

DOING TIME

A play in one act

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**SYNOPSIS:**

Confined in close quarters, a young man attempts to write his "Book of Life" amidst an old man's interruptions. As their needs collide, underscoring the significance of memory and the consequences of an undocumented life, they ultimately give each other two versions of the same gift: freedom.

**CHARACTERS:**

OLD MAN: 65+, frail and disheveled, kind-hearted and placid.

YOUNG MAN: 18-20, clean, neatly dressed in a white shirt and brown pants. Idealistic, fervent, and given to declamation.

**SETTING:**

No specific time period is apparent. A small, bare room. Two chairs, one table, a bowl on the table. There is only one tiny open window, high on the wall, and a door. It is before dawn.

*Old Man sits with a flute-like instrument (recorder, perhaps), attempting to play. He is calm, methodical in his playing, and eventually it becomes clear that he is trying to play one specific melody from beginning to end.*

*He stops playing for a moment, gets up, and looks at the window. With some effort, he carries a chair to the window, stands on it unsteadily, gazes out. He plays a few notes out the window, waits, listens. He does this again.*

*As he is listening, the door is flung open and Young Man stumbles in as though pushed. He is carrying an enormous bundle of loose papers, and is writing with a fountain pen on one paper on the top of the stack. He does not see Old Man, who is now behind him.*

YOUNG MAN

(to whoever pushed him)

Careful!

(back to his papers)

Where...?

(pause)

Oh. Here.

*Young Man writes, standing up. Old Man -- on the chair still -- watches him write for some time, and then finally plays a note.*

*Young Man emits a startled cry and the stack falls to the floor, scattering all over.*

You idiot! Ugh! Look at this-- what you've done! I had no idea anyone was in here!

OLD MAN

I'm terribly sorry.

YOUNG MAN

You should be! Sneaking up on someone like that--

OLD MAN

I didn't sneak; I've been here.

YOUNG MAN

Well, what are you doing here-- there?

OLD MAN

Playing.

YOUNG MAN

Yes, I can--

OLD MAN

I'm sorry if I startled you.

YOUNG MAN

I didn't know you were there. Here.

OLD MAN

I was. I am.

YOUNG MAN

I see. Well, that's just peachy. Just my good fortune. What a mess. Look at this! Thank you very much, now everything is out of order. Damn! Damn, damn, damn!

*(sifting through the papers on the floor)*

Oh, I don't have time for this. Argh! What's this. No, that's not it. Let's see. Is this... no. Wait. This is... Is it? No. Of course not. Where am I?

*(looking through the papers)*

Is this...? No, that's yesterday. That should be...

*(thinks he is finding the correct page)*

Wait...

OLD MAN

Can I help in some way?

YOUNG MAN

*(distractedly)*

Hmm?

OLD MAN

Can I--

YOUNG MAN

Ha! There we are. Excellent.

(pause)

No. This isn't it.

(wails)

Oh, I will go insane! What have you done?

OLD MAN

I apologize. What can I do?

YOUNG MAN

Nothing. Do nothing, please.

(still looking)

Oh, please, please, please, please, please... please, pretty please... oh... perhaps... yes...? Oh yes... Yes! Thank god! Finally!

*He reads from the paper, quickly and under his breath, skipping words.*

*French toast...blah di blah... took from me... mm hmm... waiting for the magistrate... don't know... blah blah blah... in the dark. Excellent. There we are.*

*Still on the floor, Young Man begins to write furiously and obliviously. Old Man sits on the chair, watches. Then he begins to play his flute again.*

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

I beg your pardon sir, but... the muses beckon.

OLD MAN

Certainly, certainly. Don't let me keep you from them.

YOUNG MAN

Thank you, sir.

*He writes. Pause. Old Man plays again.*

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

Um-- excuse me, gentle sir, but--

OLD MAN

Yes?

YOUNG MAN

Um... must you play upon your pipe right now?

OLD MAN

Must I.

YOUNG MAN

Yes.

OLD MAN

Must. As though I have no say in the matter. I must.

YOUNG MAN

Well, yes, I--

OLD MAN

An excellent question, son. Excellent. Do I play because I must? Or because I choose to? And how do I know the difference? Perhaps I think I must, but in reality it is only the most appealing choice. Or, I think I choose to, but really, I am compelled to play by forces beyond my will. Let me ponder this.

YOUNG MAN

I really didn't intend to--

OLD MAN

To what?

YOUNG MAN

Well, to stoke the flames of some sort of debate--

OLD MAN

I see.

