA
I thought you would get better. I wanted you to get better.

NICK
I had such high hopes for you ...

NOLA
I don't think you can get better.

NICK
... For us.

NOLA
I don't want to see you ever again.

NICK
Did you tell anyone?

NOLA
Tell anyone what?

NICK
That you know me?

NOLA
No. I never told.

NICK
Good.

NOLA
... I'm going to leave you.

NICK
You think you can just leave?

NOLA
You can't even kill me in your dreams. Of course I
can leave.

*Nola collects her things and starts to exit
through the kitchen.*

NICK
Wait. One last thing.

Nick exits offstage.

NICK (O.S.)
What about last night? Does anyone know where you
were last night?

NOLA (O.S.)
... Why?

NICK
Just tell me. Just tell me that and you'll never have
to see me again.

NOLA
You were the only one that knew I was here.

NICK
I'm so glad you said that.

*A loud sound offstage, as if someone threw
another person against a wall.*

NOLA
Stop it Nick.

NICK
I don't think I can let you leave. You'll tell
everyone about what happened. Which we all know will
be a lie. I can't trust you out there.

NOLA
You can. I won't tell. I promise.

NICK
I don't believe you.

More sounds of a struggle.

NICK
You're not going anywhere.

NOLA
I'll scream.

NICK
Promise?

NOLA
Help --

Nola starts to scream, but is muffled. Sounds of her choking, gasping for air.

After a few moments the sounds stop.

Nick enters the living room. He takes the whiskey bottle and tries to pour some into his glass. He realizes it's empty and places it back on the wet bar. He realizes all he has are empty bottles. He takes the trash bin and starts to throw them away. He sees the manuscript with her notes on it. He takes out the empty bottles and places them on the wet bar. He then takes the manuscript and lights it on fire. After it's been on fire for a few moments he places it in the bin.

ACT III

The light comes on in Nick's kitchen. Voices are heard offstage.

NICK (OFFSTAGE)

Welcome to my humble abode.

CHRISTI (OFFSTAGE)

This is a nice kitchen. And this door?

NICK (OFFSTAGE)

The basement, but don't worry about it. It's gross and floods when it rains.

Nick appears in the living room. He is well-dressed and very confident. He appears slightly drunk. He turns on the light. There are a couple of stacks of books in his apartment. They say "Harry Brown Publishing" on the side.

He is joined by a woman, early 20s. She wears glasses and has her blond hair pulled back into a ponytail. She appears to be wearing a generic white shirt and black skirt waitress outfit. This is CHRISTI.

NICK

Just a moment while I reset this.

Nick goes to the wall alarm system and sets it.

CHRISTI

What is that?

NICK

A security alarm. I just need to reset it since we're in here.

Nick finishes with the alarm.

NICK

I apologize for the boxes.

CHRISTI

Not a problem.

NICK

My publisher sent them over this morning and I haven't had a chance to move them.

CHRISTI

Is this your new book?

NICK

Right off the presses.

CHRISTI

I've been wanting to read it.

NICK

Do you have a copy?

CHRISTI

Not yet.

Nick opens a box and tosses her a copy.

NICK

Now you do.

CHRISTI

No... I can't just take it from you. Here let me get you some money...

NICK

No. I can't take that. Consider it a gift.

CHRISTI

Thanks. This is great. I've heard so much about this already. People are already saying it's a success.

NICK

Yes. I mean success has never been something that really motivated me. Some people are out to write for the reviews or the money. I just write because I have stories to tell.

CHRISTI

That's great.

NICK

Enough shop talk. Let me get that coat of yours and you take a seat.

CHRISTI

I don't know if I should.

NICK

Why not? I did bring home a bottle of wine for us to share.

CHRISTI

I don't usually do this, just so you know.

NICK

Do what?

CHRISTI

Go back to a stranger's house after I just met him.

NICK

Strange?

CHRISTI

I mean new. I don't know you.

NICK

You said you've read all my books.

CHRISTI

I know your books.

NICK

If you know my books then you know me.

CHRISTI

You don't know me.

NICK

That's why I think you should stay and have some wine. Besides you owe me for the book.

CHRISTI

I thought you said this was a gift.

NICK

With strings attached. I promise tonight we're just two people talking and sharing some wine. You don't want to let me drink alone, do you?

CHRISTI

I guess I can have a glass.

NICK

That's settled. Now you sit down and tell me about yourself.

Christi sits down on the couch as Nick pours them wine from the wet bar.

CHRISTI

There's not much to know.

NICK

Nonsense. How did you get started at the restaurant?

CHRISTI

Ugh that's the last thing I want to talk about.

NICK

Why not? It's a good joint. I go there all the time.

CHRISTI

I hate working as a waitress.

NICK

So what would you want to do?

Nick returns with the glasses and they toast.

CHRISTI

I don't know.

NICK

Come on. Everyone has some idea of what they want to do.

CHRISTI

I can't say it. You'll think it's ... No I can't.

NICK

What? It can't be that embarrassing.

CHRISTI

It is. Just switch subjects.

NICK

No. Now I have to know. Come on. Trust me.

CHRISTI

... A writer. I always wanted to be a writer.

NICK

Why is that embarrassing?

CHRISTI

Because you're you and I'm ... a waitress. It would be like telling Picasso I want to paint and so far the only work I've done are finger paintings.

NICK

Not everyone liked Picasso.

CHRISTI

Everyone likes you.

NICK

Everyone?

CHRISTI

I like you.

NICK

How do you like the wine?

CHRISTI

It's good.

NICK

I don't usually drink wine, but so far this is a good bottle.

CHRISTI

I mean, I know I'm not like the next Shakespeare or anything. I just always enjoyed writing. You probably don't want to hear this.

NICK

No. I do. I'm always fascinated by those that want to do something creative.

CHRISTI

I've never really written anything. Just a few short stories, some poetry. Nothing that's been published. I just feel like I have all this potential, you know, just waiting to burst out.

NICK

I could help you if you want.

CHRISTI

What do you mean?

NICK

I have connections. I can show your things around to some people I know.

CHRISTI

Really? That would be great.

NICK

I'm not promising anything.

CHRISTI

No, no. I understand.

NICK

I knew when I saw you tonight that you were a writer. I could tell by the way you hold yourself, the way you took my order. That's why I invited you back here, to my house. I knew you could help me.

CHRISTI

Help you with what exactly?

NICK

I'll tell you what, exactly.

Nick takes a small key and unlocks a drawer in the wet bar. He pulls out a manuscript.

NICK

This is the new novel I'm currently writing. A work in progress as they say.

CHRISTI

What's it about?

NICK

Without giving too much away, it's about this woman. She's trying to be a journalist. She's about your age actually. She's one of those ambitious types - really out to have a career. Will do anything to get a leg up. Blackmail, bribery, sex. She thinks she's found

(MORE)

NICK (cont'd)
the story about this corrupt politician that will make her career. The problem is this other journalist, a more well-known and established man has already started researching it. So she starts to get close to him to try to steal the story.

CHRISTI
What do you need my help with?

NICK
I want to get your perspective on some troubling parts. I want to make sure she's a believable character.

CHRISTI
Sure, sure...

NICK
So if you could just read some her dialogue for me.

Nick hands Christi the manuscript.

CHRISTI
Nola ... this is the woman?

NICK
Yes. This scene she's meeting the male journalist. I'll be him. His name is Joe.

CHRISTI
"Nola enters the room."

NICK
No, no. You need to enter.

CHRISTI
You want me to get up?

NICK
Yes, yes. And can I do fix something real quick?

Nick takes Christi's hair out of her pony tail and lets it fall to her shoulders.

NICK
There, that's better. Have you ever thought of changing your hair colour? A brunette maybe.

CHRISTI
No.

NICK
Because I think you'd look great as brunette. But that's just me. Okay now go to the kitchen and enter.

CHRISTI

This feels silly.

NICK

I know, but it will really be a lot of help to me if you do this, okay?

CHRISTI

Okay...

Christi exits and goes to the kitchen. She re-enters.

CHRISTI

"Hello Joe."

NICK

"How did you get in?"

CHRISTI

"I used the spare."

NICK

"I thought I had moved the spare inside."

CHRISTI

"You did."

Christi looks at the pages.

NICK

You sit down now.

CHRISTI

Oh. Right.

Christi sits down next to Nick on the couch.

NICK

"It's been three weeks since you've been here."

CHRISTI

"We need to talk about my story."

NICK

"You're story? You mean my story. I'm writing it. I have connections with the politician."

CHRISTI

"Not like me."

NICK

"I knew it. I knew you were screwing him."

CHRISTI

"All my research, all my writing. All the credit going down the drain. My name deserves to be on that story."

NICK
"If you wanted your name on that story maybe you should have spent less time screwing the guy and more time writing."

CHRISTI
"You can't stand it that I'm more talented than you. I was getting better and that made you jealous. That's why you stole my story."

Nick gets up, still in character, and paces.

NICK
"I can't believe this is how you repay me for helping you out when you first started."

CHRISTI
"You didn't help me."

NICK
"I introduced you to people, I looked at your work."

CHRISTI
"You may have opened a couple of doors, but I was the one that walked through them alone."

NICK
"Why are you really here? You could have just called me if you wanted a story credit."

CHRISTI
"No. I couldn't. They've put people on me. I think they're listening to my calls."

NICK
"Shit you have to go then. If they find out you're here with me we'll both be ruined."

CHRISTI
"No. I can't go."

NICK
Do that one again.

CHRISTI
What?

Nick comes over to Christi and stands over her.

NICK
That line. I need to hear it again.

CHRISTI
... "No I can't go. You're the only one I can trust. You're the only one ..."

Christi stops reading.

(MORE)

CHRISTI (cont'd)
It says they kiss.

NICK
So?

CHRISTI
Do you want me to kiss you?

NICK
If you were Nola, would you kiss me? Do you think that's something she would do?

CHRISTI
I don't know.

Nick lowers down and kisses Christi.

NICK
"You're going to ruin me."

CHRISTI
Uh... (finds her lines) "Not if you don't ruin me first."

Christi leans in and kisses Nick. After a few moments he pulls away.

NICK
How did that feel? Was it believable?

CHRISTI
... Yeah. It was good.

NICK
Sorry about the kissing. But you know I really need to get into character when it comes to these things. You were great as Nola.

CHRISTI
No, no. I'm not an actress.

NICK
Quit selling yourself short. Much better at acting than waiting tables.

CHRISTI
Are you saying I'm a bad waitress?

NICK
No. I'm saying you're wasting your time there. More wine?

CHRISTI
I shouldn't. I'm a little tipsy already.

NICK

You've only had one glass. You call yourself a writer. You're going to need to build your alcohol tolerance.

Nick pours Christi more wine.

CHRISTI

What happens to Nola?

NICK

Nola becomes obsessive, to the point that she's psychotic. Loses all track of reality. She thinks that Joe is cooperating with the politician. In the end she vanishes.

CHRISTI

No one knows what happens to her?

NICK

I can't tell you all my tricks. Especially if you're going to be my assistant.

CHRISTI

Your what?

NICK

I need a new assistant, and I think you'd be perfect.

CHRISTI

You're just drunk. You're going to wake up tomorrow and realize you made a mistake.

NICK

I'll realize I made a mistake if you don't take me up on my offer. Come one. You don't want to spend the rest of your life being a waitress.

CHRISTI

... Okay. I'll do it.

NICK

Just a few little ground rules. You can't tell anyone - and I mean anyone about this. It's for both our protection. If the press finds out you're working for me, then they will hound you with details on new books and story lines, which won't make for a productive work environment. Don't call me or email me. Just show up at my house everyday at nine. And don't come to front door. Once again it could tip off the wrong people. I know it's a little unorthodox, but I have my reasons.

CHRISTI

I get it. You're a successful writer. If you want to keep your private life private you have to be a little extreme.

NICK

Most people would be bothered.

CHRISTI

I'm not most people ...

NICK

No you're not.

Nick raises his glass.

NICK

To my new assistant!

They toast, but Christi accidentally spills her drink on Nick.

CHRISTI

Oh my god - I can't believe I did that.

NICK

Don't worry about it.

CHRISTI

Some got on your couch...shit this is bad.

NICK

It's just wine. I'm going to go upstairs and change.

CHRISTI

I'm so sorry. I can clean this up.

NICK

Check the kitchen. There should be some supplies.

Nick exits offstage towards upstairs. Christi exits to the kitchen and brings back a wet cloth. She starts to clean up the wine on the couch.

CHRISTI

Hey do you have a washing machine I can throw this in when I'm done?

Christi stops cleaning for a moment. She notices something hiding in the seams.

NICK (OFFSTAGE)

I do, but don't worry about it.

CHRISTI

It's no trouble. Is it in the basement?

Christi looks at the item she's removed from the couch. It's Nola's necklace.

NICK

Don't go in the basement! Do you hear me?

Footsteps are heard running. Christi looks around for a place to put the necklace but realizes she's not wearing anything with pockets. Christi folds the necklace in the washcloth.

Nick re-appears with a clean shirt.

NICK

I hope that didn't sound harsh, but there isn't any light and I would hate for you to fall. Do you understand?

CHRISTI

Yes. I think I do.

NICK

Here let me take that (re: the wash cloth) from you.

CHRISTI

No I can take it back.

NICK

Give it to me. You're not a maid.

Nick takes the cloth and almost opens it.

CHRISTI

How do you come up with names for characters?

Nick looks at Christi and places the cloth on the coffee table.

NICK

They just come to me. Why?

CHRISTI

I was just thinking that Nola is an unusual name. How did you come up with it?

NICK

Honestly I can't remember. Sometimes a name just comes to you.

CHRISTI

You don't know anyone named Nola or anything.

NICK

No. I don't. Why do you ask?

CHRISTI

No reason. I'm always wondering how writers like you come up with names. It must be hard to find new ones after writing so many books.

NICK
It can be difficult, but I try not to name characters after actual living people that I know. Otherwise there could be a big mess.

CHRISTI
That's a good point.

Christi seems a little uneasy.

NICK
Are you feeling okay? You look a little ...

CHRISTI
It's all the wine. I should probably go.

NICK
You can't go home like this. And at this hour? It's not safe.

CHRISTI
I don't live far. Really it won't be a problem.

NICK
Christi I insist that you stay here. I swear I have the most honest intentions.

CHRISTI
I don't want to impose.

NICK
It's not imposing if I ask you to stay. Please stay.

CHRISTI
Do you have any aspirin?

NICK
Yes. First let me get you some water.

Nick exits to the kitchen and re-enters with a full glass of water.

NICK
Let me go get you some. I'll be right back.

Nick exits offstage towards the stairs. Christi waits until he has left so she can exit offstage.

Nick starts to head back down the stairs.

NICK
I just remembered I keep some in the kitchen. (He sees Christi) Where were you going?

CHRISTI

Nowhere. I was getting a refill on water.

NICK

Don't you need your glass?

Nick holds out her glass.

CHRISTI

Of course.

Christi goes to Nick to get the glass. She takes it but he takes her arm.

NICK

Where were you really going?

CHRISTI

Let go of my arm.

NICK

I will if you tell me where you were going.

CHRISTI

What's in the basement?

NICK

Nothing. It's just a basement.

CHRISTI

Why don't you want me to see it?

NICK

If you know what's good for you won't go down there.

CHRISTI

Is Nola down there?

NICK

Nola doesn't exist.

CHRISTI

I found her necklace.

NICK

You're lying.

CHRISTI

I knew you were a creep when you came in tonight. I humoured you with the wine and talking, but I kept thinking something was off about this guy.

Nick pushes her against the wet bar.

NICK

You're just like all the rest. Ready to jump in bed with the most successful man in the room. then you start in on all these stupid games. She was just like you. Tried to make my mind play tricks on me. Well I caught her. And now I caught you. I'm sad to say I don't think you'll be joining me as an assistant after all.

CHRISTI

You're right I won't.

Christi takes the empty wine bottle and smashes it on Nick's head. She grabs her things and runs out the kitchen.

The alarm goes off in Nick's house.

Nick takes the wet cloth on the coffee table and tries to clean off his head. He finds the necklace that Christi had hidden.

APPENDIX B

Author (Draft from Playwrights' Workshop)

By

Ashley Lara

Cast of Characters

<u>Nick:</u>	Late 30s/40s. Once a famous crime novelist, he hasn't released a book in years.
<u>Nola:</u>	Mid 20s. Former co-writer and assistant to Nick. Brunette.
<u>Woman:</u>	20s. A waitress from New Jersey who now lives in New York City.

Scene

All three acts take place in the living room of Nick's Brooklyn Townhouse.

Time

Act One is late evening. Act Two is early morning the day after Act One. Act Three is a few months after Act Two, also taking place in the early morning.

NOTE ON DIALOGUE: Any "/" marks indicate overlapping speech.

ACT I

The lights fade up as voices are heard.

NOLA (RECORDED)
I can't do this.

NICK (RECORDED)
Why not?

Lights up. The voices come from a tape playing in a stereo in the slightly dishevelled living room of a townhouse in Brooklyn. There are two exits to the room - a stairwell to the upstairs floor, and a door leading to the kitchen.

Some other features of the room include a leather couch, coffee table, and a wet bar with empty bottles of whiskey, and an expensive coffee machine.

