

THE INEVITABLE DEIGN

By Alan Flurry

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

The idea for this began with a single a conversation with a painter buddy in his studio. He was describing a casino experience, especially an episode with the slots, 'praying to imaginary Gods,' which is what I called this as I spun out the first draft.

He's a Beckett fan, as am I, and I'm also poisoned with certain ideas about theatre – my novel CANSVILLE is about a playwright and an impossible story. Brecht is an influence, but also Miller – Arthur, as well as Henry. It's one thing to say setting doesn't matter, but THE INEVITABLE DEIGN trades the audience something for it. The physical scene changes themselves play a crucial role early in the play establishing a breakdown of the setting changes as a throughway for the dialogue and allowing the audience to set aside normal expectations.

The narrative becomes the means by which fear, conformity and convention are turned against themselves and towards illumination of the barriers to imagination.

ACT I

Scene 1

TIME: Morning, present day.

AT RISE: PRITCHER is seated behind a desk in a brightly lit office with a diploma and a few other citations on the wall, family pictures on display; his is the general demeanor of an insurance agent. DORMINY enters the room as one might to fulfill an earlier agreed upon appointment, expected and welcomed.

DORMINY

Mr. Pritchett?

PRITCHER

Yes, come in - and it's Pritchett.

DORMINY

(embarrassed)

Oh... I'm terribly sorry.

PRITCHER

(forgivingly)

Please, think nothing of it, I only like to correct things like that at the earliest possible moment. It's a character flaw, really. Won't you sit down?

(Dorminy hesitates momentarily before continuing into the office to one of the two seats on the other side of the desk. She puts her purse in one and sits in the other. She glances around at the walls and their adornments, re-comports herself as if in adjustment to them and sighs.)

DORMINY

Thank you, and I appreciate you seeing me on such short notice. The accident has created a great deal of chaos that I'd just as soon resolve as easily and quickly as we can.

PRITCHER

That's why we're here. Now tell me, did the house seem as if it was going to give way, I mean, were there any warning signs?

DORMINY

Well, what do you mean? Are there ever? I mean to say, we watch the news, we knew the storms were on the way and the fires were close. But you never know. In hindsight...

PRITCHER

I'm sorry, I don't mean to say you should have... done anything differently, that is. I'm just trying to establish your state of mind prior to the accident, relevant to the state of house. So, there were no warning signs?

(DORMINY slouches in her chair, as if under some initial anxiety, and shakes her head.)

DORMINY

No, but when you put it like that, I have to ask myself if I was paying attention, watching the right things. I mean, I was.

PRITCHER

We all do.

DORMINY

But the question is, to what? I don't know that I can excuse myself from responsibility properly if I can say I was aware of what was happening.

PRITCHER

The thing to remember is that I'm not here to accuse you, just to establish a concrete set of facts, a sort of chronology we can agree on.

DORMINY

That's a lot more easily said than done, I'm afraid.

PRITCHER

Still we need to do it in order to move forward.

DORMINY

But isn't there a tendency to cover for ourselves even when we've done nothing wrong?

(PRITCHER nods.)

PRITCHER

There is; that's why it's even more important to try and reconstruct the situation exactly as it was.

DORMINY

Yes, well, okay. I suppose it's prudent to spike my contention that there were no warning signs, as I'm overcome with the sensation that there must've been.

PRITCHER

What were they?

DORMINY

Well that's just it. The more sure I am that there were, the more unable I am to think of them. It's like my mind has taken the intervening events and constructed an unavoidable basis which led up to them.

PRITCHER

Is it because things like this don't just happen?

DORMINY

That's probably part of it - except that they do. They happen every day.

PRITCHER

But what is the condition, you know, that was necessary and sufficient? I mean, there's a school of thought that says accidents are nothing more than well-constructed probabilities.

DORMINY

Well... so many things. You can go back so far until it looks like you're moving forward again. Us sitting right here could be one thing. I mean, they're related, but my house couldn't have burned down unless I didn't at some point move into it. Unless you're...

PRITCHER

What?

DORMINY

Oh, it's ridiculous.

PRITCHER

Go ahead. It might help.

DORMINY

Well, unless you're inferring that my house would have burned no matter where and what it was. Simply because it was mine.

PRITCHER

That does transcend circumstances, to an extent. But tell me, even then, would you have been able to say that was a condition you were aware of?

(DORMINY pauses.)

DORMINY

I think I see what you mean. It would have always been a possibility.

PRITCHER

Though taken one step further, toward being inevitable.

DORMINY

And that I would have had to accept.

PRITCHER

And to some degree forget.

DORMINY

I can't go around waiting for something to happen, after all, even an eventuality.

PRITCHER

Which is where we were.

DORMINY

Yes, as I was saying, I feel like I should have known.

PRITCHER

But you did.

DORMINY

I just forgot, and now I'm only vaguely aware of it. Tell me, what does that do to my claim?

PRITCHER

Well that depends on if you're claiming that were not aware of the situation beforehand. It seems to me as if you're saying you were.

DORMINY

So, there's really no defense?

PRITCHER

Against what? Something happening, or you being responsible for it?

DORMINY

I mean, my culpability is undeniable. I knew about something and did nothing to prevent it.

PRITCHER

Can we say that with certainty? Even you alluded to the prejudice that you somehow internalized it and went on with your life.

DORMINY

That somehow doesn't completely wash, now that it's happened and I'm trying to sort all this out.

PRITCHER

You seek absolution; that's hard to achieve. Maybe you should think about it some more, about what really happened, and whether you really want to be released from your responsibility.

DORMINY

Oh?

PRITCHER

Because once it's gone, there's no way of getting it back.