YOUNG MAN

I just meant--

OLD MAN

I know. You want quiet.

YOUNG MAN

Yes, you see-- "I am the vessel that needs be filled no more, no less than each moment brings..."

OLD MAN

Pardon?

YOUNG MAN

"I am merely a horse. It is the pen that rides me."

OLD MAN

I'm sorry, son, I'm not quite--

YOUNG MAN

Sir. To be perfectly frank: to debate with you would draw me away from (indicates book) my maison d'etre.

OLD MAN

Raison. Raison d'etre?

YOUNG MAN

Exactly. Yes. Thus I ask you to give me the solitude I beseech.

OLD MAN

I can do that.

YOUNG MAN

Thank you, I apologize for--

OLD MAN

No, no. No apologies necessary.

YOUNG MAN

Thank you. You are a noble and gentle man, sir.

*Young Man goes back to writing. Old Man sits quietly, watching. He fingers the flute, then is still. Finally:*

OLD MAN

Plenty of paper.

YOUNG MAN

Hmm?

OLD MAN

Paper. Reams of it.

YOUNG MAN

(attempting to ignore him)

Hmm, yes.

*Old Man fingers his flute. Pause. He then lifts it to his lips, closes his eyes, and pretends to play, swaying as he does. He stops, suddenly, as though he has just had a thought:*

OLD MAN

A sweetheart?

YOUNG MAN

(ignoring him)

What?

OLD MAN

(indicating the papers)

Do you have a sweetheart?

*Young Man shakes his head no, continues to write.*  
A family.

*Young Man does not look up, shakes his head no.*  
Ah. A childhood friend. Of course.

YOUNG MAN  
(frustrated)

No! Please.

(at the end of his rope)

I'm sorry, but I thought we understood each other. I really must ask you--

OLD MAN

You must?

YOUNG MAN

Alright, I choose to.

OLD MAN

That's better. I apologize--

YOUNG MAN

Thank you, and your apology is accepted and duly noted. However. You simply cannot keep interrupting me like this, alright?

(to himself)

And I thought the music was bad--

OLD MAN

My music is bad?

YOUNG MAN

No, not-- not specifically your music-- your music is fine. I mean, any distraction is bad.

OLD MAN

Any? How can you generalize with such impunity? I couldn't possibly think of--

YOUNG MAN

I know. You're right. I shouldn't generalize. "Generality is the limestone of life."

(takes a deep breath)

Now. Please. I can't afford to let you bleed into my work, it's far too important.

OLD MAN

I see. I had no idea. Please, continue.

YOUNG MAN

Thank you.

*Young Man writes. Old Man sits quietly. He fingers the flute, lifts it to his lips, inhales deeply, then stops. He returns the flute to his lap. He watches Young Man. He again lifts the flute to his lips, and again stops. This time he speaks:*

OLD MAN

You are hard at it, aren't you?

YOUNG MAN

(utterly exasperated)

Yes! I am! What is wrong with you? Can't you see I'm busy?

OLD MAN

Of course--

YOUNG MAN

Then leave me alone!

OLD MAN

Goodness! Such a display of incivility!

YOUNG MAN

I'm sorry.

OLD MAN

I merely made a passing comment--

YOUNG MAN

No! You made one passing comment ages ago! Since then you have made hundreds of these intrusive little non-sequiturs which I believe, based on their sheer volume, have since amounted to a full-fledged, albeit one-sided, conversation. Now. If you will allow me to--

OLD MAN

I was merely trying to pass the time.

YOUNG MAN

(incredulous)

Pass the...pass the time?

OLD MAN

Exactly.

YOUNG MAN

My god, how could you-- Time is not meant to be passed! One passes salt! One passes a hat! One passes out! One passes, perhaps, a kidney stone if one is particularly unfortunate! But certainly not time! There is not enough of it to treat it so...so wantonly!

OLD MAN

I see.

YOUNG MAN

Now please. There is not much time left. So please, please keep yourself to yourself. This is too important--



OLD MAN

Yes, it must be terribly important. You've been at it non-stop. What are you writing?

YOUNG MAN

I DON'T HAVE TIME TO TELL YOU!

OLD MAN

My boy, if you take the time to tell me you don't have time, then surely--

YOUNG MAN

Alright! For the love of god. If I tell you, will you promise to leave me alone?

OLD MAN

I promise.

(crosses his heart solemnly)

On my life.

YOUNG MAN

Yes, well... alright.