The room is in the process of being renovated. There is a wall to ceiling bookshelf covered in thick plastic. The couch is also covered in a cloth due to the interior painting.

There are post-it notes scattered throughout the room.

NOLA (RECORDED)
I'm not a professional or anything.

NICK (RECORDED)
So?

NOLA (RECORDED)
I'm going to mess it up.

NICK enters the townhouse through the kitchen entry, carrying a brown liquor bag. His hair is slightly wet from the rain outside.

NICK (RECORDED)
No, no. Look I just need a woman's voice to read this dialogue for my book. I need to know if it sounds natural.

NOLA (RECORDED)
My point is, I'm not natural. Not at acting like a character.

NICK (RECORDED)
Then act like you.

He stops and takes a bottle of whiskey out of the bag.

NOLA (RECORDED)
All I have to do is read this? /

NICK
/ All I have to do is read this?

NICK (RECORDED)
Yes.

NOLA (RECORDED)
Okay. Sounds easy enough. / Just tell me when.

NICK
/ Just tell me when.

NICK (RECORDED)
When.

Nick pours himself a drink.

NOLA (RECORDED)
It's recording now?

NICK (RECORDED)
Yes.

NOLA (RECORDED)
I'm sorry. I didn't realize our work had begun.
(takes a breath) Okay -

Nick stops the tape, and rewinds.

NICK (RECORDED)
When.

NOLA (RECORDED)
It's recording now?

NICK (RECORDED)
Yes.

NOLA (RECORDED)
I'm sorry. I didn't realize our work had begun.
(takes a breath) Okay -

Nick stops the tape again, and rewinds.

NICK (RECORDED)
Yes.

NOLA (RECORDED)
I'm sorry. I didn't realize our work had begun.

Nick stops the tape. He finds an empty post-it.

NICK

(saying as he writes)
I didn't realize our work had begun.

He sticks the post-it to the wall.

*NOLA enters from the stairwell on stage right.
Nick's back is to her so she isn't noticed.
She's relatively dry compared to Nick. She's
carrying a satchel.*

Nick presses play and crosses to the couch.

NOLA (RECORDED)

Okay. / Where do you want me to start?

NICK

/ Where do you want me to start?

Nick plops down on the couch.

NICK (RECORDED)

Page twenty-seven. I will be the man at the bar, the
detective. You'll be the waitress. This is their
first meeting -

Nola stops the tape.

NICK

Dammit...

Nick sits up and sees Nola.

NOLA

Hello Nick.

NICK

Hi. (pause) You weren't here earlier.

NOLA

Neither were you. I had let myself in.

Nick runs over to an alarm panel on the wall.

NOLA

You don't have / to do that. / (pause) You didn't
change the code.

NICK

/ I do / or the police ... / It's off. How ...

NOLA

The code.

NICK

No. The door. How did you get through the door?

NOLA
The spare key outside.

NICK
I moved it.

NOLA
I know.

*Nola takes the key out of her pocket and places
it on the wet bar.*

NICK
I can't get anything past you.

NOLA
No you can't.

Nick takes Nola's hand.

NICK
Nola.

NOLA
Yes?

NICK
I assume you were careful.

NOLA
I was.

NICK
Tell me. Tell me how careful you were.

NOLA
No one saw me come in.

NICK
And?

NOLA
You're the only one that knows I'm here.

NICK
Good. Very good.

Nick leans in closer to Nola.

NICK
(pause)
You did something different with your hair.

NOLA
My hair?

NICK
... It's longer.

NOLA
No.

NICK
No? Something is different about it.

NOLA
It's down. I usually had it pulled back while I was here.

NICK
- I like it down. You should wear it like this more often.

Nick takes Nola's hair and starts to caress it.

NOLA
It's easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission.

NICK
Your point?

NOLA
I'm sorry, for showing up here like this.

NICK
I was surprised.

NOLA
Also ... You're out of milk.

NICK
Oh. (pause) I don't drink milk.

NOLA
Your coffee.

NICK
My coffee.

NOLA
You put milk in your coffee.

NICK
I do?

NOLA
Yes. I've seen you. The night we met. You asked for milk in your coffee.

NICK
I thought I was drinking something more ... alcoholic.

NOLA

Yes.

NICK

Not coffee.

NOLA

Right. You were. After though, you asked for coffee. With milk. Ever since that's how I've seen you take your coffee.

NICK

With milk.

NOLA

Mmm-hmm.

NICK

(pause)

I don't think I've put milk in my coffee in weeks.

NOLA

Three weeks.

NICK

It hasn't been three weeks.

NOLA

It has. Did you think it had been longer?

NICK

To tell you the truth, I haven't really noticed the amount of time that has passed. My assistant usually kept track of that for me.

NOLA

Assistant?

NICK

She left some time ago ... you know, I think it was three weeks ago when she left. She would do all the dull tasks like typing my pages and buying food. She was the one who bought milk. She must have been the only person drinking it.

NOLA

I think you're mistaken, Nick.

NICK

You drink milk.

NOLA

No I don't.

(pause) I was looking for wine.

NICK
Upstairs?

NOLA
No.

NICK
Because you won't find any wine upstairs.

NOLA
In the fridge. I used to keep the whites in there.
That's when I noticed you were out.

NICK
Of wine?

NOLA
Yes. And milk.

NICK
You did go upstairs.

NOLA
I was looking for you.

NICK
That's a good answer.

NOLA
That's why I said it.

NICK
Upstairs is against the rules. Being in my house when
I'm not here is against the rules. I don't like it
when my rules are broken.

NOLA
Would you rather I called first?

NICK
I would rather you didn't leave in the first place.
(pause) You want to stay.

NOLA
Tonight? I haven't made up mind.

NICK
That wasn't a question.

Nick takes off her coat.

NOLA
I came here to talk.

NICK
Talking is dull.

Nick puts her coat in the closet under the stairs.

NICK
You can talk when you're dead. Or is it ...

NOLA
It's sleep. You can sleep when you're dead.

Nick pours two glasses of whiskey.

NICK
That's even duller. You know I hate dull.

NOLA
No. I didn't know that.

NICK
I can't stand dull.

Nick holds a glass out for Nola.

NOLA
What is this?

NICK
It's not dull.

Nola smells it.

NOLA
I don't drink whiskey.

NICK
Tonight you'll make an exception.

Nick clinks his glass with Nola's.

NICK
Here's looking up your old address.

Nola waits for Nick to take a drink.

NICK
What are you doing?

NOLA
Waiting.

NICK
I know - why?

NOLA
When some guy / forces a drink on a woman / What are you then?

NICK
/ I'm not just some guy. / Forces? / For fuck's sake.

Nick takes Nola's glass and pours it into his.

NICK
I was trying to be nice. (pause) I missed you.

NOLA
You did?

NICK
Did you?

NOLA
Yes. No. Maybe.

NICK
Which one?

NOLA
All of them. Some days I did, some days I didn't, and some days ...

NICK
Maybe.

NOLA
Exactly.

NICK
I play the tape ... to see you.

NOLA
Hear me. You play the tape...

NICK
... To hear you. Yes. That's what I said.

Nola touches Nick's cheek.

NOLA
I'm sorry.

NICK
Just don't do it again.

NOLA
No. Not for leaving.

Nola takes a letter out of her pocket and hands it to Nick.

NOLA
This came for you.

NICK

When?

NOLA

Three weeks ago.

Nick paces, looking at the letter.

NICK

This is from Harry. My publisher. This is contract for the book.

NOLA

Yeah I saw.

NICK

You opened this?

NOLA

It's not against your rules to open the mail.

NICK

It's against the law. I figured it was implied.

NOLA

It looked like it was another ... rejection letter.

NICK

So that's why you opened it?

NOLA

You don't handle rejection that well. Remember last time?

NICK

No.

NOLA

The two week bender?

NICK

Oh yeah. (pause) No I don't remember.

NOLA

Where you ever tell me about the book deal?

NICK

Yes. But you left before -

NOLA

- You had plenty of time before I left to say something.

NICK

I was waiting for the right time.

NOLA
The right time / would have been when you signed /
the contract for the publishing deal.

NICK
/ Maybe over dinner. / I would have bought wine. /
You like white or red?

NOLA
You should have told me.

NICK
Maybe I wanted it to be a surprise.

NOLA
I don't like surprises.

NICK
Then maybe you shouldn't have opened the letter!

NOLA
You owe me.

Nick rises, takes out his wallet.

NICK
You're right.

NOLA
Thank you.

NICK
You deserve some compensation for your time.

NOLA
Compensation...

NICK
I didn't become an author for the money. No.

Nick hands Nola some cash.

NOLA
No. You don't -

NICK
- I became an author ... to create worlds.

NOLA
This isn't what I want.

NICK
Hmm?

NOLA
I don't want this.

NICK
Oh. How much do you want?

NOLA
No. I don't want money.

NICK
I don't understand.

NOLA
I want credit.

NICK
Credit for what?

NOLA
For writing the goddamn book!

*Nick is speechless. Nola pours herself a
whiskey.*

NICK
That's / You said / you don't like / oh.

NOLA
/ I know. / So? / I can change / my mind.

NICK
Why do you think...

NOLA
Not think. Know.

NICK
You didn't write it. You were -

NOLA
- If you say assistant...

NICK
The original idea was mine. I thought of it. I
created it.

NOLA
And I wrote it.

NICK
I'll admit you may have helped with some typing.

NOLA
I did more than type.

NICK
Anything you wrote, or think you wrote, was because
of me.

NOLA
What about the days you were drunk? Too drunk to get out of bed? What did you tell me to write on those days?

NICK
Nothing.

NOLA
Yet somehow you ended up with pages on those days. Pages I wrote.

NICK
That was never part of the plan.

NOLA
You told me that if I helped you, you would help me.

NICK
You were only supposed to write what I gave you.

NOLA
And you were supposed to introduce me to people.

NICK
I can't introduce you to people if you're not here.

NOLA
You were never going to do any of that. You knew I was improving, that I was getting better. You thought you could keep me for your own work. You used me.

NICK
And you didn't use me?

NOLA
What does that mean?

NICK
That night we met, you acted like you didn't know my name. But that was an act. You knew exactly who I was.

NOLA
I may have heard of you, yes.

NICK
You knew I had connections.

NOLA
You barely have the connections you think you have.

NICK
I have name recognition. I have written bestsellers. My first book was on the New York Times' list for twenty-five weeks.

NOLA
Not at number one.

NICK
Oh I'm sorry - how many have you had on that list?

NOLA
I haven't had any ... yet.

NICK
You were ambitious. Willing do anything to leave your waitress job. "A glass of wine on the house, Mr. Walters." "A creme brulee on the house, Mr. Walters." "A night alone with me. On. The. House, Mr. Walters."

NOLA
There are plenty of other people I could have slept with if wanted a boost.

NICK
Really?

NOLA
Yes!

NICK
Like who?

NOLA
Like ...
Nola stops herself.

NICK
Like. Who. Nola.

NOLA
I can't. I promised.

NICK
Promised?

NOLA
What were we talking about before?

NICK
What are you talking about now?

NOLA
Forget it.

NICK
No...

NOLA
I've said too much.

NICK
You haven't said anything ...

NOLA
Are you jealous?

NICK
Hardly.

NOLA
Then why do you want to know?

NICK
Because I do. Just tell me. Tell me Nola.

NOLA
Say I'm clever, and I'll maybe I'll tell you.

NICK
Nola what are you -

NOLA
- Say it Nick. Say it.

NICK
(pause)
You're clever.

NOLA
Good. Very good. (pause) Harry. Brown.

NICK
My publisher?

NOLA
I hope so or I fucked the wrong guy.

NICK
What?

NOLA
I. Fucked. Him.

NICK
You fucked him.

NOLA
I just said that.

NICK
You're lying. You didn't sleep with him.

NOLA
I did. On his mahogany desk from Brazil. Do you know that desk?

Nick turns pale.

NICK
Nola ...

NOLA
I think you do know the desk I'm talking about.

NICK
Does he -

NOLA
- I'd rather not discuss all of it -

NICK
No. What I was asking was does he know about us?

NOLA
He doesn't. I gave him a fake name.

NICK
Are you sure?

NOLA
Yes I'm sure.

NICK
What name did you give him?

NOLA
Why do you care?

NICK
I'm curious.

NOLA
I'm not telling you all the little details of my sordid affair.

NICK
Did he give you that?

Nick points to a diamond pendant necklace on Nola's neck.

NOLA
This?

NICK
It looks cheap.

NOLA
I was told it was a real diamond.

NICK
Let me rephrase: it makes you look cheap.

NOLA

Is that so?

Nola takes off the necklace.

NICK

That's just my opinion.

NOLA

You gave this to me you asshole.

Nola throws the necklace at Nick.

NOLA

You paranoid ... obsessive compulsive ... dick.

NICK

I never gave you a necklace.

NOLA

Yes you did. It was early on. Right after I left the restaurant to come work here. During one those reading sessions, like on the tape, you gave me a necklace because the scene referenced a necklace. I went to give it back when we were finished, but you said "No - you keep it." You don't remember that?

NICK

No.

NOLA

You charmed me. Seduced me into leaving my job to come here and work.

NICK

You can't prove it. At least not in a legal sense.

NOLA

I knew the alarm code, I knew about the spare key.

NICK

Codes and locks can change. (pause) You never signed any papers establishing you worked here.

NOLA

You told me that was for my protection. From the press or ... whatever.

NICK

It was. I can't have someone out blabbing about my next book.

NOLA

Those rules were your insurance police. They allowed you to get rid of me whenever you wanted.

NICK
I can't get rid of someone who technically never existed here in an official capacity.

NOLA
I existed. Maybe not on paper, but I existed.

NICK
If you existed it's because I let you into this world.

NOLA
You still paid me.

NICK
In cash, under the table. You could have been a maid.

NOLA
I wasn't a maid.

NICK
Or a prostitute. I probably should have asked. Are you a prostitute?

NOLA
Fuck you Nick.

NICK
Right now? Are you sure you're in the mood?

NOLA
You're not that funny.

NICK
Well you weren't that good in bed anyway.

NOLA
Neither were you.

NICK
I don't seem to remember any complaints.

NOLA
You don't remember a lot these days.

NICK
I remember what's important.

NOLA
Then you must remember that I had ideas.

NICK
Everyone has ideas.

NOLA
Not you. That's why you needed me. That's why you still need me.

NICK
I don't need you. I have a book deal.

NOLA
Yeah but you need a book. A finished book. You only sold it on a pitch and the few chapters that had been written.

NICK
I have ideas.

NOLA
Do you?

NICK
I do.

NOLA
Where?

NICK
Somewhere safe.

NOLA
It isn't on one of these post-its, is it?

Nola starts to look at the post-its. She takes one off the wall.

NOLA
"Another woman." Really? You wasted a post-it on that?

Nola rips the post-it in half.

NICK
Don't do that.

NOLA
"Add another staircase - could be ..." I can't even read the rest of this one.

Nola rips the note in half.

NICK
Could you fucking stop?

NOLA
"I didn't realize our work had begun." What a bunch of shit.

Nola starts to tear this post-it, but Nick grabs her hand.

NICK
I asked you nicely.

NOLA
I didn't hear a please.

NICK
Could you *please* fucking stop?

*Nola releases the post-it. Nick finds a place
for it on the wall.*

NOLA
You were speaking along with the tape when you came
back tonight.

NICK
No I wasn't.

NOLA
Yes you were.

NICK
I don't think so.

NOLA
You were speaking when I spoke, word for word.

NICK
Maybe I mumbled some of your lines.

NOLA
They weren't lines. Characters in books have lines.
Those were my thoughts, my own words. (pause) You
didn't even realize you were doing it.

NICK
What the fuck does it matter that I mumbled some
words that my subconscious remembered?

NOLA
You would have to listen to the tape a lot of times
for your subconscious to remember my parts. How
many times did you listen to it?

NICK
A few perhaps. I didn't keep a tally or anything.

NOLA
You lose track of time when you are isolated like
this.

NICK
Hey I am not isolated. I live in Brooklyn. I'm
surrounded by people.

NOLA
Tell me one of your neighbour's names then. Go on.
Tell me.

NICK

I could ask you the same.

NOLA

They are not my neighbours.

NICK

I could lie and you wouldn't know.

NOLA

You can't tell me because you don't know. Or maybe you knew once, but now you don't. That is why you live like this, removed from the world. To protect your mind. Because you can't forget what you don't know. But no writer worth reading can shut out the world. We use the world to create our fantasies. Then we put them on paper and call them stories. (pause) You need me because can't create without me. And it is making you sick. You are sick Nick. Sick in the head.

NICK

You want to know my neighbours' names?! They are Bob and Sue who the hell cares?! They don't matter. I know people, the important people that make things move and spin forward. Those other people, the neighbours and waitresses and everyone like them - they're just background. They are nothing! You are nothing! You're just a waitress who occasionally writes words.

NOLA

Thank you for saying that. It makes what I'm about to do a lot more easier.

Nola starts to collect her things.

NOLA

Earlier I said I didn't want your money. I think I've changed my mind.

NICK

Too bad. You can't have it.