DORMINY

Hmm. Maybe that's what I'm really afraid of.

PRITCHER

Maybe it is, in which case you need to resolve your responsibility in this case but without overstating your role.

DORMINY

You sound skeptical.

PRITCHER

It's exceedingly difficult. I will tell you one thing, however. I've watched a number of people go

(CONTINUED)

through this, all with varying degrees of success. But they've all developed a humility which, no matter how honorable it seems at the time, always becomes an obstacle.

DORMINY

It seems like such a simple thing.

PRITCHER

That's exactly the problem. What we want to believe, we often conflate into truth before it deserves to be so.

(DORMINY contemplates this point for an extended moment, as her posture - physically and otherwise - has changed in relation to PRITCHER. During the last two minutes of dialogue, their setting has changed: the office setting has given way to a counter in a small

shop selling an assortment of convenience wares. DORMINY is at the counter behind the register and PRITCHER is the customer; several items are between them on the counter, DORMINY begins mindlessly examining each and scanning the numbers in the machine as she picks up the conversation thread.)

DORMINY

I guess there's always been something in my mind, something unconscious, that said I could avoid that tendency.

PRITCHER

And yet it proves exceedingly difficult; I don't know if we can. I was telling someone just the other day that of all the errors we compound on a daily basis, none is so egregious as the one we start out with first thing in the morning.

DORMINY

Which one would that be?

PRITCHER

Well, ask yourself: what was your first settled assumption this morning?

DORMINY

I don't know...

PRITCHER

Sure, sure you do. Even as unthinking as it was...
(watching DORMINY)
Ah, you've remembered it.

DORMINY

(strangely unsettled)
Yes, somehow I have. I thought today how senseless my anxiety from the night before was.

PRITCHER

(skeptically)
On the basis of what?

DORMINY

I don't know; mainly just that it was morning - a new day.

PRITCHER

Overtaken by sheer optimism?

DORMINY

Not really. Just able to see things in a new light, and some distance from the night.

PRITCHER

But suppose you had been able to actually think clearly the night before and arrived at a vital conclusion - an epiphany you dismiss merely in the light of a new day and on no other basis.

DORMINY

It seems preposterous - and you're saying I've been making it worse all day?

PRITCHER

Only by perhaps abandoning where you had gotten to last night. Sometimes we assuage our fears when we should give them full vent and fury. They lead us in distinct directions, not always wrongly.

DORMINY

I can see where there could be a distinct self-preservation aspect to them. But we're conditioned to suppress our fears, to move on from them.

PRITCHER

By what? What makes us do that? I mean, is there any evidence that this works?

(DORMINY pauses, then presses a register key.)

DORMINY

That'll be \$21.48.

(seeming the slightest bit puzzled)

PRITCHER

Oh... sure.

(PRITCHER pulls out some bills and hands them over the counter.)

DORMINY

I would say that it almost exclusively does not work - its promise overshadows its track record, in a sense.

PRITCHER

But that promise is enough to allow it to reseed itself.

DORMINY

I think in being reassured, I'm afraid of almost any other possibility. Especially those coming in the dead of night.

PRITCHER

You'd rather not think about them.

DORMINY

I'd rather assume they were only a form of my anxiety silently replacing itself. One among many, so to speak.

PRITCHER

The anxieties keep returning, though, don't they?

DORMINY

They won't be put off by...

PRITCHER

By your unconscious changing the subject with a mere suggestion of better things. It's a form of piety, I tell you.

DORMINY

You've seen it?

PRITCHER

I experience it, as well, even doubting the truth of what I believe, as unassailable as it is.

DORMINY

Is it that? I'm somehow unsure that it is.

PRITCHER

So, you see what I mean.

DORMINY

In a way, I don't see any way around it.
(Hands Pritchler some change)

PRITCHER

But even if there was a way - would you choose it? Would that be prudent?

(Dorminy reflects for a moment.)

DORMINY

I'm not sure - but I also don't know that I could be..

PRITCHER

Yes, it's not as though we have that luxury, such as it is.

DORMINY

Though we always seem to bring it up, as if it matters in some larger way.

PRITCHER

It's a form of hedging, almost venturing to commit to something but holding back that smallest of guarantees against being wrong..

DORMINY

When there's really no great penalty awaiting us anyway, I mean, if we're wrong, we're simply wrong.

PRITCHER

And it can be somewhat enlightening, from an experimental perspective.

DORMINY

It's what so much of this is anyway, until we get it right.

PRITCHER

Then what? Will we then proceed on an enlightened course?

DORMINY

And short-circuit our natural proclivities? If you underestimate them that much, your devious evolution is already part-way along the course.

PRITCHER

I don't know whether to take that as a compliment or a slight.

DORMINY

You're not so far along after all, then.

(smiles)

(PRITCHER lifts the bag of items takes a few steps toward an exit.)

PRITCHER

Did I remember to get chips? I distinctly came in here for chips.

DORMINY

I don't think you bought any chips

(pulls down her glasses and looks at the receipt tape coming out of the register)

PRITCHER

(dejectedly)

It's the one thing I came for, and now I'll leave without.

DORMINY

At least you remembered.

PRITCHER

But what good will that do me, when I'm home and still hungry for that specific item I am expressly without.

DORMINY

You could recall the taste, even some time past when you might have enjoyed them the most.

PRITCHER

I could. But wouldn't that make me want them even more fervently?

DORMINY

Maybe. But maybe you won't forget them next time. Maybe you'll even make a special trip.

PRITCHER

Well I wouldn't go that far.

DORMINY

Oh. I thought that's what you said that you just did.

PRITCHER

In a way, but not that way. Those are the types of things that we think we'll do anything for...