OLD MAN

(happily)

Excellent.

YOUNG MAN

It is... my Book of Life.

OLD MAN

A Book of Life! How marvelous!

YOUNG MAN

(unconvinced)

Mm, yes. Why don't you have one?

OLD MAN

I don't know. Perhaps...I used to have one.

YOUNG MAN

Where is it?

OLD MAN

No idea.

YOUNG MAN

(shocked)

What?

OLD MAN

I'm sorry. My memory is...  
(inspired)

My memory is like the greasy fingers of an old fisherman; my thoughts wriggle free and swim away, just as I'm reaching out to grab them.

(pleased)

Ha! How's that?

YOUNG MAN

(indignant)

Everyone is supposed to have one, to write down every event, every milestone of life.

OLD MAN

What a task.

YOUNG MAN

(grimly)

It's not a task. It's an utter joy. Without it my life would be meaningless.

OLD MAN

Really?

YOUNG MAN

Of course! Who could let their experiences simply float away, like petals on the breeze?

OLD MAN

I do that.

YOUNG MAN

I couldn't.

(flatly, as though reciting a memorized oath:)

"Writing is the pinnacle, the zenith of human experience. Through it I am magnified and distilled, exalted and humbled."--

OLD MAN

Goodness.

YOUNG MAN

"To write is to truly live."

*He begins to write again. Pause.*

OLD MAN

Have you ever--

YOUNG MAN

You promised, remember?

OLD MAN

Promised what?

YOUNG MAN  
To leave me alone!

OLD MAN  
Did I?

YOUNG MAN  
(seriously, with sympathy)  
Oh, God. Is your memory that bad?

OLD MAN  
(smiles broadly)  
What do you think?

YOUNG MAN  
By God, you will drive me insane! Enough!  
*He writes.*

OLD MAN  
But I have so many questions!

YOUNG MAN  
You promised--

OLD MAN  
I know, but--

YOUNG MAN  
--and time may be running out, as we both know.

OLD MAN  
Time is always running out. A funny phrase, isn't it? Out  
of where? To where?

YOUNG MAN  
You know what I mean. Today might--

OLD MAN  
Oh, yes, yes, yes. I forgot.

YOUNG MAN  
(writes)  
So much has happened just in the last few minutes...

OLD MAN  
The last few... you mean... you are caught up to the very  
present?

YOUNG MAN  
Yes! But not if I keep talking.

OLD MAN  
 I see! Oh, then, by all means, you must write.  
 (pause)  
 Might I read what you've written?

YOUNG MAN  
 No.

OLD MAN  
 Just to pass the t-- um, I mean, I would very much like to  
 see how it's done.

YOUNG MAN  
 Sorry.

OLD MAN  
 Please?

YOUNG MAN  
 No!

OLD MAN  
 I'll be quiet.

YOUNG MAN  
 I've never let anyone read it.

OLD MAN  
 I won't criticize.

YOUNG MAN  
 I don't even read it myself.

OLD MAN  
 No? I thought--

YOUNG MAN  
 No time.

OLD MAN  
 Of course.

(pause)  
 Please?

YOUNG MAN  
 Well... You won't laugh?

OLD MAN  
 Of course not.

YOUNG MAN  
 You promise?

Absolutely.

OLD MAN

No.

YOUNG MAN  
(hesitates, then)

Oh, come now.

OLD MAN

No.

YOUNG MAN

Please?

OLD MAN

No!

YOUNG MAN

I'll be quiet.

OLD MAN  
(pause)

Really?

YOUNG MAN  
(after consideration)

Yes!

OLD MAN

You'll really be quiet?

YOUNG MAN

*Old Man nods.*  
Well... alright.

Bravo.

OLD MAN

Here.

YOUNG MAN

(sifts through, hands him a  
few pages)  
This is... yes, this is yesterday.

Thank you, lad.

OLD MAN

*He reads as Young Man begins to write. His countenance is very serious at first, then he smiles. Young Man looks up, forces himself to go back to his writing. Old Man starts nodding, smiling, Young Man notices again, stares at him. Old Man sees him staring, immediately straightens his face into seriousness once again. Young Man returns to writing.*

*Old Man reads very seriously for a few more lines, then laughs out loud.*

YOUNG MAN

What!?

OLD MAN

Nothing, it's nothing-- I'm sorry. Please, write.

YOUNG MAN

What is it? You promised not to laugh!

OLD MAN

I'm sorry-- I'll be quiet.