NOLA

Even if I have an ending?

Nola produces a manuscript from her purse.

NICK

Where did you get this?

NOLA

I wrote it while I was gone.

NICK
I told you I have ending.

NOLA
You also have a deadline approaching.

NICK
And just how much do you want?

NOLA
Interested?

NICK
Realistically no. I'm just interested to see what you think is a fair deal.

NOLA
Fifty/fifty.

NICK
You want half of the money?

NOLA
No. I want all of the money. In exchange you get your entire book. That's fifty/fifty.

NICK
If I don't want to give you the money?

NOLA
Then I get the book. With my name on the cover.

NICK
Those are my two options?

NOLA
Well there's a third, but I don't think you're going to like it.

NICK
You just told me you want my money or you want my book. What else left is there to take?

NOLA
I could take it all.

NICK
And how the fuck could you do that?

NOLA
I could sue you for plagiarism.

NICK
Do you really want to go up against a writer like me in court?

NOLA
You mean a writer with a past.

NICK
We all have pasts.

NOLA
Not like yours.

NICK
The best-sellers, the critics' lists ...

NOLA
No. Not those.

NICK
That's my past.

NOLA
Only part of it.

NICK
... Go on then. Tell me what you think you know about my past.

NOLA
It's been five years since your last book was published.

NICK
I was taking time off.

NOLA
Five years since your last book isn't time off. It's unemployment.

NICK
I needed to clear my head. Get a new start.

NOLA
Or you were blacklisted from the industry due to the previous plagiarism lawsuit.

NICK
How did you find out about that?

NOLA
I've struck a nerve.

NICK
That wasn't ever supposed to see the light of day.

NOLA
You must have paid a lot of money to keep it buried. To keep it out of the press.

NICK
Which begs the question how did you find out?

NOLA
Harry may have mentioned a few things. The rest of the blanks I filled in on my own.

Nick pours another drink.

NICK
That case was a whole ... misunderstanding. Besides it didn't even go to court.

NOLA
Because you settled.

NICK
That doesn't mean I was guilty.

NOLA
It doesn't mean you were innocent.

NICK
Harry told me ... a settlement would be easier to control, publicity wise.

NOLA
Sure. After the settlement you have didn't have any publicity. At all. No one wanted you or your books.

NICK
I didn't steal!

NOLA
Right. They didn't have enough proof.

NICK
Neither do you.

NOLA
Well I can't prove everything. But you do have something that belongs to me.

NICK
What's that?

NOLA
The ending.

NICK
You just gave this to me tonight.

NOLA
Or did you take it out of my handbag while I was out of the room?

NICK
I could destroy it.

NOLA
Do you think that's the only copy you have?

*Nick starts to tear the place apart, searching
for the other copy of the manuscript.*

NICK
What'd you do?

NOLA
Not me. You.

NICK
You still need a full book.

NOLA
I have a full book. What do you think I was doing
upstairs?

Nola starts to collect her things.

NICK
You stole my manuscript?

NOLA
You stole it first.

*Nick finds his check book. He signs his name
and hands the check to her.*

NICK
That's all I have right now.

NOLA
You choose the book.

NICK
It's blank. Write a number. Take it to the bank
tomorrow.

NOLA
Tomorrow is too late.

NICK
Then take it to an ATM tonight. You can have it.

NOLA
How much?

NICK
Whatever you want. Take it. Take it Nola. Take it.

Nola takes the check.

NOLA
And the renovation?

NICK
I'll pause it.

NOLA
You don't get it. I want what you spent on the renovation.

NICK
That was my money.

NOLA
From the advance for the book.

NICK
That was mine.

NOLA
Do you want the book?

NICK
Yes.

NOLA
Then give me that money.

NICK
... Give me some time...

NOLA
Time? Time wasn't part of the deal.

NICK
I just need a little bit of ...

NOLA
Can you get me that money or not?!

NICK
... I can't.

NOLA
Then I can't give you the book.

Nola rips up the check and throws the pieces on the ground. Nick bends down to pick them up.

NOLA
Don't worry.

Nola bends down to Nick, and lifts up his chin.

NOLA
I will get your money in court. Along with the book.

Nola kisses Nick.

NOLA

Remember me Nick. Remember what I did to you.

*Nola rises, turning to walk away. As she turns,
Nick takes her hand.*

NICK

I shouldn't have let you leave.

NOLA

Stop the sweet guy act.

NICK

I'm being honest. I shouldn't have let you go.

Nick rises.

NICK

Just tell me ... did you really keep your word about us? That you kept our relationship a secret?

NOLA

No one knows about us.

NICK

Thank you.

Nick throws his whiskey glass on the floor.

NOLA

What the hell was that?

NICK

I threw my whiskey glass on the floor.

NOLA

Why?

NICK

You broke into my house.

NOLA

I used the key to get in, remember? I didn't break anything.

NICK

It's not too late to start.

*Nick takes Nola's whiskey glass and throws it at
a lamp, breaking both.*

NOLA

To start what?

NICK
Creating a scene! If I call the cops and tell them that someone broke in, I have to make it look convincing.

NOLA
You wouldn't call the cops.

NICK
Why not?

NOLA
Then someone else would know I'm here. That's breaking your rule.

NICK
Fuck the rules Nola. You're taking away everything I have.

NOLA
If you call the cops then others would know about our relationship.

NICK
There's no proof of a relationship. You're just some woman. A stranger.

NOLA
What's my motive then? Huh? Why would I break-in if I'm some stranger you've never met?

NICK
The restaurant. We met at the restaurant.

NOLA
Over a year ago.

NICK
And you've been stalking me ever since then. At first I thought you were a nice sweet girl. Then you broke into my house.

Nick smashes another glass.

NICK
You trashed the place because you're a crazy ...

Nick throws the plastic off the bookcase.

NICK
- delusional ...

Nick takes a book and rips out some of the pages.

NICK

- sick, twisted fan.

Nick throws some of the other books on the floor.

NOLA

This doesn't prove I broke in.

NICK

You're right. You said you used the spare key.

NOLA

The spare that you moved.

NICK

I did move it.

Nick pulls out two copies of the spare key from the wet bar - one is the copy that Nola made, the other is a copy that Nick moved inside.

NICK

I moved it inside. It was never outside. The last time it was outside ... was three weeks ago. Which means you must have made a copy before you left. You were plotting to come back while I wasn't here.

Nick grabs her arm.

NICK

Do you know what you're doing?

NOLA

Nick let go of my arm.

NICK

You're erasing everything I built.

NOLA

You brought this on yourself.

NICK

I'm a man with nothing left to lose. That makes me powerful. More powerful than you.

NOLA

You're not so powerful that you can rewrite our past.

NICK

I can do whatever the fuck I want.

Nick now tightens his grip.

NOLA

You're hurting my arm.

NICK
You had so much potential. Why are you wasting it on these little games? Why didn't you trust me?

NOLA
Because you lied. You promised to help me. Instead you just kept me here for your own use.

NICK
Everything I did was for your own good.

NOLA
Nick let go of my arm or I will -

NICK
We could have toppled the world, Nola. We could have toppled the world.

Nola hits Nick in the face.

NOLA
You're insane.

Nola slaps him again.

NOLA
Fucking insane.

Nola tries to slap him again, but Nick stops her hand. He pushes her and she trips. As she falls her head hits the stereo, causing the tape to start playing again.

Nick stops cold and glares at Nola, who is lifeless on the ground.

NOLA (RECORDED)
Can I ask you something?

NICK (RECORDED)
Of course.

NOLA (RECORDED)
Is this scene based off how we met?

Nick touches her neck. He can't find a pulse.

NICK (RECORDED)
You weren't flirting with me when we first met.

NOLA (RECORDED)
... I thought it was obvious.

Nick looks at the stereo.

NICK (RECORDED)
So why didn't you say something?

NOLA (RECORDED)
What if I did?

*Nick takes the thick plastic that was covering
the bookshelf and wraps Nola's body.*

NICK (RECORDED)
It's the past. You can't change what happened.

NOLA (RECORDED)
Why not? No one else would know if we did. It would
be our little secret.

*Nick stops the tape. He pulls out the tape
ribbon, and tosses it in with Nola.*

Silence. Lights down.

ACT II

The lights come back up. Nick is asleep on the couch. The bottle of whiskey is empty and lying on its side on the coffee table.

Nick wakes up in a panic. His apartment is still a mess from the night before.

NICK

Nola ...

Nick stands up and looks around the room.

NICK

She was here. She was right there. Then after ... something happened after ... in the basement? No that's not right ... and the evidence. I must get rid of any evidence.

Nick stumbles over the glass on the floor. He opens the coat closet door. He pulls out a broom. Something deep in the closet catches his eye. He pulls out Nola's coat from the night before.

NICK

I forgot about you.

A door closes offstage from the direction of the kitchen.

Nola enters from the kitchen. She's carrying a satchel. Her hair is up in a ponytail. She stops, looks around the room.

NOLA

Nick?

Nick, startled, turns and faces Nola.

NOLA

What the hell happened in here?

NICK

Nola?

NOLA

This is a mess.

NICK

You're here.

NOLA

Yeah.

NICK
Your hair?

NOLA
Huh?

NICK
It's different.

NOLA
It's up.

NICK
Yes. Pulled up. Not down. I like it down.

NOLA
Right. Look are you going to tell me what happened in here or what?

NICK
You shouldn't be here.

NOLA
Jesus. You could have told me before I got all the way here.

NICK
I want you to stay. That wasn't a question.

NOLA
I didn't say it was.

NICK
No, no ... something isn't right.

NOLA
Shit. You're still drunk.

NICK
I'm not drunk.

Nick ruffles his hair, revealing a bruise on his head.

NOLA
Oh my god. Your head.

NICK
What?

NOLA
You have a big bruise on your head. You must have fallen or something.

Nola touches the bruise on Nick's head.

NICK
I didn't fall.

NOLA
That looks bad. You may have even had a concussion.
What did you do?

*Nola finds some ice left in an ice bucket on the
wet bar. She wraps it in a fabric sample left
out from the renovation.*

NICK
What did I do?! I didn't do this.

NOLA
Put this on it.

*Nick touches Nola's neck as she tries to put ice
on his bruise.*

NOLA
What are you doing?

NICK
Stand still. And don't talk.

*Nola is silent. Nick stops his hand when he
finds her pulse.*

NICK
How did you do it?

NOLA
Do what?

NICK
Come back to life.

Nick looks directly at Nola.

NOLA
Nick this isn't funny.

NICK
I'm not joking.

*Nola looks directly at Nick. He doesn't blink.
She drops the ice and backs away.*

NOLA
I don't like this behaviour.

NICK
You should have thought of that before last night.

NOLA
What do you mean last night?

NICK
You know what happened.

NOLA
Why would I know?

NICK
It's part of your act somehow. / Yeah. / You think I'm just a drunkard / and that you can fool me...

NOLA
My act? / What act? / I think you're drunk / I'm trying to help you.

NICK
So now you want to help me? Big change from last night. Showing up here, uninvited.

NOLA
I was here last night.

NICK
You were here last night Nola.

NOLA
No I wasn't. It was Sunday. You said you didn't need me.

NICK
When did I say that?

NOLA
Last week ... Thursday was it? Yeah. You said you wouldn't need me this weekend.

NICK
You weren't here last week. You left three weeks ago.

NOLA
I was here last week. I've been here for the past few weeks. Hell I've been here for the past few months.

NICK
And you were here last night because you broke into my house.

NOLA
You're mistaken. I wasn't -

NICK
- The code. You remembered the alarm code.

NOLA
That code...

NICK
I should have changed it.

NOLA
There is no code.

NICK
Of course there's a code! I know the code. I gave it to you.

NOLA
There was a code...

NICK
And I gave it to you. That's how you got in.

NOLA
There isn't a code because you deactivated the alarm service!

NICK
I did no such thing.

NOLA
You kept changing the code, and then forgetting that you changed it. You thought ...

NICK
I thought what?

NOLA
You thought the alarm company was changing the code without telling you. So you stopped the service.

Nick tries to activate the alarm. It won't start.

NICK
Come on. Start.

Frustrated, he starts to hit the alarm.

NICK
Start you piece of shit.

Nick hits the alarm harder, cutting his hand.

NOLA
Nick stop.

Nola runs over to try to stop Nick from destroying the alarm.

NICK
It has to work.

NOLA
You're hurting yourself.

Nick stops and looks at his hand, bloody from hitting the alarm.

Nola rips off part of the cloth covering the couch and wraps his hand.

NICK
It won't start.

NOLA
I told you it wouldn't.

NICK
I need it to start.

NOLA
You can call them later and re-activate it. If that's what you want.

NICK
It is.

NOLA
Then call them later. Here sit down. I'll make us some coffee. Although you're out of milk.

NICK
I know. You told me.

Nola leads him to the couch.

NOLA
Oh. Okay.

Nola crosses back to the coffee machine.

NOLA
Tell me more about last night.

NICK
Is this your plan? Getting me to say shit you already know?

NOLA
Fine. You found out Nick. You discovered my great master plan: repetition.

NICK
Did Harry put you up to this?

NOLA
Who's Harry?

NICK
Harry Brown. My publisher. You know him.

NOLA
I don't think so.

NICK
Last night you said you were seeing him.

NOLA
I didn't say that because I wasn't here.

NICK
You said you were sleeping with him.

NOLA
I've never met Henry -

NICK
Harry.

NOLA
Whatever his name is, I've never seen him before in my life.

NICK
You said you were doing more than seeing him.

NOLA
What does that mean?

NICK
You said you were fucking him.

NOLA
... I think the coffee's ready.

Nola hands Nick a cup of coffee.

NICK
Last night you said -

NOLA
- I heard you.

NICK
Why are you avoiding the subject?

NOLA
Nick just stop and listen to yourself.

NICK
You didn't want to talk about him that much last night either.

NOLA
I told you I don't know him.

NICK
We can talk about other subjects.

NOLA
Fine.

NICK
... How did you get into the house this morning?

NOLA
I used the spare key.

NICK
You're lying. I moved the spare key inside.

Nick crosses to the wet bar and opens a drawer.

NICK
Where is it?

Nola holds the key out to Nick.

NOLA
Things have been a little busy today with your mental breakdown and I haven't really had the chance to move it inside.

Nick takes the key.

NICK
I'll also need your copy.

NOLA
I don't have a copy.

NICK
You made a copy.

NOLA
Why would I need a copy if you have a spare?

NICK
So you can enter my house while I'm not here.

NOLA
Technically I could still use the spare.

NICK
Not if I move it and you don't know where.

NOLA
Forget about the keys - why would I be in your house if you're not here?

NICK
To gather proof.

NOLA
Proof for what?

NICK
For your case. You're suing me.

NOLA
I'm not suing you.

NICK
Yes, yes. Yes you are. You said so.

NOLA
No...

NICK
Last night. You entered my house, gathered all the evidence you need -

NOLA
- I wasn't here last night!

NICK
You tried to leave, but then ...

NOLA
Then?

NICK
... You fell. You weren't moving. You weren't breathing.

NOLA
What are you saying?

NICK
I checked for a pulse.

Nick touches Nola's neck.

NICK
Right there. Nothing.

NOLA
Oh my god.

NICK
I moved you into the basement.

NOLA
Stop. Stop it. You're freaking me out.

NICK
I couldn't risk leaving you up here.

NOLA
Nick would you please stop?

NICK
I figured I could put you in the basement until I knew what to do with you.

NOLA
JUST STOP IT! STOP IT!

NICK
I know what I saw last night!

NOLA
I wasn't here last night!

NICK
Then prove it. Prove to me you weren't here.

NOLA
I don't have to prove anything to you.

NICK
And why's that?

NOLA
Moving the body to the basement ... Doesn't it sound familiar to you?

NICK
It's familiar because it happened! I wouldn't just make this up.

NOLA
Actually I think you would.

Nola finds a book on the shelf. She flips through some pages and stops.

NOLA
(reading) "William disposed of the woman's body the best way he knew how. He had an old cellar. In this cellar he had a deep freezer. Deep enough to hold her body until he could think of a new place, a better place to put her."

Nola hands the book to Nick.

NOLA
You made it up because you wrote it.

NICK
So last night...?

NOLA
I don't know what happened, but I know I wasn't here.

NICK
It felt real.

NOLA
But it wasn't. I didn't die. I'm not in the basement.

NICK
It was all just a dream. A bad dream.

NOLA
A nightmare.

NICK
Nola I'm -

NOLA
Don't say sorry.

NICK
I don't know why -

NOLA
- You thought you killed me!

NICK
It was an accident.

NOLA
Oh yeah. That makes me feel better.

NICK
It wasn't real. You said it wasn't real. It can't be real. You're here.

Nick tries touches Nola's shoulder.

NOLA
No.

Nola swats his hand.

Nick tries to touch her again, but she turns around and slaps him so hard that he falls on the couch.

NOLA
Don't touch me!

NICK
I can understand that you're upset.

NOLA
Upset. UPSET! Fuck upset.

NICK
It didn't happen.

NOLA
You thought it did. Isn't that worse? That you thought it was real and you did nothing.

NICK
I don't know why I did. I'm a mess.

NOLA
I can't do this anymore.