DORMINY

But when it comes down to it, we're just as likely to settle with or without them? I don't know that I would particularly subscribe to that.

PRITCHER

Oh?

DORMINY

No, because if I do, I've changed my greater course for a series of obstacles in front of me.

PRITCHER

And you rather wouldn't.

DORMINY

Not if I still want to get where I'm going.

PRITCHER

But don't we change course sometimes?

DORMINY

Yes, both knowingly and... not so. I'd just prefer to avoid the latter.

PRITCHER

Not much of an adventurer, eh?

DORMINY

It's not that; I can be as adventurous as anyone.

PRITCHER

Just not to the point of affecting any change in you. Some would say that's not adventure, but tourism. We either commit to an unknown outcome or we're not committed at all. There are no degrees between these two.

DORMINY

Still, I might like to know what I'm doing while I'm doing it.

PRITCHER

Wouldn't we now! But in return for this, we're willing to give up... what?

DORMINY

Going without our chips, for one thing.

PRITCHER

Ah, but we forego so much more; earthly cravings are the very least of it.

DORMINY

But what of sustenance?

PRITCHER

It's a good question, whose answer may surprise us.

DORMINY

But to get to it, the forgoing would have to commence.

PRITCHER

Yes, and there would be no hedging, no avail to guarantees.

DORMINY

Living with an outcome is almost too much bear.

PRITCHER

Almost as bad as living without one?

DORMINY

But one could go on in hopes of a more favorable harvest.

PRITCHER

And that would be better, easier?

DORMINY

Than knowing all is futile? I would say so.

PRITCHER

But that's not the only possible result, indeed being on the path raises the only other possibilities. Only by sitting on the wayside does futility set in.

DORMINY

I don't know...

PRITCHER

Of course, you don't. The next thing you're going to tell me is that you're not sure. Now, where are you heading?

(Over the last minute the setting has changed again to the inside of a cab. PRITCHER is the

cabbie and DORMINY has taken her seat in the back and sits looking out of the window.)

DORMINY

Uh... Downtown? 14th and Horatio... and can we take the Westside highway? I'd like to make one other stop.

PRITCHER

Sure, lady.

END OF SCENE 1

Scene 2

The scene is switched by the darkness of the stage and a return to light but only as to illuminate the contrivance of one person driving another in a cab. The two are as before when the previous scene faded, but their trip is in progress.

DORMINY

I've never been fascinated by these so-called shocking mistreatments popping up everywhere.

PRITCHER

Did you say something?

DORMINY

I was just...

PRITCHER

I'm sorry, I get tangled up sometimes over the difference between mused and amused.

DORMINY

Really.

PRITCHER

Yes. It seems that when we linger on something, we limit the outcomes; it's either laughter or deep contemplation, like they're the only two sides of the canyon.

DORMINY

And the other shores simply... get left out.

PRITCHER

But what troubles me in times of doubt, I have no gauge whether to attribute it to cause or effect.

DORMINY

Why should you attribute it to either?

PRITCHER

Well it's got to be one or the other. Things don't just randomly pop into mind, in the service of nothing...

DORMINY

(skeptically)

That's *not* possible?

PRITCHER

If it was, why would it only happen, as I said, during times of doubt?

DORMINY

I don't think it does, at least...

PRITCHER

But it does happen *then*, I know.

DORMINY

But maybe it's all one long period of doubt and we should distinguish the increments by more significant means.

PRITCHER

Significant of what? When I'm not marked by doubt, it shows.

DORMINY

Why *couldn't* we have thoughts occur to us in singular isolation? And for that matter, if we lived with doubt more naturally, more comfortably, we wouldn't need to see everything in its light. This necessity for attribution is so...

PRITCHER

Inartful?

DORMINY

Hobbling. A self-obsessive thinks of a mountain only as obstacle to his progress - when it could be an opportunity for a breathtaking view.

PRITCHER

And nothing more?

DORMINY

How could that be nothing more? A gorgeous view just doesn't stop there - it nourishes the mind with distance, propels the soul in anticipation.

PRITCHER

But I couldn't be made better simply by these things alone.

DORMINY

These experiences aren't supposed to improve you at all; only reveal the actual you.

PRITCHER

Did you say you wanted to stop somewhere?

DORMINY

Oh yes, but we passed it. I guess I was otherwise fatefully engaged.

PRITCHER

You don't seem too upset by it.

DORMINY

Oh, it's just that I can return to it later. There are so many things and often a shortage of time.

PRITCHER

What do you do?

DORMINY

(after a brief hesitation)

I'm a fortune teller.

PRITCHER

Oh? For one of the big banks?

DORMINY

The biggest.

PRITCHER

That must be pretty exciting... glamorous.

DORMINY

I guess it looks that way. Sometimes I imagine what it would be like to... I don't know...

PRITCHER

Drive a cab?

DORMINY

Maybe, or some other...

PRITCHER

Maybe we could switch some time.

DORMINY

That means you'd have to be me, though.

PRITCHER

Yeah...

DORMINY

You'd have to banish your doubts, or embrace them fully.

PRITCHER

I don't know if I could quite do that.

DORMINY

See, you're showing promise already.

PRITCHER

No one would believe it, though.

DORMINY

Don't mischaracterize... you said 'no one' but you meant 'not everyone', right?

PRITCHER

Well, a critical mass.

DORMINY

(shaking her head)

You start out with just one. If you can get just one person on board..

PRITCHER

(skeptically)

What's one person?

DORMINY

What's *convincing* one person, and I would say quite a lot. Because if you can do it once, you can do it over and over.

PRITCHER

Who's going to believe *that*?

DORMINY

You mean who will be first?

PRITCHER

I mean who's going to believe it at all.