YOUNG MAN

But I must know why you laughed.

OLD MAN

You--

YOUNG MAN

Yes, I must.

OLD MAN

I see. Well then. I laughed-- How shall I say this. I laughed at-- at--

YOUNG MAN

At what?

OLD MAN

At this:

(reads from the pages)

"I slept well last night and awoke earlier than yesterday. After bathing, I ate a peach for breakfast. It was large-- roughly the size of my fist-- and it had three soft spots. I also drank a large glass of milk, which was slightly warm. I've put on my white shirt and the brown pants and shoes I wore yesterday. The soles of these shoes seem to be wearing a little thin. Should I take them to a cobbler? Speaking of cobbler, the peach did not agree with me, and I am now feeling slightly dyspeptic."

*Old Man laughs again.*

YOUNG MAN

What's so funny about that?

OLD MAN

Lad, is your whole book like this?

YOUNG MAN

Like what?

OLD MAN

Like... a running commentary on the minutiae of your daily life?

YOUNG MAN

You-- you--

OLD MAN

Don't be angry, son-- I'm not criticizing. I'm just surprised, that's all. I didn't know that was what a "Book of Life" was all about.

YOUNG MAN

What did you think?

OLD MAN

I thought it would be different. More...

YOUNG MAN

More what.

OLD MAN

More... more... oh, what's that word.  
(pretending he can't  
remember)

My mind, you know...

YOUNG MAN

More what. You know. Don't pretend you don't.

OLD MAN

Alright then. More... poetic.

YOUNG MAN

Poetic.

OLD MAN

Yes.

YOUNG MAN

Poetic.

OLD MAN

Yes.

YOUNG MAN

As opposed to... what, prosaic? Is that what you're saying? My writing is prosaic? Go on, say it. It's banal. Commonplace.

(sounding out every  
syllable:)

Ped-es-tri-an.

OLD MAN

No,-- now, don't get all worked up here.

YOUNG MAN

No!

(hurt)

That's fine. I can take it. It's fine.

OLD MAN

You don't seem fine.

YOUNG MAN

I am. I'm fine. Alright?

OLD MAN

It's just that, based on your speech, I thought-- that is, I assumed, your writing would be--

YOUNG MAN

More poetic, yes, well, it's not. Now. I must continue. Do you mind?

OLD MAN

Not at all. Please do.

*Pause, while Old Man looks around and fingers his flute, not playing. He lifts it to his lips, looks at the Young Man, puts it down.*

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Excuse me--

*Young Man looks up, glaring.*

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Do you mind if I play?

*Young Man shakes his head no slowly, glaring.*

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Um, is that no, you don't mind, or no, don't play?

YOUNG MAN

Play! Don't play! I don't care! Just don't interrupt me!

*Old Man nods emphatically, puts a finger to his lips.*

*Young Man returns to writing. Old Man picks up his chair, puts it in front of the small window, stands on it, looks out. He smiles to himself, then begins to play the flute at the window. This continues for 15-20 seconds. Then:*

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

(sadly)

You're right. It is prosaic. But I don't have time for anything else.



OLD MAN  
(to him)

I know.

(indicates the window,  
whispers:)

They are all sleeping still.

YOUNG MAN  
(reacts violently)

NO! Oh, no! This cannot be!

(shakes the pen vigorously,  
attempts to write)

Oh, God in heaven-- NO!

(shakes it violently, attempt  
to write)

Oh my God, I am lost! No, no, no, no...

(puts his head down on his  
tome, rocks it back and  
forth)

...no, no, no--

OLD MAN

Goodness...

YOUNG MAN

Oh, please God, make it not so--

OLD MAN

You have run out?

YOUNG MAN

It cannot be...

OLD MAN

What a terrible misfortune, my boy. Oh, goodness.

YOUNG MAN

What will I do? How will I go on? My life is over!  
Meaningless!

(sobs into his book)

What will I do? I am ruined, ruined...

OLD MAN

Wait! Wait--

YOUNG MAN

What.

OLD MAN

I think I may have--

*Old Man searches through his pockets.*

What--  
 YOUNG MAN

I know I had it earlier...  
 OLD MAN

Oh please, please--  
 YOUNG MAN

Hold on, hold on... Aha! Here it is!  
 OLD MAN

*Old Man pulls out a penknife.*

Thank you, God!  
 YOUNG MAN

Oh, wait-- no, no, that's my knife. So sorry.  
 OLD MAN

*Young Man emits a cry.*

Now, wait. I know it's here somewhere.  
 OLD MAN (CONT'D)  
 (searches)

Is it...no, it's got to be...