NICK
... I'll quit drinking.

NOLA
You've said that before.

NICK
I did?

NOLA
You can't even remember conversations you've had when you were sober.

NICK
That was a joke.

NOLA
Was it?

NICK
(pause) I mean it. I'll quit. I'll remember it this time.

NOLA
I want to believe you, but I can't.

NICK
Yes you can. I know deep down that you can.

NOLA
Then let me rephrase: I don't want to.

NICK
I'm an ass. I'm a drunkard. I know that. I can change.

NOLA
Then change without me because this is where I leave you.

Nola collects her coat and satchel.

NOLA
I'll be needing my manuscript.

NICK
What manuscript?

NOLA
(sighs)
I gave you a manuscript a couple months ago. You said you would look over it and give me some notes. Did you even look at it?

NICK
... You didn't give me a manuscript.

NOLA
Dammit Nick. Don't do this.

NICK
I would remember a manuscript.

NOLA
That was the only copy I had.
Nola starts to look around the room for the manuscript.

NOLA
It wasn't even finished yet.

NICK
What was it about?

NOLA
If you don't remember me giving it to you, I doubt you would remember what it was about.
Nick starts to look around the room.

NICK
Was there a title?

NOLA
No. It was untitled.
Nola finds the letter from Harry Brown among some papers on the bookshelf.

NOLA
You have a publishing deal?

NICK
Huh? Oh yeah.

NOLA
When did you write a book?

NICK
I've been writing it for some time.

NOLA
It says here it's untitled.

NICK
Yeah, well, I'll think of a title. Titles always come later.

NOLA
... and unfinished. The remainder of the advance is due upon receipt of the final chapters.

NICK
It's a work in progress.

NOLA
How does it end?

NICK
I have ideas.

NOLA
Like all these post-its? Are they your big idea for the ending?

NICK
Some are, yes. Why are you acting strange?

NOLA
I find it a little strange you have book I didn't know about -

NICK
- You know about it. I wrote the pages by longhand and then you typed them.

NOLA
Those pages were full of incoherent, drunken babbling. I typed them up to humour you.

NICK
What are you implying?

NOLA
You gave my manuscript to this Harry guy and passed it off as your own.

NICK
I gave him my manuscript.

NOLA
Then where is it?

NICK
Somewhere safe.

NOLA
Show it to me. Show it to me Nick.

Nick walks in front of the couch and reaches for something underneath. He pulls out a manuscript.

Nola takes the manuscript out of his hands, flipping through the pages.

She stops, and looks at Nick.

NOLA
You bastard.

NICK
Nola...

Nola yells in his face.

NOLA
You cheating son of a bitch. This was everything I had, and you took it.

NICK
This is my book.

NOLA
Prove it.

NICK
I had the manuscript.

NOLA
I want the handwritten pages.

NICK
This is absurd.

NOLA
Where are they?

NICK
I don't know. I think I destroyed them.

NOLA
Oh. How convenient. I think it's shit.

NICK
It's not shit. It's the truth.

NOLA
Are they upstairs?

NICK
I don't know.

NOLA
You're bad at lying. You used to be good, but now
you're just pathetic.

Nola turns to go upstairs.

NICK
Nola don't ...

Nick takes Nola's arm by the wrist.

NOLA
Ow.

*Nola tries to pull away from Nick, but Nick
doesn't let go.*

NICK
I barely touched you and you winced.

NOLA
It's nothing.

NICK
If it's nothing then let me see it.

NOLA
Let go of my arm so I can go upstairs.

NICK
I'll let you go after I see it.

*Nick grabs her arm and pulls up her sleeve,
revealing a bruise.*

NICK
How did you get this?

NOLA
Let go of me.

NICK
Or what? You'll hit me like last night.

NOLA
I wasn't here last night.

NICK
Then how did you get this bruise?

NOLA
I fell last week while running.

NICK

No. No. I gave it to you.

Nick lets go of her arm, tossing it back to her.

NOLA

When? Last night when I wasn't here?

NICK

Yes.

NOLA

I would have never let you touch me like that.

NICK

You're lying! It was last night!

NOLA

I'm not lying. Bruises can last longer than one day.

NICK

I thought I was going mad.

NOLA

You are going mad. You thought I was dead.

NICK

You were dead.

NOLA

Then how come I'm standing right here?

NICK

You tricked me. You were just acting dead.

NOLA

Earlier you said that you checked my pulse last night.

NICK

I was drunk! Do you think after a bottle of whiskey I'm going to pick up a pulse?

NOLA

This was a mistake coming back here. I should left you here for good.

Nola picks up the manuscript.

NICK

You can't take the manuscript.

NOLA

If you want a manuscript then type it up yourself you lazy asshole.

NICK
You're a nobody. I made you who you are.

NOLA
You didn't make me. I'm not some character you can create and then ... kill off. I'm real.

Nola puts the manuscript in her satchel. Nick grabs the satchel.

NOLA
Stop it!

Nick empties out the contents. He finds two manuscripts.

NICK
What's this?

NOLA
Give it back.

NICK
... The final chapters.

NOLA
That's right.

NICK
You had this last night.

NOLA
Do you see the name of the author? It's me. This is mine. Not yours.

Nola picks up the rest of her things.

NICK
You could have written it off the pages I let you type up.

NOLA
I could have, but I didn't.

NICK
Why are you doing this?

NOLA
I'm not doing anything.

NICK
You are. You're not playing fair.

NOLA
This isn't a game. You're sick. You need ...

NICK
I'm not sick. Don't say that. Stop saying that.

NOLA
I thought you would get better. I wanted you to get better.

NICK
I had such high hopes for you ...

NOLA
I don't think you can get better.

NICK
... For us.

NOLA
Just let me go.

NICK
You want out because I caught you.

NOLA
I gave you everything I had and you ruined it!

NICK
No. ... Not everything.

NICK
Were you here last night?
Nola is silent.

NICK
Nola tell me if you were here last night!
Nola stops, and rises.

NOLA
No ... yes ... Maybe ...

NICK
Which is it?

NOLA
How does it feel to have someone fuck with your life?

NICK
Which is it? Yes or no!

NOLA
Which is it? It's fuck you. That's which it is.
Nola crosses to leave.

NICK
You can't leave. I'm not done talking to you.

NOLA
Well I'm done talking to you. You're crazy -

NICK
- I'm not crazy. I might be a drunk, but I know I'm not crazy.

NOLA
I don't think you do.

NICK
Did you tell anyone?

NOLA
Tell anyone what?

NICK
That you know me?

NOLA
No. Not yet. As soon as I leave here they'll know. Others will know about us. About you.

NICK
Good.

Nick takes a shard of broken glass and stabs Nola in the stomach.

NICK
(whispers to Nola)
This is everything.

Nick pulls back his hand, now covered in blood, and takes off Nola's satchel.

Nola is taken aback. There's a large amount of blood coming from her stomach. She falls down on the ground, coughing.

Nick crosses to the couch, sits down, and places the shard of glass on the coffee table. He rummages through the satchel as Nola drags herself towards the kitchen exit.

Nick finds the manuscripts. He places them in the drawer in the wet bar.

Nick picks up the shard on the coffee table. He crosses into the kitchen offstage. He then sharply pulls Nola the rest of the way into the kitchen offstage.

Nola screams.

Blackout.

ACT III

Lights up in Nick's living room. The chaos of the destruction has all disappeared. The painting drop cloths are removed. However, the walls are the same colour, and the furniture appears to be the same. The living room looks cleaned and organized.

It is morning. There's movement, sounds of glasses rattling in the kitchen offstage.

Nick stumbles into the living room. He stops and looks towards the kitchen.

NICK

You're still here.

A woman, 20s, appears in the doorway of the kitchen. She wears glasses and has her blond hair pulled back into a ponytail. She's wearing a man's button up shirt and boxers. She's carrying two coffee cups.

WOMAN

Of course. I can't leave until I get paid.

NICK

Excuse me?

WOMAN

I'm joking. I'm a waitress.

NICK

Waitress?

WOMAN

Remember? We met at the restaurant...

NICK

Oh...

WOMAN

Is that a disappointed "oh?" or ...

NICK

I'm not disappointed. Have we met before?

WOMAN

I've seen you in the restaurant, but we've never met.

NICK

I'm sorry. I'm a little foggy this morning.

WOMAN

You drank a lot.

NICK

That sounds like me.

WOMAN

And I drank a lot. You convinced me to come back here with you to Brooklyn where we ... You know ...

NICK

It's slowly coming back to me. Are you wearing my clothes?

WOMAN

Yeah. You want me to take them off?

NICK

No. You can keep them on. They look better on you than me. Although later, if they happen to come off I wouldn't be disappointed.

WOMAN

So there is a later for me?

NICK

I'm in no hurry.

WOMAN

It's just that most one night stands have an expiration date.

NICK

Oh now don't talk about break ups so soon after we just ...

WOMAN

Fucked?

NICK

You read my mind. What am I thinking now?

Nick crosses to her and leans into her.

WOMAN

You want to kiss me.

NICK

Yes, I do.

WOMAN

That wasn't a question.

NICK

Good.

Nick kisses the Woman.

NICK
I see you found my coffee cups.

WOMAN
I was going to make coffee until...

NICK
Until what?

WOMAN
You found me.

NICK
Well don't let me stop you.

WOMAN
I have a better idea.

NICK
Do you?

WOMAN
You make the coffee.

NICK
How is that better?

WOMAN
What kind of host would you be if your guest had to make the coffee?

NICK
(pause)
You couldn't figure out the machine.

WOMAN
Just make the coffee.

Woman hands him the coffee cups. She starts to look at some of the books on the bookshelves.

WOMAN
You like books?

NICK
I do. I especially like the business of books.

The Woman pulls a book off the shelf and looks at the cover, then looks at the back.

WOMAN
Holy shit. This is you.

The Woman crosses to Nick and holds the back flap of the book, which contains Nick's photo, next to Nick's face.

WOMAN
You're "THE" Nick Walters?

NICK
Guilty.

WOMAN
Oh my god. I thought that was just a pick-up line,
telling me you're like some famous writer. But you're
like the real deal. Back photo and everything.

NICK
You didn't come home with me just because I said I
was a writer?

WOMAN
No. The bottle of wine helped.

NICK
It always does.

WOMAN
Always?

NICK
Hmm?

WOMAN
You said always.

NICK
I did?

WOMAN
Do you do this often?

NICK
Make coffee for a woman?

WOMAN
Seduce your waitresses with a bottle of wine.

NICK
No. I don't. I have once before, but that didn't work
out.

WOMAN
Why not?

Nick steps in close to the Woman.

NICK
She didn't like whiskey.

WOMAN
She didn't?

NICK
Hated it.

The Woman steps in close to Nick.

WOMAN
You don't know if I like it.

NICK
Then I guess you'll have to stick around until I find out.

WOMAN
I guess so.

They passionately kiss. They start to make their way to the couch, still kissing. They are on the couch when the coffee machine beeps.

WOMAN
That's the coffee.

NICK
Forget the coffee.

WOMAN
Nick ...

NICK
You want the coffee now?

WOMAN
Yes please.

Nick huffs, rises, and crosses to the coffee machine. He pours two cups of coffee.

As he does this the Woman flips through the book.

NICK
How do you take it?

WOMAN
I usually take it with milk ...

NICK
Then you shall have it with milk.

WOMAN
You're out of milk.

NICK
What?

WOMAN

I looked for it earlier when I was going to try to make coffee.

NICK

That's right. You said that already.

WOMAN

Huh? I didn't say that.

NICK

Someone said it.

WOMAN

I'll just take it black.

NICK

(under his breath)
Yes. Yes you will.

WOMAN

So what's this book about?

NICK

What's the book about?

WOMAN

Yeah. I want to know.

NICK

I can't tell you that.

WOMAN

Why not?

Nick returns to the couch with the coffee.

NICK

Won't it take all the fun out of reading it? You do read books, don't you?

WOMAN

Yes. Except I don't have a copy.

NICK

Take that one.

WOMAN

No... I can't just take it from you.

NICK

Yes you can.

WOMAN

No...

NICK
I said you can have it.

WOMAN
I can't.

NICK
You can. Here. Take it. I insist.

WOMAN
Fine. If you insist.

NICK
Thank you.

WOMAN
... Let me get you some money...

NICK
No. I can't take that.

WOMAN
I would feel better / if I gave you / some money /
for the book.

NICK
/ Consider it a gift. / Then it / wouldn't be a gift.
/ Would you just take the book?

WOMAN
... Okay. I'll take it. No money.

NICK
That was easy.

WOMAN
You wanna sign it?

NICK
Later. Come here.

Nick and the Woman on the couch together.

WOMAN
I don't usually do this, just so you know.

NICK
Do what?

WOMAN
Go back to a stranger's house after I just met him.

NICK
Strange? What's so strange about me?

WOMAN

I don't know you. I just met you.

NICK

You know my name. You know my profession.

WOMAN

Your profession is writing books about murders and violent killings...

NICK

So you have read my books?

WOMAN

I may have read a couple ...

NICK

A couple?

WOMAN

I honestly didn't put two and two together until we came back here where I discovered who were while you were still asleep.

NICK

Is that right?

WOMAN

You have a whole fucking shelf dedicated to your books. It's hard to overlook.

NICK

But you didn't know last night?

WOMAN

Last night you were just a guy.

NICK

And now?

WOMAN

Now you're just a guy who writes books about ... serial killers and psychotic murderers.

NICK

That sounds like me.

WOMAN

That's not you. That's your characters.

NICK

All my characters are a version of me.

WOMAN

Yeah right. You live in a brownstone townhouse in Williamsburg. You have a fancy French coffee machine that I can't figure the fuck out of.

NICK
It's Italian.

WOMAN
Whatever. My point is you're hardly a criminal
mastermind.

NICK
We all have skeletons in our closets, I just happen
to make money off mine.

WOMAN
I've seen your closets. You have more shoes than I
have. And they probably cost a hell of a lot more
than mine.

NICK
Which closets?

WOMAN
What?

NICK
Which closets did you look in?

WOMAN
Just the one in the bedroom. I thought it was the,
uh, door to the hallway up there. I wasn't trying to
snoop or anything.

NICK
It's fine. I trust you.

WOMAN
Are you sure that's smart?

NICK
Why wouldn't it be?

WOMAN
Even if we ... you know ... spent the night together
... you don't know anything about me.

NICK
You're a waitress. You try to disguise your accent
but every now and then, you forget you're in New York
and not New Jersey. Moved here for fame, ended up
schlepping tables, if you will, for minimum wage. if
I had to guess, you don't want to be a waitress for
the rest of your life.

WOMAN
That's not a good guess.

NICK
It isn't?

WOMAN

No one wants to be a waitress forever.

NICK

So what do you want to do?

WOMAN

Are you saying you don't know that?

NICK

I can figure out a lot in one night, but I can't figure out everything.

WOMAN

I used to think I wanted to act. I know, I know. Everyone thinks they're good. That's why they move here. That's why I moved here. I would have done anything. Stage, camera - I just wanted to get out of that state. Into the N-Y-C. You know what it is to be so close to something ... and yet at the same time know you're far away. You might be a thirty minute train ride into the city, but there are a hundred other girls cuter, taller, dumber ... or maybe smarter ... and they're a hell of a lot closer than you are. It's all about location. (pause) I did get called back for a commercial. My first one. I was so dumb. I thought it was a done deal. But then I realized ... I'm nothing. Just a puppet. Because actors are puppets. They don't have any control. Maybe if you like some superstar, you have control. But for me, a girl just starting out? I think the people that made the sandwiches had more power than me. So, if we're being honest, I can't put what I want to do in some box like actor or writer or ... shit I don't know. (pause) That was the long answer.

NICK

The short one?

WOMAN

Whatever I do, I want power. I want control over my life. Besides that, I don't care.

NICK

And how do you plan on getting what you want?

WOMAN

I find a smile usually helps.

NICK

I think you're going to need more than smile.

WOMAN

Well it worked on you last night.

NICK
I was drunk.

WOMAN
Not at first.

NICK
That's right. You gave me a glass of wine on the house.

WOMAN
Yeah, but in the end, you bought the whole bottle.

NICK
I did, didn't I?

WOMAN
Don't feel bad. I always get guys to buy wine.

NICK
You tricked me. Not too many people can trick me.

WOMAN
I take that as a compliment.

NICK
The last person that tricked me ...

WOMAN
... What happened to her?

NICK
I didn't say her.

WOMAN
I know. It was a guess. Was I right?

NICK
You were.

WOMAN
So what happened?

NICK
She got caught in her own game.

WOMAN
And now?

NICK
Now, she no longer works here.

WOMAN
She was your employee?

NICK
An assistant. You know, I need a new assistant.

WOMAN
Then place an ad in the paper.

NICK
What about you?

WOMAN
Me? No.

NICK
I'd hire you on the spot.

WOMAN
Thanks, but I don't want to be an assistant.

NICK
You also don't want to be a waitress.

WOMAN
Look I already told you what I want. It's up to you to decide how you can help me. If you can't think of anything then I'll just take my coffee and leave.

The Woman gets up and starts to unbutton her shirt.

NICK
What are you doing?

WOMAN
I'm giving you your shirt back.