DORMINY

We base every action on that one little premise - I'll guarantee you.

PRITCHER

Figuratively, of course.

DORMINY

Of course.

(The scene has changed as the stage becomes flooded with much more light and a change to an outdoor setting reveals the back of a cement truck and a worker using a float over a newly

poured pool of concrete. PRITCHER makes the motion over the cement and DORMINY, perhaps in the posture of the truck driver, stands close, watching near the rear of the truck.)

PRITCHER

And when it comes to a teetering possibility, I'll bet you can't even do that.

DORMINY

I would believe it one way, and someone else would another; it's as simple as that.

PRITCHER

Yet you're not trying to fool anybody.

DORMINY

Not just one; that takes more of a crowd.

PRITCHER

I don't know - there's also a one-at-a-time quality to it.

DORMINY

Oh? Also?

PRITCHER

Yeah, you know. Like last week, I was finishing off this driveway and the guy had been parking in the yard for like a year and he just couldn't wait one more day.

DORMINY

Yeah?

PRITCHER

Yeah, and he just rolls up real close to the end of the sidewalk, so close that his tires, on his car, start sinking into the end of the driveway, messing up my work.

DORMINY

Not to mention his tires.

PRITCHER

But you did, so I'll include what he told me at the time..

DORMINY

You mean you'll pass it on, to me now.

PRITCHER

I'm just telling you this story.

DORMINY

Yes, but then what happens to it?

PRITCHER

How should I know?

DORMINY

That's not something you consider beforehand? Words strung together can have quite an effect.

PRITCHER

(goes back to working the float)

This is mostly harmless.

DORMINY

So, what did the guy say?

PRITCHER

Something about the slackened jawbone of an ass.

DORMINY

(snorts)

You must be confused.

PRITCHER

Why? The guy was irate, but he didn't quite know at what.

DORMINY

So his rage led him into a mangled tirade?

PRITCHER

Exactly. It was like he was spinning and in every direction there was only torment, so much that he could only blather like an idiot.

DORMINY

It's the sort of thing that lives on.

PRITCHER

Isn't it doing just that?

DORMINY

I don't know; at first, I misunderstood you.

PRITCHER

You were trying to catch me being lazy, but then you realized I was talking about something larger, siding with you in a bigger way.

DORMINY

We can see someone coming ashore and think they're attacking us - when actually they're invading our entire country.

PRITCHER

They're just establishing a beachhead.

DORMINY

And you can't hold them off, even for a time.

PRITCHER

Much less if you actually invite them in.

DORMINY

It's like I was saying, you convince just one... Then they start doing your work for you. The point may not be that everyone will not believe something - they just may not believe it yet. There's a distinction.

PRITCHER

But it confuses whose side one is on.

DORMINY

It just bears keeping in mind, that's all.

PRITCHER

Who's going to remind them?

DORMINY

Maybe that's one way to put it.

PRITCHER

That was a question.

DORMINY

The answer may be more than we're willing to admit.

PRITCHER

Because you can't just come out and say such things.

DORMINY

Or you won't.

PRITCHER

Have we lost that particular trait, that skill - or the desire for it?

DORMINY

Did we ever have it is the question.

PRITCHER

You see what's been done to those who've spoken directly -

DORMINY

We bottle them up in tirades...

PRITCHER

Or their words get taken literally.

DORMINY

But these are just translations.

PRITCHER

It's hard to be sure.

DORMINY

It's impossible; but it's easiest to *seem* sure.

PRITCHER

What are you getting at?

DORMINY

That you can't just tiptoe - you've got to be decisive.

PRITCHER

Does that mean something by itself? I mean, that guy who drove into my slab, he meant it.

DORMINY

Further consideration absolves our right to be wrong under the duress of passion. I've been backing up to big empty holes for years and filling 'em with a soupy aggregate - you just gotta wax poetic while it hardens.

PRITCHER

Bullshit. I'm gonna shape it, and ignore your sophist tactics.

DORMINY

You don't want it to dry any old way - perhaps naturally?

PRITCHER

I've no great appreciation for the purity of nature. In this case gravity will cause me to have to come back and right something that I could have done the first time.

(With one last pull of the handle on the concrete float, PRITCHER hands it to the prop grip, giving him/her a glance to acknowledge the presence but without breaking the barrier any further with words. The scene is transformed to a windswept roadside with PRITCHER standing outside the vehicle in which DORMINY is sitting; a few seconds of intermittent silent blue light flashes indicate that PRITCHER is a patrolman of some sort who has pulled DORMINY over for some yet-unstated offense. As before, their focus is unbroken by any acknowledgement of the change in scenery.)

DORMINY

Yet you would try to approach it from another angle, your own hand, as it were.

PRITCHER

And still I know perfection holds so little for me...

DORMINY

But can you speak for everyone?

PRITCHER

If I could, I hope the question would be, would I?

DORMINY

Still, don't go writing off perfection so hastily. There's quite a bit of it that's gotten us this far.

PRITCHER

And even more that we've spent a fair amount of energy trying to stamp out.

DORMINY

Time well spent, some would say.

PRITCHER

While it could be called fascist, by others. Do you know how fast you were going?

DORMINY

(shaking her head)

But coming up short in that pursuit... really advances the fall.

PRITCHER

You mean the ball? You're talking sports...

DORMINY

(shakes her head again)

Is there any other way? I mean, we can tumble forward or back, depending on momentum. Can you say I would be less better served than in some lunge toward perfection?

PRITCHER

What's it done? Ask yourself. Much has been accomplished in the name of purity that I'm sure we'd rather just forget or, pretend not to remember.

DORMINY

Sure - it's a matter of perceptive skill. It should be chased exactly because it is so difficult. But we can know when we're on its scent or not.