Oh please, God, let him find it. Please, please, please...  
 YOUNG MAN

I'm certain it has to be here... Maybe I...no...  
 OLD MAN

Please.  
 YOUNG MAN

Wait... I think... Yes! Here it is!  
 OLD MAN  
 (pulls out a pen)

Really?  
 YOUNG MAN

Yes! Look!  
 OLD MAN

Oh, bless you old man, you have saved me!  
 YOUNG MAN

Here you go.  
 OLD MAN  
 (hands it to him)

YOUNG MAN

Thank you! Thank God!

OLD MAN

Glad to be of service. (pause) Well, go to it.

YOUNG MAN

Yes, of course.

(happily)

New pen.

*He begins to write; the pen does not work. He shakes it, casually at first, then with increasing desperation and anger as it still does not work. He finally flings it across the room viciously and then collapses in his chair. He lays his head on the desk and moans quietly to himself, almost in a state of shock.*

OLD MAN

(coming over to him)

You mustn't take it so hard, lad. I'm sure--

YOUNG MAN

Take it so hard? You have no idea what this means. None.

OLD MAN

Perhaps I don't.

YOUNG MAN

Ha! How could you know? A man whose life consists of playing the same tune on a flute over and over?

OLD MAN

You're right, that is my life now, son. But it hasn't always been so.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, who cares. I just want a pen.

OLD MAN

Of course, I'm not certain of that--

YOUNG MAN

I can't live like that! Uncertain of the details of my life! Oh, god!

*Young Man gets up, finds the defective pen, and begins a pattern of alternately hitting things with it and trying to write with it.*

OLD MAN

Listen to me, boy. Pull yourself together.

YOUNG MAN

I can't!

OLD MAN

You must. What does it matter now how I lived my life? Who cares?

YOUNG MAN

That's right. Who cares? No one, that's who. No one will ever know and no one will ever care!

OLD MAN

Listen--

YOUNG MAN

I want my PEN!

OLD MAN

I may have done a hundred things in my youth. Maybe I touched a soft cheek, or held a child sick with fever... or perhaps, God forbid, I murdered a friend for his money.

YOUNG MAN

(still hitting things)

That's fine, fine.

OLD MAN

Listen to me. Sit down.

YOUNG MAN

No.

OLD MAN

I'm trying to help you, son.

YOUNG MAN

A pen would help.

OLD MAN

Maybe talking would help.

YOUNG MAN

Writing would help. "Talk won't cook rice."

OLD MAN

What?

YOUNG MAN

How can you live without writing? How can you live, not knowing who you are?

OLD MAN

I am who I am right now, in this moment. Must an ocean beach remember each wave that pounded its shore to know its present coastline?

(pleased with that one)

Oh, that's a good one, don't you think?

YOUNG MAN

No, I don't. I just want a pen. Get me a pen, I'll listen to anything you want to say to me. Alright? And I'm not a beach.

OLD MAN

You are entirely too literal.

YOUNG MAN

Don't you get it? A life without memory just is not as significant as one with it!

*Pause.*

OLD MAN

My life is not as significant as yours?

YOUNG MAN

I don't mean that--

OLD MAN

No. That's alright.

YOUNG MAN

(genuinely; stops hitting things with the pen)

Wait, I'm sorry--

OLD MAN

No, no...

YOUNG MAN

I apologize. It's just that-- you're content to live this way--

OLD MAN

Yes, I am.

YOUNG MAN

I believe you are. And perhaps, if I had known from my first day on this earth that I would live free of memory, then yes, I would probably be content to do so as well. I would live each day lightly...each moment unfolding like a destiny.

OLD MAN

Yes!

YOUNG MAN

But I can't.

OLD MAN

Yes, you can--

YOUNG MAN

No. As soon as I was old enough to write, I was taught to document myself. At first, it was so easy. A child's life has the simplicity of...a spring rain. Here:

(fishes in the papers and reads from one:)

"Mom made me a cheese sandwich for lunch. It was good. I played war with Thomas. I won. Goodnight." But then I grew, and so did the complexity of my life and mind. Listen:

(reading from another page)

"It is late and I wish I could sleep, but so much happened today. Mr. Rinaldi chastised me in front of the whole class for falling asleep during geometry, and I had to stand for the rest of the period. I know my face was red, I was so embarrassed. And now I'm worried that Diana will think I'm stupid, or lazy. But I was so tired..." You see? I found I couldn't keep up. And love?