NICK
Why?

NOLA
I think it is time for me to leave. I have shift later at the restaurant.

NICK
Didn't you hear me? I just offered you a job.

WOMAN
I don't need a job. I have a job. It pays pretty well. I'd probably make more in tips than you could pay me per week to make your photocopies and get things like milk from the store.

NICK
Why milk?

WOMAN
Huh?

NICK
You said milk. Why did you pick milk?

WOMAN
I don't know. I just picked it. You got something against milk?

NICK
No. It's just ... I feel like I've had this conversation before.

WOMAN
We were talking about it earlier.

NICK
Yes. We were.

WOMAN
... Last night was fun.

NICK
This can't be good.

WOMAN
But it's morning now and I am leaving.

NICK
Before you leave, just let me finish. Off the record, you wouldn't be working for me. You'd be working with me.

WOMAN
On what?

NICK
Why would I tell you if you haven't said yes?

WOMAN
Because of last night. I didn't have to come back here and do certain things for you.

NICK
You owe me for the book.

WOMAN
I thought you said this was a gift.

NICK
With strings attached.

WOMAN
You never said that.

NICK
It was implied.

WOMAN

How?

NICK

Gifts are never free. They always come with a price. Like last night. You did certain things I'm sure you didn't want to do, but alas they were a gift to me from you.

WOMAN

So we're even. I did those things for you, and you gave me the book.

NICK

I don't think so. You weren't that good at it. At least not \$29.95 good. Plus you got to play your little game with me. Now it's my turn.

WOMAN

So I owe you for the book and the wine?

NICK

If that's how you want to see it.

WOMAN

First you offered me a job. Now you say you want to play a game. Which is it?

NICK

Why can't it be both?

WOMAN

What kind of game?

NICK

Can you keep a secret?

WOMAN

Of course.

NICK

I'm working on a new book. There's a character that's giving me some trouble. You've read parts before?

Nick takes a small key and unlocks a drawer in the wet bar. He pulls out a manuscript.

WOMAN

Yes.

NICK

That's all I need. Another woman. A woman. To read through some dialogue with me.

Nick starts to hand the Woman the manuscript, but stops.

NICK

Also, it's of the utmost importance, that we keep this to ourselves.

WOMAN

It's just reading.

NICK

No. It's not just reading. Everything that happens has to remain between us. It could reflect poorly on us if certain things were to come out in the press.

WOMAN

Relax Nick. My lips are sealed.

NICK

Good. Very good.

Nick hands the Woman the manuscript.

WOMAN

Nola ... this is the woman?

NICK

Yes. This scene she's meeting this guy Joe. I'll be him.

WOMAN

What's their relationship?

NICK

No. None of that.

WOMAN

I think I would be better if I knew a little more...

NICK

It will become clear to you. Just read.

WOMAN

"Nola enters the room."

NICK

No, no. You need to enter.

WOMAN

You want me to get up?

NICK

Yes, yes. And can I do fix something real quick?

Nick takes Woman's hair out of her pony tail and lets it fall to her shoulders.

NICK

There, that's better. Have you ever thought of changing your hair colour? A brunette maybe?

WOMAN

No.

NICK

Because I think you'd look great as brunette. But that's just me. Okay now go to the kitchen and enter.

The Woman laughs.

NICK

What's funny?

WOMAN

This. Me reading ... or acting this out ... it's not how I thought my morning would end up.

NICK

You said you wanted power.

WOMAN

How will acting this out get me power?

NICK

Power is like money - it's a currency. You do this for me, and I'll owe you. That's how you will get power.

Woman exits and goes to the kitchen. She re-enters.

WOMAN

"Hello Joe."

NICK

"How did you get in?"

WOMAN

"I used the spare."

NICK

"I thought I had moved the spare inside."

WOMAN

"You did."

Woman looks at the pages.

NICK

You are sitting down now.

WOMAN

Oh. Right.

Woman sits down next to Nick on the couch.

NICK
"It's been three weeks since you've been here."

WOMAN
"We need to talk about my story."

NICK
"Your story? You mean my story. I'm writing it. I have connections."

WOMAN
"Not like me."

NICK
"I knew were screwing someone."

WOMAN
"You mean someone else besides you?"

NICK
"That's all I ever was to you - a stepping stone. Well good luck taking that next step without me."

WOMAN
"My name deserves to be on that story and you know it."

NICK
"If you wanted your name on that story maybe you should have spent less time screwing the guy and more time writing."

WOMAN
"You can't stand it that I'm more talented than you. I was getting better and that made you jealous. That's why you stole my story."

Nick gets up, still in character, and paces.

NICK
"I can't believe this is how you repay me for helping you out when you first started."

WOMAN
"You didn't help me."

NICK
"I introduced you to people, I looked at your work."

WOMAN
"You may have opened a couple of doors, but I was the one that walked through them alone."

NICK
"Why are you really here? You could have just called me if you wanted a story credit."

WOMAN

"No. I couldn't. They've put people on me. I think they're listening to my calls."

NICK

"Shit you have to go then. If they find out you're here with me we'll both be ruined."

WOMAN

"No. I can't go."

NICK

Do that one again.

WOMAN

What?

Nick comes over to Woman and stands over her.

NICK

That line. I need to hear it again.

WOMAN

... "No I can't go. You're the only one I can trust. You're the only one ..."

Woman stops reading.

WOMAN

It says they kiss.

NICK

So?

WOMAN

Do you want me to kiss you?

NICK

If you were Nola, would you kiss me? Do you think that's something she would do?

WOMAN

I don't know.

Nick lowers down and kisses Woman.

NICK

"You're going to ruin me."

WOMAN

Uh... (finds her lines) "Not if you don't ruin me first."

Woman leans in and tries to kiss Nick, but he stops her.

NICK

Wait. Just wait.

Nick runs to the closet. He pulls out Nola's jacket from the previous acts.

NICK

Put this on.

WOMAN

Why do you have a woman's coat?

NICK

Someone left it here.

WOMAN

A past girlfriend?

NICK

Sure. Let's go with that.

WOMAN

How will putting on this coat help?

NICK

Just put on the coat Nola.

WOMAN

That's not -

NICK

For now, you're her. That's how you can help me. Just be her.

The Woman puts on the coat.

NICK

Now go back and re-enter.

*The Woman goes back towards the kitchen stairs.
She re-enters.*

WOMAN

"Hello Joe."

NICK

"How did you get in?"

WOMAN

"I used the spare."

NICK

"I thought I had moved the spare inside."

WOMAN

"You did."

The Woman sits down next to Nick.

NICK
"It's been three weeks since you've been here."

WOMAN
"We need to talk about my story."

NICK
"Your story? You mean my story. I'm writing it. I have connections."

WOMAN
"Not like me."

NICK
"I knew were screwing someone."

WOMAN
"You mean someone else besides you?"

NICK
"That's all I ever was to you - a stepping stone. Well good luck taking that next step without me."

WOMAN
"My name deserves to be on that story and you know it."

NICK
"If you wanted your name on that story maybe you should have spent less time screwing the guy and more time writing."

WOMAN
"You can't stand it that I'm more talented than you. I was getting better and that made you jealous. That's why you stole my story."

Nick gets up.

NICK
I don't know. It's not right.

WOMAN
Look I did exactly what you told me to do.

The Woman plays with a necklace - a necklace similar to the one Nola wore in Act One - around her neck.

NICK
The necklace. Were you always wearing it?

Nick touches the necklace that the woman is wearing.

WOMAN

Do you want me to take it off?

NICK

No. Leave it. Leave it on.

Nick leans in and kisses the Woman.

WOMAN

We're not supposed to be kissing yet.

NICK

This was a change I am thinking of making. I need to explore some options. (pause) Can you lie down?

WOMAN

Are we acting or are we -

NICK

You're acting. I'm writing. Now please - lie down.

The Woman lies down on the couch.

NICK

"Nola why did you have to lie to me? Why couldn't you just listen? You and I - we could have toppled the world."

WOMAN

"Because I'd rather topple you."

NICK

What did you say?

WOMAN

Was I wrong? I thought we were improvising.

NICK

No it was good. Let's try this. Sit up.

The Woman sits up.

NICK

I'm going to lie down and when you say that line -

WOMAN

"Because I'd rather topple you Joe."

NICK

Don't say Joe. On that line can you do some sort of movement.

WOMAN

What kind of movement?

NICK
I don't know but it feels like it should be something intimate ... You know what I mean?

WOMAN
Sure, sure.

NICK
Can you think of something?

WOMAN
Yeah, I have a couple of ideas ...

NICK
Just, you know, feel free. Feel like Nola.

WOMAN
That shouldn't be a problem.

NICK
Now let's start from ...

WOMAN
"That's all I ever was to you - a stepping stone."
That line?

NICK
Yes. Let's start there.

Nick is up from the couch.

NICK
"That's all I ever was to you - a stepping stone.
Well good luck taking that next step without me."

WOMAN
"My name deserves to be on that story and you know it."

NICK
"If you wanted your name on that story maybe you should have spent less time screwing the guy and more time writing."

WOMAN
"You can't stand it that I'm more talented than you. I was getting better and that made you jealous. That's why you stole my story."

Nick crosses to the couch and sits down.

NICK
"I can't believe this is how you repay me for helping you out when you first started."

WOMAN

"You didn't help me."

NICK

"Nola why did you have to lie to me? Why couldn't you just listen? You and I - we could have toppled the world."

The Woman crosses to the couch. Nick lowers down on the couch.

WOMAN

"Because I'd rather topple you."

The Woman is now on top of Nick.

NICK

Again.

WOMAN

"Because I'd rather topple you."

NICK

NICK

Good. Very good. Our work has begun.

Nick leans up and kisses the Woman. The lights fade to black.

Author (FINAL DRAFT)

By

Ashley Lara

Cast of Characters

Nick Walters: Late 30s/40s.

Nola: Mid 20s.

Scene

All three acts take place present day in the living room of Nick's Brooklyn Townhouse. There are two exits to the room - a stairwell to the upstairs floor, and a door leading to the kitchen.

Time

Present day. Act One takes in the late evening. Act Two takes place during the late night hours/early morning hours that follow Act One. Act Three is in the early morning after Act Two.

NOTE ON DIALOGUE: Any "/" marks indicate overlapping speech.

ACT I

The lights come up to reveal Nick's living room.

Nick enters the room from the kitchen.

NICK

Here we are.

As Nick pours two whiskeys, Nola enters from the kitchen. She's wearing a red coat over a black dress with heels, and her hair is up in a ponytail. She's taking it all in.

NICK

Allow me.

Nick takes off Nola's coat and places it in a coat closet by the stairwell.

NOLA

What's upstairs?

NICK

My room. A bathroom. Some closets. A door to the roof.

NOLA

Can I see it?

NICK

Later.

Nick hands Nola a drink.

NICK

Here's to looking up your old address.

They clink and sip. Nola coughs.

NICK

I'm sorry / I should have asked / if you wanted soda water or / another mixer?

NOLA

I'm fine / It went down the wrong / tube. / No this is fine.

Nick crosses to Nola. He takes her hand and leads her to the couch.

NICK

I'm glad you came back here with me.

NOLA

I'm glad you invited me.

Nick leans in to Nola and stops.

NICK

Can I just ...

Nick takes her hair out of the ponytail. He arranges it so it falls gently around her shoulders.

NICK

There.

NOLA

Sorry. I forgot.

NICK

It's fine. (beat) Now, where were we?

NOLA

I think I'm tipsy.

NICK

Just don't think about it.

NOLA

I didn't eat much today.

NICK

You have to keep drinking. Get past the moment where you feel light headed. Then you'll be fine.

Nola takes a sip of whiskey.

NICK

Better?

NOLA

Mmm ... maybe. Sure. (beat) I don't usually do this.

NICK

Do what?

NOLA

Go home with strange men.

NICK

What's so strange about me?

NOLA

I don't know you.

NICK

I don't know you either. That makes us even.

NOLA

No.

NICK

No?

NOLA

I'm a waitress. You're like some writer -

NICK

- Novelist.

NOLA

That's right. Stories.

NICK

Novels.

NOLA

Hmm?

NICK

I write novels.

NOLA

What's the difference?

NICK

Novels are longer than stories.

NOLA

You write long novels, do you?

NICK

Yes. Quite long.

NOLA

I like a good, long novel.

NICK

I bet you do.

NOLA

A nice thick book really gets me going.

NICK

Well my dear ...

*Nick rises to the bookshelf and tosses
her a book.*

NICK

... Start your engine.

*Nola looks over the book. She looks at
the back cover with Nick's picture.*

NOLA

Oh my god.

NICK

Yes?

NOLA

This is you.

NICK

That is me.

NOLA

You're really a writer?

NICK

Yes.

NOLA

I thought that was a line.

NICK

You didn't know me?

NOLA

No.

NICK

I thought you said you were a fan?

NOLA

I did.

NICK

But you didn't know me?

NOLA

... I wanted a good tip.

NICK

You really haven't heard of me?

NOLA

No. Not really.

NICK

People know me. You know? People know me.

NOLA

Sure, sure.

NICK

All the waitresses used to know me.

NOLA

Well ... maybe I recognized your name.

NICK

Maybe?

NOLA

I did. I definitely recognized your name.
From a list.

NICK

A list?

NOLA

Like a best-sellers list. Were you on any of
those?

NICK

A few.

NOLA

Then that's it. I read those lists.

NICK

But you haven't read any of my books?

NOLA

No.

NICK

Why not?

NOLA

I like to read new books. Fresh off the presses.

NICK

Do you?

NOLA

When were you last published?

NICK

Not long ago.

NOLA

When?

NICK

I said not long ago.

*Silence. Nick rises to the wet bar, turns
his back to Nola, and refills his
whiskey.*

NOLA

Did I say something / wrong?

NICK

Go back. / To the lists. Tell me about the lists.

NOLA

... You said your name was on lists.

NICK

A few.

NOLA

That's where I must have recognized it.

Nick turns back to Nola.

NICK

So you did recognize my name?

*Nola rises and crosses to the bookcase.
She starts to wave her hands over his
books.*

NOLA

Of course I did.

NICK

That bit before then?

NOLA

I didn't want you to think I was a crazy fan. Or
a stalker.

*Nola walks across the room,
looking through Nick's things.*

NICK

You? A stalker? I wouldn't believe it.

NOLA

You don't know me that well. I could be a stalker.

NICK

Are you a stalker?

NOLA

If I say no, isn't that what a stalker
would say
to get away?

NICK

It's also what an honest person would say.

NOLA

Then no, I'm not stalker. Yet. Now I know where
you live, which definitely makes it easier for me
if I should feel so inclined to stalk.

NICK

You know I've never had a stalker.

NOLA

Haven't you?

NICK

Not that I know of.

NOLA

That is the trick of stalking. Being as close as possible yet completely out of sight. Or so I've heard.

NICK

Have you heard?

NOLA

From friends. Who stalk.

NICK

I see.

NOLA

Do you want a stalker?

NICK

I don't know.

NOLA

Would you like me to stalk you?

NICK

No. I wouldn't want to put you through the trouble.

NOLA

I could stalk you. Give it a go. If you want.

NICK

Perhaps I'm not interesting enough to be stalked.

NOLA

Oh now that's modest. You're interesting.

NICK

Am I?

NOLA

Mmm-hmm.

NICK

What makes me interesting?

NOLA

I would have to say ... everything.

NICK

Everything?

NOLA

(thinks about it)
Yep.

NICK

Could you be more specific?

NOLA

Maybe I could.

Nola takes a long sip of whiskey.

NOLA

... And maybe / I couldn't.

NICK

/ Maybe you couldn't?

They laugh.

*Nola stops at Nick's desk. She
glides her fingers over the
typewriter.*

NOLA

Is this where you write?

NICK

Yes.

NOLA

Beat out the pages here, do you?

NICK

At times.

NOLA

Must be hard.

NICK

Not really. I have a girl who assists me.

NOLA

A girl?

NICK

Young woman. Can't be more than thirty.

NOLA

Should I be jealous?

NICK

Of her? No. She's rather drab. Sits with her hair
in a ponytail, typing up my notes. I keep a close
eye on her. But at the end of the day, it's just
work.
Nothing personal.

NOLA

Do you like working with her?

NICK

She works for me, not with.

NOLA

Does she?

NICK

Why are you so concerned about my assistant?

NOLA

Concerned? No. Curious ... maybe.

NICK

Nothing ever good came from curiosity. Just ask that cat.

NOLA

You mean like the dead cat? Like in "curiosity killed the cat?"

NICK

That's the one.

Nola laughs. Small at first, then she loses control.

NICK

You're enjoying this?

NOLA

(almost breathless)

I just got this image of you talking to some dead cat.

Nola laughs - really guttural. Nick joins in.

NICK

I think it's best to get off this subject before you pass out.

NOLA

(sighs, wipes away tears)
Yes, that's a good idea.

Nick hands her a tissue to wipe away tears.

NICK

Nola is an interesting name. Where is it from?

NOLA

I'm told my parents gave it to me.

NICK

A family name?

NOLA

No.

NICK
It's a lovely name.

NOLA
Eh.

NICK
You don't like it?