PRITCHER

How?

(Pritcher looks around, as if the wind kicks up and he has noticed how particularly quiet it is out in the adjacent landscape)

DORMINY

I was speaking about it recently, or was I listening? But... you can know. It's that essential doubt. Know your purpose and dig your ditch; but venture uncertainly and oh, your path will open.

PRITCHER

So, it's some question of motive?

DORMINY

There's a pureness of heart involved.

(Pritcher shakes his head)

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But we've got all that already. It's just camouflaged beneath...

PRITCHER

What?

DORMINY

Desires, concerns.

PRITCHER

What's wrong with those?

DORMINY

You tell me. Do you find anything wrong with them?

PRITCHER

It depends on what they are.

DORMINY

That's all I'm saying. Everything depends too much on what those concerns are.

PRITCHER

But that's saying quite a lot.

DORMINY

You're saying you question the assumption?

PRITCHER

(shaking his head)

Not really, it's just... I don't know how you can put a limit on desires.

DORMINY

I can't; but I can prioritize them.

PRITCHER

(nodding, handing Dorminy back her license)

I guess I'll let you go this time.

DORMINY

With a warning?

(Pritcher nods)

So...?

PRITCHER

What?

DORMINY

What is it?

PRITCHER

I guess it would be to slow down... maybe let that hope mature, age.

DORMINY

Old hopes turn to mold and ruin. As soon as it crops up, I'd rather join the race on the path to fulfilling it.

PRITCHER

You're sure to be stopped.

DORMINY

I can only hope so, and long before I get there - or my hope changes.

PRITCHER

What if you ever finally make it?

(At this Dorminy shakes her head)

DORMINY

I guess I'll have to let you know on that one.

PRITCHER

What if you never do?

DORMINY

Same thing, I guess. I'll have to let you know.

PRITCHER

So, it turns out to be a bit of a wash, either way, huh?

DORMINY

But in the meantime, my hope has dimmed or sprouted wings toward a redemption.

PRITCHER

And you're willing to accept either?

DORMINY

No - that would be perfect. I guard my preferences, to guide my hopes, in a way.

PRITCHER

And thus, elude perfection. But what does it get you?

DORMINY

There is no saying that it 'gets' me anything. It's not a transaction

PRITCHER

But why, then?

DORMINY

Because it's what we believe, without bothering about truth.

PRITCHER

(shaking his head)

I don't think you can avoid that.

DORMINY

Not as I am presently constituted, no. But you see, it indirectly causes my haste. Its effect is as another body upon me, as toil under the force of something greater.

PRITCHER

It's like a sun?

DORMINY

(nodding)

And it's sinking fast.

PRITCHER

But tell me...

DORMINY

Yes? Can I go now?

PRITCHER

Of course, but tell me something, as terms for your release.

DORMINY

(sighs)

I will be what I am becoming, with certain restrictions, of course.

PRITCHER

Probably, but... if you set truth aside, aren't you left with sort of a false antecedent before everything you do?

DORMINY

I said not *bothering* with truth, not trying to conjure it. It, too, will be what it has always been.

PRITCHER

I can think of no simpler calamities than your sort of ignorance.

DORMINY

How so?

PRITCHER

(*shaking his head*)

You take only the best from any possibility and dismiss the rest.

DORMINY

It's my active imagination. A cross section of my intuitions would reveal a divided loyalty between what I want and what I simply long to desire.

PRITCHER

You wish you were better? I guess we all do.

DORMINY

Not just that; but if I could convince you, for example, that we should strive toward higher ideals for ourselves, then...

PRITCHER

But you can't tell me what to want.

DORMINY

Convincing someone means making them think they believed something all along. I'm -

PRITCHER

Don't flaunt my authority!

DORMINY

How could I? It's one of the places where we occupy exactly the same position.

PRITCHER

You think you have as much right to what I think as I do?

DORMINY

In a way, what you think is *all* that is up for grabs. Truth is the constant, remember.

PRITCHER

But you can't be so concerned with me when it's your hopes that are in the balance.

DORMINY

What are they being weighed against? *Your* hopes?

PRITCHER

They don't have to be in conflict.

DORMINY

But that's not the truth, is it? Not if we want the same thing.

PRITCHER

There's enough for both of us.

DORMINY

But are we in complete agreement? And how far does it go? I can't imagine you would support the goals of some of my hopes.

PRITCHER

I could say the same.

DORMINY

But if you do, our desires are in conflict - perhaps your success is my death.

(A pause.)

PRITCHER

Is there a way around such an ultimate standoff?

DORMINY

Yes, there is. But will you sublimate your hopes in support of it?

PRITCHER

Should I?

DORMINY

That's the problem - it may convulse every single thing within your being to resist such.

PRITCHER

Maybe, but why shouldn't you?

DORMINY

Perhaps there is no further purpose to any of our faculties... the reason for all of the evolutionary knife-sharpening, if you will.

PRITCHER

I might. Entertaining the cumulative effects is almost redundant, is it not?

DORMINY

It's a question then, worded as a challenge.

PRITCHER

I can take it any way I please.

DORMINY

But it is offered only in this one way.

(The scene has transformed over the preceding minute, to an interior location, a corridor constructed primarily with lighting; as the lights come up again after dimming during the change, the corridor with along one wall is illuminated, on which the two sit. Periodically, a figure passes in front of them, obscured by the lack of light, only to denote the passage as a sort of hallway. Also periodically, numbers are called offstage. PRITCHER and DORMINY sit uncomfortably and hold small slips of paper that they refer to each time a number is called, as if it might be

theirs. After a number is called and a figure passes in the hallway, their conversation resumes.)