(miserably)

Oh, God! Unlike you, I know I caressed a soft cheek, it is written--

(flips back in book, points)

Here. Oh, and--

(points again)

Here. But all those emotions, the conflicting desires that love inevitably brings -- how could I possibly get them all down? And live them as well? I couldn't. So I simply gave up -- on relationships, on love -- in the interest of-- of historical accuracy.

(in utter despair)

And that has made me...happy.

OLD MAN

Until now.

YOUNG MAN

What else can I do? I have to write. This has been my life. It's all I know. And it's much too late now to change.

OLD MAN

Not true.

YOUNG MAN

Yes, it is. Yes!

(near tears; weak)

You see now, don't you? Without this, I'm faceless! A...a hiccup of history! If I cannot remember myself, and I am not recorded permanently, how will anyone know I existed?



Don't even think it. YOUNG MAN

Really, it might-- OLD MAN

No. YOUNG MAN

Just a little. OLD MAN

Not a note. YOUNG MAN

Hmm. Yes, well. OLD MAN

*Young Man places his head on his folded arms on the table, and closes his eyes. Old Man stealthily picks up his pipe and begins to play, softly.*

Oh, lord. YOUNG MAN

*Old Man continues to play.*  
Oh, that your pipe were filled with ink.

*Old Man ignores him, plays.*  
Do you take requests?

Shh. Listen. OLD MAN

*Old Man plays.*

YOUNG MAN  
(after a while)  
That's quite nice.

Ha! OLD MAN

*Old Man plays.*

YOUNG MAN  
No, really-- Is that the same tune you were playing before?

*Old Man nods.*  
Hmph.

*Old Man continues playing. Lights rise as the sound of birds beginning to chirp is heard. Dawn is breaking.*



OLD MAN

Ah, they are finally awake!

YOUNG MAN

How beautiful! What a sweet song! I've never heard such lovely sounds before. What I would give to hear such music forever...

OLD MAN

Of course!

YOUNG MAN

What?

OLD MAN

That's it!

YOUNG MAN

What.

OLD MAN

Now listen to me. You must write to live, yes?

YOUNG MAN

Yes, but--

OLD MAN

But without ink, you cannot write.

YOUNG MAN

Of course.

OLD MAN

Pick up your pen.

YOUNG MAN

Why? I'm rather enjoying--

OLD MAN

Just do it. For me.

*Young Man picks up the pen.*

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Now. Write.

*Old Man turns his back to him and the audience.*

YOUNG MAN

But there still is no ink!

OLD MAN  
 (turns around, penknife in  
 one hand, wrist bleeding)  
 Write. Here is your ink.

YOUNG MAN  
 Oh... God--

OLD MAN  
 Get the pen.

YOUNG MAN  
 (going to him)  
 No, let me help you--

OLD MAN  
 The pen.

*Old Man sits, lets the blood flow into the bowl on the table.*

YOUNG MAN  
 What have you done--

OLD MAN  
 Write, boy. Now you must write.

YOUNG MAN  
 But--

OLD MAN  
 Write.

YOUNG MAN  
 Why did you do this? For me?

OLD MAN  
 For us. Write.

YOUNG MAN  
 But... (pause) Yes. I must.

OLD MAN  
 (smiles; fading)  
 Good boy.

YOUNG MAN  
 I'm-- I'm not--

OLD MAN  
 (laying his head down on the  
 table)  
 Shh. Write. Write... and live.

*Young Man picks up his pen, dips it into the bowl, and begins to write. He writes slowly at first, then gathers momentum. He stops abruptly, looks at Old Man, then continues. He finishes what he is writing, picks up the page and reads it aloud:*

YOUNG MAN

"Ordinary mortal, I-- (so I think)  
 Skimming, flitting o'er the surface  
 of a cool pond:  
 A waterwalker at dawn.  
 So intent on my purpose that  
 I narrow my gaze to shield the glare  
 of a nascent sun.  
 But the simple song of an ancient swan  
 In the pearly grey of morning  
 Ever so gently lifts the veil  
 and opens my eyes:  
 Bloody, I am born."

*He puts it down and picks up Old Man's flute. He begins to play, slowly attempting the Old Man's tune. As he plays, he cannot see the door behind him open slowly. The light grows brighter. Sensing something, he stops playing and turns around to see the door is standing open behind him. He looks forward. Blackout.*

END OF PLAY