NOLA
No. Everyone thinks its "Nora" and not "Nola."

*Nick crosses to the desk. He grabs a post-it
and writes on it.*

NICK
Do you mind if I use it?

NOLA
Use it how?

NICK
For my book. I often find character names
the most troubling to create.

NOLA
You want to name a character after me?

NICK
If you don't mind.

NOLA
No. Not at all.

NICK
Great.

Nick slaps a post-it with "Nola" written on it.

NICK
You can be her.

Nick takes a sip of whiskey.

NICK
She can be you.

NOLA
I've never been in a book before.

NICK
Not many people have my dear.

NOLA
So what am I in this book? A socialite?
A femme fatale?

NICK
You're a waitress.

NOLA
A waitress?

NICK
Yes. Is that a problem?

NOLA
No, it's just ... I'm a waitress. In real life.

NICK
In real life she's a waitress.

NOLA
I see.

NICK
You're disappointed?

NOLA
No no no no. ... A little.

NICK
I thought you liked being a waitress?

NOLA
No. I don't. I hate it.

NICK
You said that you liked it at the restaurant.

NOLA
Yeah but I didn't mean it.

NICK
What about ... I'll make her a waitress, but she was an actress at one time.

NOLA
I like that.

NICK
Does it suit you better?

NOLA
That's more exciting.

NICK
Not many people are actors. In real life of course.

NOLA
Of course.

NICK
Waiting tables gives it an air of authenticity.

NOLA
You know I used to act.

NICK
No.

NOLA
Yes. That's why I moved here. To act.

NICK
What happened?

NOLA
Nothing. That's why I quit. Waiting tables is more secure.

NICK
I'm glad you gave it up. I doubt we would have met if you were an actor.

NOLA
Does she give up acting in the book?

NICK
I think she does.

NOLA
What else happens to her?

NICK
Would you like to know? Would you like me to show you?

NOLA
Very much.

NICK
She meets a man at the restaurant. They hit off. He invites her to his place for drinks.

NOLA
Like tonight?

NICK
Like tonight.

NOLA
And do they drink whiskey?

NICK
Yes. They're both on their second glass -

NOLA

First.

NICK

Your first?

NOLA

I'm a slow drinker.

Nola takes another sip.

NICK

She says, lifting the glass to her lips for another sip.

Nola laughs.

NOLA

Oh. Because I'm her.

NICK

You are her.

NOLA

I get it now. I'm her. And you're him.

NICK

Exactly.

Nick gets up from the couch. His actions follow the following speech.

NICK

The man gets up from the couch. He looks her over. The usual type. Brunette hair. Mid- twenties. He pours a drink for himself and says: You don't drink whiskey that often.

NOLA

No. I mean I drink. I like wine. Red wine. Do you have any red wine?

NICK

No I'm afraid I don't.

NOLA

Mmm-kay. (takes another sip) You know, I actually hate red wine.

NICK

Why did you say you liked it?

NOLA

I don't know why I lied about that. I'm not usually like that.

NICK

You just break all the rules with me.

Nick leans in to Nola.

NOLA

I guess you're my exception.

NICK

Stop.

Nick runs over to his desk.

NICK

Repeat what you just said.

NOLA

Um ... I guess you're my exception.

Nick writes as Nola speaks. He smacks a post-it on the wall above his desk.

NICK

Go on.

NOLA

I, uh, think you were going to kiss me.

NICK

Oh right.

Nick kisses Nola.

NOLA

What about you?

NICK

What about me?

NOLA

Do you do this ... often?

NICK

What do you / mean? / Usually it's just one / but once I did bring home sorority sisters.

NOLA

Bring home women / and like seduce them / on your couch / and give them drinks? / What?

NICK

I'm kidding. Of course I don't do this often.

NOLA

But you have before?

NICK

Well you're not my first.

NOLA

How many?

NICK

That's personal.

NOLA

You're right. You don't have to tell me. I get it. You're a writer. I could go out and blab it around town.

NICK

I doubt that you could do that.

NOLA

Oh yeah?

NICK

Yeah.

NOLA

Why's that?

NICK

No one has done it before.

NOLA

Are you so sure?

NICK

One-hundred percent.

NOLA

What do you do? Force them to sign a non-disclosure agreement?

NICK

You'll find out later.

NOLA

It's all part of the mystery man, isn't it?

NICK

We all have skeletons in our closets. I just happen to make a living off mine.

NOLA

Is that how you came up with the stories?

NICK

Novels.

NOLA

Yeah. Novels.

NICK

They're inspired by real-life events.

NOLA

Like news reports?

NICK

More like actual events that happened to me.

NOLA

What kind of books did you say you write again?

NICK

Crime novels. You know, about murders and killers and girls who go home with strange men.

Nick touches her hair.

NICK

You did something different with your hair.

NOLA

Nick, this is wrong.

NICK

I know what you did. Hmm? I know.

NOLA

You're drunk. You went ... too far.

NICK

You thought you could hide from me?

NOLA

I don't know what you're talking about.

NICK

Yes you do.

NOLA

I don't like this.

NICK

Too bad.

NOLA

If this is a joke -

NICK

- This is not a joke.

NOLA

I don't feel good.

NICK

Imagine that.

NOLA

This isn't part of it.

Nola gets up, but is a little wobbly.

NOLA

You skipped ... something. This is ... too far
...
ahead of now.

Nola grabs onto the wall.

NOLA

I need my coat.

*Nola starts to walk, but falls and crashes
in to the wet bar.*

NICK

Careful, careful.

*Nick crosses to her and holds her
up. Nola's speech starts to slur.*

NOLA

No don't -

NICK

I'm just helping to stabilize you -

NOLA

I'm fine I just have to go. Have to go. Now.

Nola takes another step, but falters.

NICK

I can't let you do that. You're in no state
to go home like this.

*Nola tries to walk, but she's too weak.
She falls onto the floor.*

NICK

You've had quite too much to drink.

NOLA

I ... you. You did this ...

*Nola slides down onto the floor.
Nick stands above her.*

NOLA

What did ... you do ... to me?

Nick rummages through her purse and finds a USB drive and a house key. He pockets them.

NICK

I'm sorry. I hope you understand it's nothing personal. Just business. I needed tonight to be authentic.

Nick pulls Nola up towards the stairwell.

NICK

Time to go upstairs.

Nick lifts Nola up and carries her over his shoulder. Blackout.

ACT II

In the darkness light rain can be heard.

Then voices, pre-recorded, begin.

NICK (RECORDED)

Would you like to know? Would you like me to show you?

NOLA (RECORDED)

Very much.

The voices come from a tape player. On the wall closest to the desk there are post-its stuck to it, almost covering the entire space.

The room appears to be in the early stages of a renovation. There is a wall to ceiling bookshelf covered in thick plastic.

NICK (RECORDED)

She meets a man at the restaurant. They hit off. He invites her to his place for drinks.

NOLA (RECORDED)

Like tonight?

NICK (RECORDED)

Like tonight.

NOLA (RECORDED)

And do they drink whiskey?

NICK (RECORDED)

Yes. They're both on their second glass -

*A door closes offstage towards the kitchen.
A few steps are heard.*

NOLA (RECORDED)

First.

NICK (RECORDED)

Your first?

NOLA (RECORDED)

I'm a slow drinker.

NICK (RECORDED)

She says, lifting the glass to her lips for another sip.

*On the tape, Nola laughs.
In real time, Nicks enters the living room carrying a brown liquor bag. His hair is slightly wet from the rain outside.*

He takes a bottle of whiskey out of the bag and crosses to the wet bar.

NOLA (RECORDED)

Oh. Because I'm her.

NICK

Because I'm her.

NICK (RECORDED)

You are her.

Nick stops and looks at the tape player.

NOLA (RECORDED)

I get it now. I'm her. And you're him.

NICK (RECORDED)

Exactly.

Nick stops the tape player and hits fast forward.

NOLA (RECORDED)

I like wine. Red wine. Do you have any red wine?

NICK (RECORDED)

No I'm afraid I don't.

NOLA (RECORDED)

Mmm-kay. (takes another sip) You know, I actually hate red wine.

NICK (RECORDED)

Why did you say you liked it?

NOLA (RECORDED)

I don't know why I lied about that. I'm not usually like that.

NICK (RECORDED)

You just break all the rules with me.

NOLA enters from the stairwell on stage right. Nick's back is to her so she isn't noticed. She's relatively dry compared to Nick. She's carrying a purse and wearing the red wool coat from the scene before. Her hair is pulled back in to a ponytail.

NOLA (RECORDED)

I guess you're my exception.

NICK

I guess you're my exception.

Nick turns to see Nola standing by the stairwell.

NICK (RECORDED)

Stop. ... Repeat what you just said.

*Nola walks away from Nick. She crosses
to the tape player and stops it.*

NOLA

Hello Nick.

NICK

Hi. You did something different with your hair.

NOLA

My hair?

NICK

It's longer.

NOLA

No.

NICK

No? Something is different about it.

NOLA

It's up. I usually had it down while I was here.

NICK

I like it down. The pony tail isn't bad though.

NOLA

Thank you.

NICK

You should wear it down more often.

NOLA

I'll take that under consideration.

NICK

Good.

NOLA

That smell.

NICK

Yes. I'm not quite sure what that is.

NOLA

It doesn't bother you?

NICK

I think I've gotten used to it.

NOLA

How?

NICK

Drinking helps. (*Nick admires her coat.*) That coat.

NOLA

What about my coat?

NICK

It's a nice coat.

NOLA

What should I do with it?

NICK

Whatever you want. It's your coat.

NOLA

You want me to stay.

NICK

Tonight? I haven't made up mind.

NOLA

That wasn't a question.

Nola throws her coat over the couch.

NICK

You weren't here earlier.

NOLA

Neither were you. I had let myself in.

NICK

I see that.

NOLA

It's easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission.

NICK

Your point?

NOLA

I'm sorry for showing up like this.

NICK

The door was locked.

NOLA

Yes?

NICK
I didn't ask a question.

NOLA
Oh. I thought you were.

NICK
You thought that was a question?

NOLA
It was ambiguous to say the least.

NICK
No. You'll know when I ask a question.
For example, how did you get inside?

NOLA
Now that's a question.

NICK
Yes.

NOLA
I definitely got it that time.

NICK
How about it then?

NOLA
Do you want me to answer?

NICK
That's usually what follows a question. An
answer.

NOLA
The door. That's how I got inside.

NICK
The locked door.

NOLA
Yes. It was locked. But then I unlocked it. With
the spare. Didn't I mention that?

NICK
No you didn't.

NOLA
I thought I had.

NICK

I moved the spare.

NOLA

I know.

*Nola takes the key out of her pocket
and places it on the wet bar.*

NOLA

Thank god I found it or I would have had to bash open a window. Then you would have had a real mess on your hands.

NICK

You shouldn't be here.

NOLA

Nick. Nicky. Come on. Don't be like that. I already told you I'm sorry for showing up like this.

NICK

What if someone saw you?

NOLA

No one saw me. No one knows I'm here except for you. So you can wipe that worried look off your face.

NICK

It's more than worry-

NOLA

Is it?

NICK

Anger, mostly.

NOLA

Have I angered you?

NICK

Yes.

NOLA

(smiles)
Good.

NICK

So why the hell are you here?!

NOLA

Why the fuck do you think?

NICK

Why don't we just get down to brass tacks and you tell me what I think?

NOLA

You drugged me!

NICK

I did no such thing.

NOLA

That night -

NICK

- That night you mixed whiskey with ... what were we drinking at the restaurant?

NOLA

We weren't at a restaurant.

NICK

Weren't we?

NOLA

No. That was the book scene. In reality we were here that night, going through the scene -

NICK

Are you sure we didn't go out?

NOLA

You never went out with me. What if we were seen? Wouldn't that ruin your precious fucking plans -

NICK

- That's right. We stayed in -

NOLA

- And you drugged my drink.

NICK

I didn't drug your drink. You just couldn't handle your whiskey.

NOLA

I can handle whiskey.

Nola takes the whiskey bottle, sniffs it, and looks at Nick.

NOLA

I assume this is fresh.

NICK

Aged but fresh.

Nola pours herself a drink.

NICK

You slept it off upstairs. In my room.

NOLA
And where did you sleep?

NICK
Downstairs. I'm a gentleman.

NOLA
That's the last thing you are.

NICK
You were fine the next day.

NOLA
I was not fine.

NICK
I get that you're upset -

NOLA
Upset? UPSET?! Fuck upset. I was beyond upset. Words cannot describe -

NICK
- Try. -

NOLA
- What I feel about you.

NICK
I should be upset. You broke into my house.

NOLA
Technically I used a key.

NICK
That doesn't excuse the fact you entered my house while I wasn't here.

NOLA
Next time I'll call.

NICK
No. No you won't.

NOLA
Oh yeah. You have a thing about phones.

NICK
I don't have a thing about phones.

NOLA
It's like a real condition. Being afraid of phones.

NICK
I am not afraid of phones.

NOLA

You don't have to be ashamed. A lot of people have it.

NICK

I don't have a condition.

NOLA

Is that why you're not calling the cops about an intruder?

NICK

I thought you used a key.

NOLA

I can still be intrusive with a key.

NICK

Why were you upstairs?

NOLA

I was looking for you.

NICK

That's a good answer.

NOLA

That's why I said it.

NICK

It's a lie.

NOLA

No. More like ... part of a truth.

NICK

Will I hear the rest?

NOLA

Later. If you're good.

Nola walks around the room.

NOLA

I love what you've done with the place.

NICK

This? It's nothing.

NOLA

Nothing?! This isn't nothing. This is fucking everything. From the ground up.

NICK

It's none of your business.

NOLA
You made sure of that, didn't you?

NICK
You left. Remember?!

NOLA
I remember. I remember everything.

NICK
So you must remember that I'm the reason you're
not bring out bread sticks like some fucking
waitress!

NOLA
This fucking waitress / helped you in more
ways than one.

NICK
Appropriate term / don't you think?

NOLA
What?

NICK
Fucking waitress.

Nola is silent.

NICK
That's what you were. A. Fucking. Waitress.
A waitress who fucks.

Nick laughs.

NOLA
You think that's funny?

NICK
Yes.

NOLA
Try this one: I know about the deal.

NICK
(laughing)
What deal?

NOLA
The book deal that you hid from me.

Nick stops laughing.

NOLA
That's what I thought.

NICK
I don't know what you think you know -

NOLA
- I told you. I know everything.

NICK
There is no deal -

NOLA
- Where'd you get the money for the reno?

NICK
That's none of your business.

NOLA
Like fuck it's not. We had a deal / You help me /
I help you.

NICK
Which fell apart / when you left. / I can't help
you if you're not here.

NOLA
That was just a fucking line, wasn't it?

NICK
You want to know where I got the money?
Residuals from previous books.

NOLA
Bullshit.

NICK
You always had a way with words.

NOLA
Is that why you stole them from me?

NICK
If I wanted to steal words like bullshit and
fuck, I would aim higher than a waitress like
you.

NOLA
I'm not a waitress, I'm a writer! That's
what you hired me to do.

NICK
You helped with the recordings, and I'll
admit you may have helped with some typing.

NOLA
I did more than type.

NICK
Anything you wrote, or think you wrote, was
because of me.

NOLA

What about the days you were drunk? Too drunk to get out of bed? What did you tell me to type on those days?

NICK

Nothing.

NOLA

Yet somehow you ended up with pages on those days. Pages I wrote.

NICK

Excuse me?

NOLA

You didn't think you wrote all of that, did you?

NICK

I hired you to assist me, type up notes. That's how I ended up with pages. But you writing for me, creating new parts of the book? That was never part of the plan.

NOLA

Fuck the plan. Your notes?

Nola finds a yellow legal pad in a drawer under the typewriter.

NOLA

These were your notes.

Nola holds up the pad - the paper is filled with doodles, random words, and booze stains.

NOLA

How the fuck do you think you got a novel out of doodles and whiskey stains?

NICK

These aren't my notes. I have another notebook somewhere. That's just when I'm blocked ... I'll jot down words, draw little things ... where the hell is that other notebook?!

NOLA

I only know of this one.

NICK

I watched you sit here and type.

NOLA

You watched me from the wet bar. I could have typed whatever I wanted. Which I did. You're welcome by the way.

NICK

I would have noticed.

NOLA

But you didn't and you're caught.

NICK

The idea for the book was mine! Not yours. Mine!

NOLA

But I wrote it. You're idea was shit until I wrote it!

Nick walks away from Nola.

NOLA

I think we just need to face the facts - I helped you, and now it's your turn to help me.

NICK

First of all you didn't help me. You helped yourself.

NOLA

You said if I came to work with you that you would introduce me to people.

NICK

I was going to / but then you left.

NOLA

You never / did introduce me.

NICK

Who do you want to know?

NOLA

Huh?

NICK

I said who do you want to know?

NOLA

Why? What are you ... what are you doing?

NICK

Give me your cell phone.

NOLA

Why?

NICK

So I can call someone.

Nola hesitates, then takes out her phone.

NICK

Give me a name.

NOLA

I, uh ...

NICK

Come on. You've been dreaming of this moment.

NOLA

Your publisher. Harry Brown.