PRITCHER

And then it becomes a matter of posture, toward that one thing.

DORMINY

I can act as though there is only one, having forgotten that it was simply posited this way, deliberately.

PRITCHER

And you became engrossed, ignoring all the many other possibilities.

DORMINY

I suppose. Though I keep some memory back, if nothing else, to inform my offenses.

PRITCHER

Are they well-versed from all that you hold back?

DORMINY

I can depend on myself for everything else, save knowing this. More and less adamant? Surely. Well-versed? Hmm... a question.

PRITCHER

But this fluctuation doesn't bother you?

DORMINY

How can it? What... should I subscribe to some sort of infernal balance instead?

PRITCHER

Why not? It seems to be all the rage.

VOICE OFF STAGE

45351!

DORMINY

It's not surprising, though note that is not a reason on its own to act out.

PRITCHER

No; that I do understand. Reactionary behavior is the salve of feeble minds.

DORMINY

Ah, and feeble minds are the nourishment of monsters.

PRITCHER

(gestures for quiet)

Not so loud!

DORMINY

Oh, don't worry. They already know.

PRITCHER

Maybe, but you'll be taken for an agitator.

DORMINY

Isn't it just amazing to live in such a time as this! Simply take a seat and someone will magically call your number.

PRITCHER

It is quite a cunning feat.

DORMINY

Actually it takes quite a bit of planning and no small agreement on the part of the seated.

PRITCHER

We've all got to pitch in. But when do you come around, after spending so much time not reacting, to find any energy to rouse yourself?

DORMINY

I don't know what you mean.

PRITCHER

I think you do. *Is it a clever ruse, this feigned deference, this succumb?*

DORMINY

It would be doubly clever if it was, and therefore not so at all. In essence, the perfect disguise.

PRITCHER

If you could carry it off.

DORMINY

Or if *you* could.

PRITCHER

Why couldn't I?

DORMINY

Why aren't you at this very minute?

PRITCHER

There might be several reasons, not the least of which is that I might be called anytime now.

DORMINY

But even that shouldn't have to interrupt the bigger pattern.

PRITCHER

I can see the reductionist view of this, yet it would have to be part of it or not - not availed to this either/or possibility of whether I'm called.

DORMINY

But you were assigned to come today...

PRITCHER

Yes.

DORMINY

So everything is in order.

PRITCHER

That remains to be seen, it's the point of interest, really, if you ask me.

DORMINY

Therefore, what you set out to do is enlist in a particular calculation with chance. But how does it affect your hopes?

PRITCHER

I guess it is, in a way, inflicted upon them, or vice-versa.

DORMINY

Working in tandem then, they become a sort of syndicate, for your purposes, of course.

PRITCHER

Whose else?

DORMINY

Why... no one's; who's calling the numbers, anyway?

PRITCHER

Some staff; it's numerical - there is no need for interpretation.

DORMINY

No, of course not. Would that some other things were so straight forward.

PRITCHER

Yes. Like what?

DORMINY

(shrugs)

Oh... I don't know. Anything's that not; accidents, luck.

PRITCHER

Accidents? You mean something you didn't mean to happen, but did?

DORMINY

That would seem to qualify.

PRITCHER

But what if it was only a change in the direction of your hope, signified by a split-second turn?

DORMINY

I wouldn't know that at the time, I'd only be aware of the turn. You see, I only have as much information as anybody else.

PRITCHER

But no one knows as much about one thing as you do.

DORMINY

You mean not everyone.

PRITCHER

Not this time; I mean not even one other person.

DORMINY

But if you believe that, then the one thing becomes very powerful.

PRITCHER

That depends; how have you convinced yourself of its power?

DORMINY

If only slightly, I am all the more emboldened; I can actually call my own number.

PRITCHER

What about the poor lass, there?

DORMINY

(shrugs)

Who knows what she knows.

PRITCHER

(nods in agreement)

There is a certain solace in that.

DORMINY

But it does not release us from the original dilemma.

PRITCHER

No, that would require much more than luck.

DORMINY

But not much more.

(A pause, during which a shadow passes by their perch on the hallway bench)

PRITCHER

Still, my separate status does count for something.

DORMINY

As much as you are together with any common element, you are indeed apart.

PRITCHER

It's not so common, but all the more, I lose the sense of these distinctions when there's so little to make me notice anything but their inconsistencies.

DORMINY

Must we be philosophers to concern ourselves with conditions outside of the immediate?

PRITCHER

No, it's hardly necessary, but days run together when we are not accustomed to noticing, that's all.

DORMINY

But you won't stop that - so much goes on all the time. There's no way to reconcile what is perceived with what practically disappears by its very unbroken presence.

(Pritcher stares in disconcert)

When something is around all the time, ever-present, it ceases to be noticed, and so becomes a part of a background.

PRITCHER

It may appear that way from a mighty perch...

DORMINY

No, no...

PRITCHER

But you *are* aware of what is around you, ever-present or not, and there's no need to conflate a willful blindness based on repetition.

DORMINY

What route did you take here this morning?

PRITCHER

The same one I always do.

DORMINY

Did you notice anything strange along the way?

PRITCHER

Not really; it was the same as always, strangely comforting maybe.

DORMINY

No fires, screaming infants, or lawless sidewalk displays?

PRITCHER

Is that what it takes...

DORMINY

These things push and pull us in different directions,
until the strength is summoned to ignore them.

PRITCHER

Don't infer that I do this.

DORMINY

I'm saying you must, just to get here on time!

PRITCHER

Is that all that's important?

DORMINY

It is an amazing confluence of priorities, I'll admit.

PRITCHER

Yet still... what I don't see is how I can avoid these things
you mentioned.

DORMINY

You do it so well, that's it exactly.

PRITCHER

What's it?

VOICE OFF STAGE

45353!

DORMINY

By not seeing, they are ipso avoided.

PRITCHER

You're not understanding me; I'm saying that I *do* see them.

DORMINY

What are your impressions, then?

PRITCHER

Sorry?

DORMINY

What do you notice about them?

PRITCHER

Not a lot, frankly. I often have time to merely think about other things in my surroundings.

DORMINY

Do *you* remain the same?

PRITCHER

(slightly offended)

Certainly not.

DORMINY

What makes you think everything else does?

PRITCHER

Relative to my evaluations, I have no reason to doubt the evolution of my surroundings.

DORMINY

You've got every reason! There is nothing but reasons to doubt this total and pure arc toward betterment.

PRITCHER

Stop it. They're going to call your number.

DORMINY

And quite a state to be found in, it would be.

PRITCHER

It doesn't have to mean anything beyond the obvious; what your session may reveal is particular to you.

DORMINY

I may be charged with extravagant leanings, for all you know.

PRITCHER

If that's the case, you deserve to be found out.

DORMINY

The loss of faith in these institutions is staggering when you think about what we give up in return.

PRITCHER

(shaking his head)

I don't know what there is to be so upset about. Like I said, I'm not sure how it can be avoided.

DORMINY

But you are able nonetheless.

PRITCHER

It's a function of my willingness, pure and simple.

DORMINY

It should be encased in some periapt, worn around your neck - to remind yourself that you don't need reminding.

PRITCHER

Better than something else around my neck - what crime is it against the state of consciousness for me to imagine myself beyond certain circumstances?

DORMINY

As long as it is not better, but how might you get there?

PRITCHER

(shaking his head)

I only do so that I might be able to get somewhere and I'm not so concerned with how.

DORMINY

Which means you may infringe on the liberty of others, if necessary.

PRITCHER

I'm not so concerned with this; it may be like taking up slack that is already greatly unused.

DORMINY

But why?

PRITCHER

Interestingly enough, I'm less than concerned about why, though it would be cause for philosophy or intellectualizing.

DORMINY

You're anti-intellectual?

PRITCHER

If and when it comes down to that, a choice between causing an effect or talking about one, almost certainly yes, I am.

DORMINY

How could you have any effect then or understand one, if you are so willing to discount the power of persuasion?

PRITCHER

Did I say that? I'm...

DORMINY

(interrupting)

You stated a blatant case for the anti-intellectual approach. That which you are against, one would assume, you can have no use of in aid.

PRITCHER

Still, it's amazing what we will use - I guess if you're just driving nails, anything can be a hammer.

DORMINY

So you'll throw it around if you have to; that's typical.

PRITCHER

Of what?

DORMINY

The essence of careless expediency. It leaves a trail of apathy, forked from the road to nowhere in the direction of promise; but without a compass or map, it is sentenced to roaming in endless circles.

PRITCHER

But then, undeserving, I stumble onto a mountaintop and am able to see exactly where everything is.

DORMINY

But what are the chances? How many fail before and after you in pursuit of such a folly?

PRITCHER

Those who come later will fail differently, though.

DORMINY

And yet all your failures seem assured.

PRITCHER

It's funny, but I don't think you can impugn my methods.

DORMINY

They're beyond mortal reach?

PRITCHER

They don't care.

VOICE OFF STAGE

45354!

DORMINY

Is that your number?

PRITCHER

(wistfully)

I'm afraid so.

PRITCHER rises and walks away down the corridor, leaving a seated DORMINY to watch as the lighting fades and the scene dissolves.

Act II

Scene 1

TIME: Morning, Present day.

AT RISE: A counter case with glass top covers an assortment of items in the case, intimating an exchange or pawn broker establishment. DORMINY appears, walking up to the case and perusing its contents. After several seconds PRITCHER walks up from the other side of the counter.

PRITCHER

Good morning. Are you looking for something in particular?

DORMINY

(a little nervously)

Uh, no, no thanks. Just taking a look.

PRITCHER

We've got some excellent deals on these, and I've a got a few more I keep in the back. Say, you look familiar.

DORMINY

(shaking her head)

I don't think so. I just got into town this morning.

PRITCHER

Hmm... I could have sworn... but, maybe it's just a familiar look.

DORMINY

I don't think it's possible.

PRITCHER

You can't be too sure - anything's possible around here.

DORMINY

Just that kind of place, huh?

PRITCHER

Sometimes. And I don't mean just here but, if we thought about it, any place could be any kind of place.

DORMINY

That's a bit of a loose characterization.

PRITCHER

Still, there a certain amount of truth to it.

DORMINY

(looking into the case)

You could say that about any number of things.

PRITCHER

You could, but isn't that because there often is?

DORMINY

It really depends on the crucial portion. Do you have this in a molded grip?

PRITCHER

(shakes his head)

No, only that wooden one.

DORMINY

Too bad.

PRITCHER

What's truth after all, but one element in a larger picture?

DORMINY

Just the one which says whether it's night or day, raining or clear, that can't be fudged.

PRITCHER

Oh, come on; sure, it can.

DORMINY

But if it is, your larger picture becomes an image of something else.

PRITCHER

A lie, propaganda?

DORMINY

Whatever it is; even aphorisms are just advertisements for the truth. But whether it reflects reality, that's another...

PRITCHER

Well, there is a certain reality of which it is a part.

DORMINY

Counting our apples as oranges is just a little disingenuous, don't you think?

PRITCHER

Depends. In the service of good, deception could be a virtue.

DORMINY

Ah, in that case your bigger picture is the kind with a rainbow and a leprechaun.

PRITCHER

The crucial concern is not livelihood, then?