Nick takes her phone, acts like he's going to dial, then drops the phone in his glass of whiskey.

NOLA

Jesus Christ -

NICK

Jesus or Harry. Pick one.

Nola takes the phone out of the glass.

NOLA

Do you have any rice?

NICK

Why? Are you hungry for risotto?

Nola tries to wipe off the phone, see if it works, but it's no good.

NOLA

No it helps dry it out. Why the fuck did you do that?

NICK

To prove a point.

NOLA

That you're a dick?

NICK

That if anyone used anyone, it was you who used me.

NOLA

That's different than what you did to me.

NICK

You knew I had connections. You knew I had name recognition. For God-sakes I have written bestsellers. My first book was on the New York Times' list -

NOLA

- Not at number one.

NICK

Oh, I'm sorry, how many have you had on that list?

NOLA

I haven't had any ... yet.

NICK

Was that a threat?

NOLA

That was nothing compared to this: If you publish this book behind my back, I will sue you for plagiarism and take everything you have.

NICK

Do you really want to go up against a writer like me in court?

NOLA

You mean a writer with a past.

NICK

We all have pasts.

NOLA

Not like yours.

NICK

What do you know about my past?

NOLA

Enough.

NICK

What the hell does that mean?

NOLA

It's been five years since your last book was published.

NICK

I was taking time off.

NOLA

Five years isn't time off. It's unemployment.

NICK

I needed to clear my head. Get a new start.

NOLA

Wait for the dust to settle.

NICK

Dust to -

NOLA
- It's a phrase.

NICK
I know that. Why did you say it?

NOLA
You know why Nicky.

NICK
I don't know what you think you know -

NOLA
- Have I hit a nerve? -

NICK
- But you don't so just drop it.

NOLA
I have a question about the industry blacklist -
is it an actual list on paper, or is it like a
secret underground list with like secret codes?

NICK
I wasn't blacklisted.

NOLA
You should have been after a lawsuit like that.

NICK
How did you find out about that?

NOLA
It's called Google. You should try it sometime.

NICK
That case was a whole ... misunderstanding.
It didn't even go to court.

NOLA
Because you settled.

NICK
That doesn't mean I was guilty.

NOLA
It doesn't mean you were innocent.

NICK
I was advised that a settlement would be
easier to control, publicity wise.

NOLA
Sure. After the settlement you have didn't have
any publicity. At all. No one wanted you or your
books.

NICK

I climbed the ladder by writing, not fucking.

NOLA

It's all the same in the dark, isn't it?

NICK

Maybe the way you do it.

NOLA

Are you upset that I fucked you both personally and professionally?

NICK

I'm upset because you're taking a confidential case out of context and accusing me of stealing.

NOLA

I just want to warn you that I'm not the settling type. When I sue you, I'm going all the way. No amount will change my mind. ... Well actually there is an amount, but I'm guessing you don't have it since you did this reno.

NICK

You won't get a penny from me.

NOLA

But they're my pennies.

NICK

Fine. Sue me. I'd love to ruin your career before it even starts.

NOLA

Every thief has his day.

NICK

I am not a thief.

NOLA

That's a saying isn't it, thief?

NICK

I am not a thief. Thieves live in prisons.

NOLA

What do you call this?

NICK

My home.

NOLA

All the rules ... no phone calls, no guests ...

NICK

All by my choice.

NOLA

It's as if you live in solitary confinement.

NICK

I can leave whenever I want.

NOLA

But you never want to, do you? I mean, besides the occasional whiskey run. You would rather stay in here and listen to tapes play over and over.

NICK

That was work.

NOLA

It's like you live in some weird exposed brick prison where the form of torture is listening to the same tape over and over while you waterboard yourself with whiskey.

NICK

I was listening to the tape for work. I was working.

NOLA

You were speaking along with the tape when you came back tonight.

NICK

No I wasn't.

NOLA

Yes you were.

NICK

I don't think so.

NOLA

You were speaking when I spoke, word for word.

NICK

Maybe I mumbled some of your lines.

NOLA

Oh my god. (pause) You didn't even realize you were doing it, did you?

NICK

What the fuck does it matter that I mumbled some words?

NOLA

You would have to listen to the tape a lot of times for you to remember "my parts."

NICK

You caught me Nola. I listen to tapes. I love tapes. I'm a tape aficionado.

NOLA

How many times did you listen to it?

NICK

A few perhaps.

NOLA

A few.

NICK

I didn't keep a tally or anything.

Nola touches Nick's face. Looks in his eyes.

NOLA

Oh my Nicky. You're still doing this.

NICK

What is it I'm doing?

NOLA

You were always more comfortable living in your imagination than in real life.

NICK

I can live in real life just fine.

NOLA

No you can't. That's why you drugged me. That's why you sit alone and listen to these tapes, over and over and over again. You're escaping your life in the comfort of your own home.

Nick brushes off Nola's hands and walks away from her.

NICK

I'm not escaping. I can walk out of here. I do walk out of here.

NOLA

You always come back.

NICK

Because it's my home. It's my office. It's mine. I belong here.

NOLA

Is it lonely at the top where you're at?

NICK

Not with the right people.

NOLA
What people? You don't have people.

NICK
I have people.

NOLA
You had me.

NICK
My publisher -

NOLA
That's business.

NICK
So were we.

NOLA
No. We were more.

NICK
Not much more.

Nick walks away from Nola.

NOLA
You know you lose track of time when you're isolated.

NICK
Hey, I am not isolated. I live in Brooklyn.
I'm surrounded by people.

NOLA
Tell me one of your neighbour's names then.
Go on. Tell me.

NICK
I could ask you the same.

NOLA
They are not my neighbours.

NICK
I could lie and you wouldn't know.

NOLA
You can't tell me because you don't know. Or maybe you knew once, but now you don't. That is why you live like this, removed from the world. To protect your mind. Because you can't forget what you don't know. But no writer worth reading can shut out the world. We use the world to create our fantasies. Then we put them on paper and call them stories.(pause) You need me because can't create without me. And it is making you sick. You are sick Nick. Sick in the head.

NICK

You want to know my neighbours' names?! They are Bob and Sue who the hell cares?! They don't matter. I know people, the important people that make things move and spin forward. Those other people, the neighbours and waitresses and everyone like them - they're just background. They are nothing! You are nothing! You're just a waitress who occasionally writes words.

NOLA

Thank you for saying that. It makes what I'm about to do a lot more easy.

NICK

And what's that?

NOLA

Fuck with your life like you fucked with mine.

NICK

I never forced you to do anything.

NOLA

You charmed me.

NICK

I couldn't help it if you liked me.

NOLA

You knew that I liked you.

NICK

Of course I knew.

NOLA

That's when you seduced me.

NICK

Seduced? You make me sound like some ... Cassanova. I merely asked you to come home with me.

NOLA

And that's when you convinced me to leave my job to come here and work.

NICK

I offered you work and you accepted. It was your choice.

NOLA

You knew I was would say yes.

NICK

I didn't force you do to anything!

NOLA

You took advantage of me.

NICK

No, no -

NOLA

- I came here, and worked, and you used me.

NICK

I never used you!

NOLA

You used me for your own interests. You used me to advance your career.

NICK

You can't prove it. At least not in a legal sense.

NOLA

I will.

NICK

You can't even prove that you worked here. Hmm? Think of that?

NOLA

I knew about the spare key.

NICK

Lots of people have spare keys.

NOLA

How would I know about your spare key if we didn't have a relationship?

NICK

Anyone can find a key, break in, and the rest is criminal history.

NOLA

I still worked here.

NICK

You never signed any papers establishing you worked here.

NOLA

You told me that was for my protection.

NICK

It was. They would hound you for details. I couldn't risk that. The same with the other rules. No phone calls because they could be traced. No discussing our work with friends or family because then they could talk -

NICK (cont'd)

- to the press. Never enter through the front door because if someone saw you then they could approach you with questions about me or the book and, well, that would be the end it, now wouldn't it? (beat) I had to make sure you didn't exist here in an official capacity.

NOLA

I existed. Maybe not on paper, but I existed here!

NICK

You were here because I let you into this world!

NOLA

You paid me. Money was exchanged for services rendered.

NICK

In cash, under the table. You could have been a maid.

NOLA

I wasn't a maid.

NICK

Or a prostitute. I probably should have asked. Are you a prostitute?

NOLA

Fuck you Nick.

NICK

Right now? Are you sure you're in the mood?

NOLA

You're not that funny.

NICK

You weren't that good in bed anyway.

NOLA

Neither were you.

NICK

I don't seem to remember any complaints.

NOLA

You don't remember a lot these days.

NICK

I remember what's important.

NOLA

Then you must remember that I had ideas.

NICK

Everyone has ideas.

NOLA

Not you. That's why you needed me. That's why you still need me.

NICK

I don't need you. I have a book deal! I have the money, the connections - I have everything!

NOLA

Not everything.

Nola produces an opened envelope.

NOLA

This came for you.

NICK

When?

NOLA

Three weeks ago.

NICK

It's opened.

NOLA

Yeah, well, I had to see what was inside -

NICK

You opened my mail?

NOLA

It wasn't one of your rules.

NICK

It's against the law. I figured it was implied.

NOLA

Please - me opening your mail is the least of your worries.

Nola tosses him the envelope.

NOLA

You sold the book on a pitch and some chapter samples. You received an advance, and the remaining amount will be delivered upon the completion of the book.

NICK

It's a standard procedure.

NOLA
How does it end?

NICK
What?

NOLA
The book. How does it end?

NICK
I'm not discussing this with you.

NOLA
The wall of the post-its ... I remember these.

NICK
Shut up.

NOLA
Are these your great ideas for the ending?

*Nola starts to look at the post-its.
She takes one off the wall.*

NOLA
"Another woman." Really? You wasted a post-it on that?

Nola rips the post-it in half.

NICK
Don't do that.

NOLA
"Add another staircase - could be ..." I can't even read the rest of this one.

Nola rips the note in half.

NICK
Could you fucking stop?

NOLA
"I didn't realize our work had begun." What a bunch of shit.

Nola starts to tear this post-it, but Nick grabs her hand.

NICK
I asked you nicely.

NOLA
I didn't hear a please.

NICK

Could you please fucking stop?

Nick throws his whiskey glass on the floor.

NOLA

What the hell was that?

NICK

I threw my whiskey glass on the floor.

NOLA

I can see that.

NICK

Then why did you ask?

NOLA

Why did you throw it -

NICK

- You broke into my house.

NOLA

I used the key to get in, remember? I didn't break anything.

NICK

It's not too late to start.

Nick takes Nola's whiskey glass and throws it at a lamp, breaking both.

NOLA

To start what?

NICK

Creating a scene! If I call the cops and tell them that someone broke in, I have to make it look convincing.

NOLA

You wouldn't call the cops.

NICK

Why not?

NOLA

Then someone else would know I'm here. That's breaking your rule.

NICK

Fuck the rules Nola.

NOLA

You can't call them. Your phone is out. Remember?

NICK

I'll stick my head out the window and yell "cops." Or "fire." I've heard yelling "fire" is more successful because strangers are inclined to help.

NOLA

Then other people would find out about our relationship.

NICK

There's no proof of a relationship. You're just some woman. A stranger.

NOLA

What's my motive then? Huh? Why would I break in if I'm some stranger you've never met?

NICK

The restaurant. ... Yes. We met at the restaurant!

NOLA

Over a year ago.

NICK

And you've been stalking me ever since then. At first I thought you were a nice sweet girl. Then you broke into my house.

Nick smashes another glass.

NICK

You trashed the place because you're a crazy ...

Nick breaks a lamp.

NICK

- delusional ...

Nick takes a book out from the bookshelf and rips out some of the pages.

NICK

- sick, twisted fan.

Nick throws some of the other books on the floor.

NOLA

This doesn't prove I broke in.

NICK

Nola your caught. Like a fat kid who's hand got caught in the cookie jar. You're caught.

NOLA

Good writers borrow, but great writers steal.

NICK

No that's wrong. It's immature poets imitate, mature poets steal.

NOLA

Whatever. You stole. I was just taking what was mine.

NICK

I am not a thief. I was never convicted. If you go after me you'll fail.

NOLA

Are you sure of that?

NICK

What do you have?

NOLA

It's not what I have. It's what you're missing.

NICK

What did you find upstairs?

NOLA

Nothing. Which gives me hope.

NICK

Hope in nothing. That should be the motto of your generation.

NOLA

I came here for the ending.

NICK

What ending?

NOLA

Exactly. You need a book. A finished book. You only sold it on a pitch and the few chapters that had been written. That's what you're missing. And that's why you need me.

NICK

You have an ending?

NOLA

Yes.

NICK

I don't believe you.

NOLA

That's not my problem.

NICK

You can't publish an ending. You'll need more than that to make money.

NOLA

And you can't publish an unfinished book.

NICK

It would seem we're both in need of something.

NOLA

Yes, it would.

NICK

... What is the ending?

NOLA

No.

NICK

No?

NOLA

I'm going to need to see the original manuscript first.

NICK

The old "I'll show you mine if you show me yours" bit?

NOLA

Something like that.

NICK

And you're sure it wasn't upstairs?

NOLA

Yes. Very sure. I thought it might be, but it wasn't.

NICK

You didn't find a copy on the computer?

NOLA

What computer?

NICK

That's right. I don't use a computer. Too risky. Someone could sneak into my house and download a file and then steal your book.

NOLA

Where is the manuscript?

NICK

You sound frustrated.

NOLA

I am frustrated.

NICK

I can imagine. You searched all over my bedroom only to be interrupted by my return.

NOLA

You came back quite fast. Then again, you probably you know directly where to find your brand of whiskey.

NICK

The clerk keeps a bottle under the counter for me.

NOLA

How nice.

NICK

Yes. You really don't see that type of customer service these days.

NOLA

Speaking of service, I believe there was something you were going to get for me.

NICK

The manuscript. I've always liked hiding in plain sight.

Nick crosses to the wet bar and removes a fake panel, revealing a secret compartment. The manuscript is underneath.

NICK

Clever, no?

NOLA

Clever, but not better.

NICK

Better than what?

NOLA

Me. (beat) I don't have a copy of it, I'm afraid.

Nola takes out a flash drive from her purse.

NICK

What is that?

NOLA

A flash drive. It's on there.

NICK

How do we get it out?

NOLA

A computer, which you don't have.

NICK

That's not fair. (holding the manuscript) This is everything and you ... you have a plastic piece of crap.

Nick takes the drive.

NOLA

Be careful! Everything I have is on there.

NICK

We can't help each other if you bring a knife to a gun fight.

NOLA

What?

NICK

You know what I mean! You tricked me. Forced my hand. Now you know where to find the manuscript.

NOLA

You can hide it somewhere else.

Nick hands Nola back the drive.

NICK

What does it matter? Like you said, no one wants an unfinished book.

Nick starts to pull the pages off the manuscript.

NOLA

What the hell are you doing?

NICK

It's worthless without an ending.

NOLA

I have an ending. Just let me run out and make copies.

NICK

Like hell you are. How do I know you won't run off, print your copies, and then go straight to the publishers and screw me out of the deal? No. You're not leaving.

NOLA

Well how the fuck are we gonna get this ending off here?

NICK

What if you type it out again here on my typewriter?

NOLA

Oh go blow it out your ass. I'm not re-typing this from memory on your goddamn typewriter. Besides who the hell doesn't have a computer nowadays?

NICK

I prefer the privacy of a common typewriter. The government can't hack into a hunk of metal.

NOLA

You and your fucking ancient machines. The typewriter can't be hacked into, the cassette player sounds better than digital recordings -

NICK

- The tape player. We could use the tape player.

NOLA

It's a flash drive not a cassette.

Nick takes out a blank cassette tape.

NICK

How much of it do you have memorized?

NOLA

You want to record it?

NICK

Like the scenes we used to read. You'll be Nola, the character of course. I'll be the killer -

NOLA

- But you haven't read it yet.

NICK

I've been writing killers for years. I think I can improvise rather well.

NOLA

We would just play off each other?

NICK

Yes. We'll record it and type it up. Then send it straight off to the publishers, and voila! We have a finished book.

NOLA

Last time we recorded I ended up in a less than flattering situation.

NICK

It won't happen this time. You can trust me.

NOLA

I don't know if I want to.

NICK

Have you even shown that ending to anyone?

NOLA

No.

NICK

So it could be trash. Rubbish. Decaying matter.

NOLA

It's not. If this is your way of convincing me, you're going about it all wrong.

NICK

I'm saying it wouldn't hurt to have a second opinion.

NOLA

Which is your opinion. Your drunken opinion.

NICK

My drunken opinion led you here to this opportunity. And like it or not, I've had some literary success. You haven't. Just trust me. It's just the tapes. Just like old times.

NOLA

I left because I didn't like the old times.

Nick takes Nola's hand. She's caught off-guard.

NICK

You were right. I can't write. I don't have any idea. Or rather I have too many. I don't know. It doesn't make any sense any more. Not without you. And even then ... you were good. Not good. Great. You were. I'm not just making it up. I never told you. I should have. Maybe you would have stayed. Would you have stayed if I told you how great you were?

NOLA

You still stole from me.

NICK

We stole from each other. Isn't that beautiful? We both thought we could one-up each other, but in reality we both got our hands caught in the pot.

NOLA

So what do we do now? Start over?

NICK

No. We can just start where we left off. You can come back here and work for - I mean with - me and things will be better. Better than before.

NOLA

How?

NICK

I'll give you some of the advance.

NOLA

I want half.

NICK

But the renovation -

NOLA

Half or I walk out of here with the ending.

NICK

Okay. You can have half. I'll cancel the rest of the plans. I don't need a jacuzzi bathtub anyway.

NOLA

And I want credit. Not some bullshit thank you in the acknowledgments section in the back of the book. I want my name on the cover.

NICK

Your name on the cover?

NOLA

With yours, of course.

NICK

... Nick Walters and Nola ... what's your last name?

NOLA

Seriously? I've been working for you and you don't remember my name?

NICK

Let's figure out the order later.
What's important now is the ending.

NOLA

My ending.

NICK

You're right. So tell me, what's your plan?

Nick pops the tape in the recorder.

NOLA

The man -

NICK

- The killer.

NOLA

Yes. He is about to meet with the woman -

NICK

- You.

NOLA

Would you like to know what happens?

NICK

Yes.

NOLA

Then stop interrupting.

NICK

Right. Sorry. Continue.

NOLA

They meet at his place -

NICK

- Or she's already there. She sneaked into his house.

NOLA

I like that. It's very ... current.

NICK

I thought you might.

NOLA

Almost like what I did tonight.

NICK

That's why I suggested it.

NOLA

She wanted to surprise him. He's been keeping his distance because he doesn't trust himself around her. He tells her to leave because he can't control his urge to destroy her. She pleads with him to let her stay. There's a lot of tension - she wants to save him, but he wants to save her, and the only way they can do that is to be together and ... not be together. Which is impossible.

NICK

(pause)

That's it? Some philosophical bullshit about love and murder?

NOLA

No. There's more.

NICK

So what is it?

NOLA

I think it would be better if you didn't know. It would capture that whole spontaneity that you seem to enjoy so much.

NICK

I'm putting my book in your hands.

NOLA

Our book.

NICK

That's what I said.

NOLA

You said "My book."

NICK

No I said my book.

NOLA

If you're having second thoughts, I can leave.

NICK

No. I want to do this. I want to see our ending.

NOLA

My ending.

NICK

For our book, that is.

NOLA

Good.

*Nick is preparing the tape recorder as
Nola places herself at the stairway.*

NICK

I'm so glad we're doing this. It will sound more natural. Us authors can sit and type for hours, but what good is our work if it's not natural? Even with fiction, it has to sound real. Real is messy. Real is ugly. You stumble, but you get back up.

The tape recorder clicks. It's ready.

NICK

Just tell me when.

NOLA

When.

*Nick hits record. The lights come down. End
of Act II.*

ACT III

The lights come up on Nick's living room. Some time has passed marked by the alcohol level in the whiskey bottle. Nick and Nola appear to be drained from running the scene repeatedly.

NICK

I think it's your line now.

NOLA

Line?

NICK

Or turn.

NOLA

Where were we?

NICK

You were pleading to stay.

NOLA

I thought we did that bit already.

NICK

No. We didn't. ... Did we?

NOLA

I don't know anymore.

NICK

Why don't we start from there?

NOLA

What time is it?

NICK

Don't worry about time!

NOLA

It's not worry so much as ... curiosity.

NICK

Well curiosity killed the ... the thing ...

NOLA

Cat.

NICK

Yes. The fucking cat. (pause) I hate cats.

NOLA

Nick ...

NICK

They shit in a box and expect someone else to clean up their messes.

NOLA

You're getting off track again.

NICK

Huh?

NOLA

Stop talking about cats.

NICK

I'll talk whatever I want to talk about. This is my house.

NOLA

Let's get back to the scene.

NICK

I was never off the scene.

Nick pours himself some whiskey.

NOLA

Hey. ... Hey. HEY!

Nola throws a glass toward Nick's direction. Nick looks at Nola.

NICK

What the fuck are you doing?

NOLA

... Let me stay.

Nola approaches Nick. At his feet:

NOLA

Let me stay. Let me stay. Let me stay.

NICK

You can stay.

NOLA

What?

NICK

If you want.

NOLA

Nick -

NICK

- Like the old days.

Nick leans towards Nola and tries to kiss her. She pushes him away.

NOLA

The scene!

NICK

Oh. Is that what that was?

NOLA

Yes.

NICK

I liked mine better.

NOLA

You're drunk.

NICK

Mmm-hmm. Aren't you?

NOLA

No.

NICK

No? Why didn't you say something...

Nick gives her his glass and he takes the bottle. Takes a long sip out of it.

NOLA

How are we supposed to finish this if you're drunk?

NICK

You don't think that killer would be sober do you?

NOLA

Can we just get through this?

NICK

Okay. You're right.

Nick takes a sip of his drink. Shifts his posture.

NICK

You shouldn't be here.

NOLA

I'm sorry for showing up here like this.

NICK

You entered my house while I was gone -

NOLA

It was the only way.

NICK
I thought I made it very clear -

NOLA
- I knew you wouldn't let me come in if I knocked
on your door -

NICK
- that you weren't to come here.

NOLA
It's easier to ask for forgiveness than to
ask for permission.

NICK
Your point?

NOLA
Forgive me for tonight.

NICK
You need to leave.

NOLA
Why?

NICK
I told you. I don't trust myself around you.

NOLA
But I trust you.

NICK
You don't know me.

NOLA
I can't get to know you if you push me away.

NICK
I've done things. Terrible things.

NOLA
I don't care.

NICK
I've hurt people.

NOLA
You're hurting me by ... forcing me out of your
life.

NICK
No that's different. It's precisely because
I care for you that you must leave.

NOLA
Let me stay.

NICK

No.

NOLA

Please.

Nola kisses Nick.

NOLA

Let me stay.

Nola kisses Nick again.

NOLA

It can be good again. Like the old days. You remember the old days. We'd sit together. Drink together. Sleep together.

Nola leads Nick to the couch.

NICK

It can't.

NOLA

It can. Trust me.

Nola leans in and kisses Nick.

NOLA

Why don't we move this upstairs?

NICK

We will. Later.

NOLA

Come on. I want to go upstairs.

NICK

Not right now.

NOLA

We had good times up there. Remember?

NICK

I said later!

Nick gets up.

NICK

Stop mentioning the upstairs.

NOLA

Why?

NICK

I don't like it. It doesn't fit. It doesn't make sense.

NOLA

The upstairs was mentioned earlier in the scene when they came home. I just thought it would tie in to that scene.

NICK

Could you just ... fucking not say upstairs anymore?

NOLA

Okay. I won't.

NICK

Now what?

NOLA

The murder scene, I suppose.

NICK

(smiles)

Ah yes. The good old murder scene.

NOLA

We haven't made it this far yet.

NICK

We haven't have we?

NOLA

Are you excited?

NICK

Terribly.

NOLA

Good.

NICK

I'm all yours.

NOLA

I like the sound of that.

NICK

I thought you would.

NOLA

First we'll need that plastic.

NICK

What plastic?

NOLA

The plastic from the bookshelf.

Nola stands and crosses to the plastic draped over the bookcase.

NICK
Ah. That plastic.

NOLA
We'll need it on the couch.

NICK
On the couch?

NOLA
Unless you don't want to try it.

NICK
No, I'm game to try it.

NOLA
You don't have to humour me.

NICK
I'm not. I want to try it.

NOLA
Do you really?

NICK
Yes. It's the least I could do.

NOLA
Thank you.

*Nick and Nola remove the plastic
from the bookshelf.*

NOLA
You know it means a lot to me that you want
to do this.

NICK
It's a good idea. I'm glad you thought of it.

*Nick and Nola place the plastic on the
couch. The extra is draped over the
back.*

NOLA
Are you sure you want to do this?

NICK
Absolutely. I'm enjoying myself. Aren't you?

NOLA
Yes. I'm really touched that you trust me.

NICK
I would say curious more than trust.

NOLA

I'd be careful. You don't want to end up like that dead cat.

NICK

No I think I'll be fine. You on the other hand ...

NOLA

All in good time.

Nola kisses Nick. She then sits seductively on the couch.

NOLA

Come to the couch.

Nick crosses to the couch and sits.

NOLA

I think she sits with you -

NICK

You mean him?

NOLA

That's what I said.

NICK

No. You said me.

NOLA

Same difference, right?

Nola kisses Nick and pushes him on his back on the couch. She gets on top of him.

NOLA

She wants to make him think that she's interested in him. She keeps kissing him.

Nola kisses Nick.

NOLA

Then she moves to the clothes.

Nola starts to unbutton Nick's shirt.

NOLA

This is nice, isn't it?

NICK

Yes.

NOLA

It could be like this. You and me.

NICK

The good old days.

As Nola kisses him, she reaches for the whiskey bottle on the coffee table. She grabs it by the top and smashes it.

NICK

Jesus Christ -

NOLA

He wasn't expecting that.

Nola holds the broken top against his chest.

NICK

Okay. Why don't you put that down?

NOLA

I don't think we've played through the whole scene yet.

NICK

Nola come on. You've had your fun.

NOLA

Oh I've only just begun.

Nola drags the broken top against his body.

NICK

This is wrong -

Nick tries to sit up, but Nola pushes the broken top against his chest.

NOLA

Ah-ah-ah. I wouldn't do that. I've made some changes to the scene. If you don't mind.

Nola pushes Nick back down.

NOLA

Where do you think she makes the first cut?
In the stomach?

Nola holds the broken top above his stomach.

NOLA

Painful, but too long. Like you said, no one wants to sit and wait for death.

Nola holds the broken top against his throat.

NOLA

Maybe a good old fashioned throat slit. Or a jab to the artery. It would be fast, hardly any waiting. But it's not really significant.

Nola holds the broken top against his heart.

NOLA

I like the idea of a quick stab in the heart.
There's something poetic in one lover killing
another lover in the heart. Don't you think
so?

NICK

Yes, very poetic.

NOLA

How do you feel?

NICK

I like the idea. Can we move on?

NOLA

No. I want to know what you're feeling right now.

NICK

Why don't you put that down -

NOLA

Are you nervous?

*Nola inches up closer on him, leans in
and whispers:*

NOLA

I can feel your heart beating so fast.

Nola sits back up.

NOLA

You don't like it, do you?

NICK

No. I like it.

NOLA

I thought we were going to be honest.
Lay everything out in the open.

Nola pushes the bottle harder on Nick.

NICK

I like it, I like it a lot.

NOLA

Not that. That night.

NICK

What night?

NOLA

You know what fucking night I'm referring to. Say
it.

NICK
I told you I was sorry.

NOLA
Sorry for what?

NICK
It was wrong.

NOLA
Sorry for what?!

Nola scratches Nick with the broken top.

NICK
I'm sorry for drugging you Nola! There. Are you happy?!

Nola raises the bottle and lowers it to stab Nick, who screams. Nola stops right before reaching Nick. She then tosses the top aside and walks over to the tape player.

NICK
Jesus ...

Nick gets up off the couch as Nola stops the tape.

NICK
I thought you were going to fucking stab me.

NOLA
Yeah, well, I guess I really committed to this Nola character.

NICK
That was too far.

NOLA
I beg to disagree. Too far would be you be bleeding out on the couch. But I stopped before that. Because I know a good stopping point.

NICK
I don't like this Nola.

NOLA
Then you're going to hate my next move.

NICK
You're fucking up the book!

NOLA
No. You are.

Nola presses stop.

NOLA

I think I got what I came here for.

NICK

You can't leave. We're not finished.

NOLA

I am finished. And so are you.

NICK

You're staying until we get the ending.

NOLA

The ending is this: I walk out, get the rights to the entire book and fuck you over.

NICK

How do you expect to do that?

Nola presses play.

NICK (RECORDED)

I'm sorry for drugging you Nola! There! Are you happy?

Nola presses stop.

NOLA

You're / fucked.

NICK

Wait. / Just wait.

NOLA

I'm done waiting.

NICK

I can get you the money.

NOLA

This isn't about money. (beat) Okay, actually, it's not all about money. It's more about making you pay for being a hack of a writer and an even worse human being.

NICK

Then what do you want? I can get it for you.

NOLA

I want everything you have. And then some.

NICK

Don't. Don't do this. Please. I'm begging.

NOLA

No you're not.

NICK

Yes I'm begging -

NOLA

Then get on your fucking knees if you're going to beg.

Nick gets down on his knees.

NICK

Please Nola. This is it. This is everything. You can have it. Just don't ... don't destroy me.

NOLA

I didn't destroy you. You destroyed yourself when you
... well you know what you did to me that night.

Nola leans down, almost kissing Nick.

NOLA

You brought this on yourself.

NICK

You and I ... we could have toppled the world.

NOLA

I'd rather topple it alone.

Nola also takes the manuscript from its hiding place.

NOLA

I'm taking this. I feel I'm owed it. After everything I did for you.

Nick rises and crosses to Nola.

NICK

Just tell me ...

Nick grabs Nola's hand.

NICK

Did you really keep your word about us? That you kept our relationship a secret?

NOLA

I did. Unlike you I keep my promises.

NICK

Thank you.

In one swift move Nick stabs her with the broken bottle.

NICK

(whispers to Nola)
Now this is everything.

Nick pulls back his hand, now covered in blood, and forces the manuscript and tape from her arms. Nick tosses them aside - they have to be away from the mess.

Nola is taken aback. She slumping over, coughing and breathing heavily. She falls to floor.

Then, after a moment, she laughs.

NOLA

You poor fool.

Nola stands up. She's untouched by the stabbing.

NICK

That's impossible. I stabbed you.

NOLA

Yet I'm not the one who's bleeding.

Nick looks down. He's bleeding from his stomach.

NICK

This isn't right.

NOLA

You're just getting that now?

NICK

How did you do this?

Nick tries to walk toward Nola, but falls to the ground.

NOLA

Not me. You.

NICK

I didn't stab myself!

NOLA

Well I couldn't have.

NICK

What the fuck are you saying? You're the only other person here!

Nick stumbles up on his feet.

Nola presses play on the tape player.

NICK (RECORDED)

I like it, I like it a lot.

(silence)

Not that. That night.

(silence)

What night?

NICK

Where is your voice?

Why can't I hear your
voice on this tape?!

NICK (RECORDED)

(silence)

I told you I was
sorry.

(silence)

It was wrong.

(silence)

I'm sorry for drugging
you!

Nick stops the tape.

NOLA

If I existed in this world, it's because you let
me exist. You said that to me.

NICK

You're here.

NOLA

Technically I never left.

NICK

Stop this fucking game.

NOLA

I will if you will.

NICK

If you never left, then where were you?

NOLA

Upstairs. Where you left me.

Nick coughs up blood.

NICK

Ah shit. Call an ambulance.

NOLA

I can't. No phones, remember?

Nick crawls to the couch.

NICK

Why are you here?

NOLA

I presume your guilty conscience. But I'm not a psychologist.

NICK

This isn't funny.

NOLA

It's not supposed to be funny.

NICK

What happened that night?

NOLA

What night?

NICK

The night that I ... you know.

NOLA

Oh. You mean the night you drugged me?

NICK

Yes. That one.

NOLA

You knew I was writing behind your back. I think you just wanted to scare me, but it got out of hand. You just ... forgot it wasn't like in your books, where it's not really happening. The next day, when I wasn't fine, when I didn't wake up ...
You panicked. Left me on the roof. The smell though ... it gets to you.

NICK

- No. That didn't happen. It was in the book. It was just a scene. I made it up. We made it up.

NOLA

You didn't make it up. You lived it. The only way you know how to create is to destroy. That's why you destroyed me.

Nola hands him the flash drive.

NOLA

You found this in my purse.

NICK

I always ... *(Nick grimaces with pain)* wondered ... what it was. Is your ending really on here?

NOLA

I don't know. I could have been lying.

NICK

I think it's on here. ... My book ...
it's finished now.

NOLA

They'll find out what you did to me. They'll
brand you a murderer.

*Nick is almost breathless, really
forcing himself to talk.*

NICK

The murderer angle ... would almost certainly ...
entitle me to sales.

NOLA

Oh yes. I'm sure it would.

NICK

Do you ... think I would ... make ... the
New York Times list?

NOLA

Without a doubt.

NICK

It's been years ... since I was on that list.

NOLA

Too many years.

NICK

I always thought I could make number one.

NOLA

We.

NICK

Hmm?

NOLA

We could make number one.

NICK

Yes. We.

*Nick's breathing becomes frantic. He's in a
lot of pain now.*

NOLA

So. Here we are.

NICK

Yes. Here we are.

*Nola leans in
close to Nick.*

NOLA

Shall we go upstairs now?

NICK

No. I think here is good.

*Nick takes a breath. He then reaches up to Nola.
He takes her hair and arranges it so it falls down
across her shoulders. Takes another deep breath.*

NICK

There. Much better.

Nola gets up and walks toward the upstairs exit.

NOLA

Nick?

NICK

Hmm?

NOLA

Do you know what happens at the end of everything?

NICK

No. What?

NOLA

This.

She turns off the light. Blackout.

End of play.