DORMINY

Sure it is... our most basic preoccupation.

PRITCHER

Worthy of shading the truth to protect?

DORMINY

Certainly, if that's all my picture is, like I said, but this depends on how much you think of yourself.

PRITCHER

How *often*?

DORMINY

(shaking her head)

Is your worth greater than its slant toward the reality in which it resides? You can think of it as, if you ask this question, the answer is no.

PRITCHER

What if the answer is yes?

DORMINY

Then there's no question at all. Your capabilities are limitless. You can say anything and do as many others as you like, with no visible price of conscience.

PRITCHER

None?

DORMINY

(shaking her head)

There is one cost, though.

PRITCHER

What's that?

DORMINY

I'm not sure you want to know, and it's different for everyone anyway - only you'll know yours, only I know mine kind-of-thing.

PRITCHER

Maybe if I knew yours I could recognize mine.

DORMINY

I don't think so. We've got a habit of searching for particular things and not being on the lookout for anything at all. My admission would only confuse you.

PRITCHER

You seem so confident.

DORMINY

I'm just saying. It's sort of a reverse motif - an artificial horizon.

PRITCHER

Where I don't see anything but what I'm looking for?

DORMINY

That's it exactly.

PRITCHER

But many celebrate that sort of focus.

DORMINY

What else *would* they do? Minimize all other elements...

PRITCHER

Including truth.

DORMINY

...and you can regard this as a great boon to creativity when it just as well discounts the art, if not the deed, of discovery.

PRITCHER

(nodding)

There's an essence of truth to that.

DORMINY

What about your rainbow and pot of gold?

PRITCHER

I still think we can put one in the service of the other.

DORMINY

But whether is which, and you're either asking the question - or you're not.

PRITCHER

Now that that's out there, I feel less anxious about it.

DORMINY

But it's not yet yours, you've enrolled in no real jeopardy
- as yet.

PRITCHER

What makes you suppose I will? Some dark faith in human
nature?

DORMINY

(shaking her head)

Nah, something a little closer to home.

PRITCHER

I thought you weren't from around here.

DORMINY

I do suppose that if it exists at all, we all share at
least a little bit.

PRITCHER

Faith?

DORMINY

(shrugs)

Faith... blame... credit, belief, trust, whatever. But what's
more critical is the closer conversation.

PRITCHER

That you have with yourself?

DORMINY

Precisely.

PRITCHER

What does yours say?

DORMINY

Often, it's just a jumble of contradictory presumptions,
directions to places I've already been, so to speak.

PRITCHER

But not always.

DORMINY

No. And then when it's not, it's crucial that I be able to listen.

PRITCHER

And you're not, always.

DORMINY

No - there's the intercession of other points of view: yours, for instance.

PRITCHER

Why mine?

DORMINY

Don't you have one? Aren't we here together, opposed?

PRITCHER

(growing nervous)

Not necessarily; I'm just trying to understand. Are you going to buy something?

DORMINY

No.

PRITCHER

What then? Did you come in here just to harass me, my customers?

(DORMINY looks slowly around at the stage, empty but of the two of them, turns back to PRITCHER across the counter. The more anxious PRITCHER becomes, the calmer is DORMINY.)

DORMINY

Have I done that? You'll have to forgive me - but I need something.

PRITCHER

To say these things?

DORMINY

Not just say them, but to mean them - and sum them all into a symbol of what they are.

PRITCHER

But you can't do that; there's a violent meridian around such openness.

DORMINY

Violence is in the eye of the beholder. You want to make something and I can't stop you. If you would only take that position, this could all go unnoticed.

PRITCHER

But I can see that you're going to take something - from me.

DORMINY

Then you understand that there is no other place to get it.

PRITCHER

But what will you replace it with - and what will it do to what you already have?

DORMINY

These questions - as I said - you either ask them..

PRITCHER

Well, I am asking them.

DORMINY

What have we found so far?

PRITCHER

I thought I was asking the questions.

DORMINY

Then how appropriate that you should answer them as well.

PRITCHER

But I'm not able. Everything I put to you, I do so in sincerity.

DORMINY

Near the end of that, you come to something else - a choice. You already see the deceit in your honesty.

PRITCHER

No! For every practical purpose, I'm being sincere.

DORMINY

Beyond these concerns for your welfare: what's the use? You wouldn't display your truthfulness without a motive.

PRITCHER

I couldn't disagree more!

DORMINY

But you would if you could - don't think sincerity is the necessary apogee of self.

PRITCHER

I've heard enough of this.

DORMINY

Jettison that, too, then see what's left.

PRITCHER

I said enough! Stop it!

(PRITCHER reaches down into the case and pulls out a gun, holds it but does not point it at DORMINY.)

DORMINY

(excitedly)

Yes! There. What's there?!

PRITCHER

I said stop it.

DORMINY

But you can't stop it, can you, no matter what I say. It's there, the point of semblance where nothing that has made sense before can finally see its way. And it's all because of you.

(PRITCHER slowly brings the gun up toward DORMINY.)

PRITCHER

I asked you to stop it.

DORMINY

But you see, only you can do that.

PRITCHER

I can't!

DORMINY

It's a product of something else then, something bigger.

PRITCHER

Don't talk - STOP TALKING!

DORMINY

You're imagining what you mean and bringing it to life.

PRITCHER

Stop it!

DORMINY

I can't - you seem finally committed. But remember:

PRITCHER

What?!

DORMINY

Whatever it is that comes after - you'll want that most of all.

PRITCHER

Enough! I can't stop and I can't... do it.

DORMINY

Maybe this will help.

(DORMINY takes a gun out of her purse and points it at PRITCHER.)

PRITCHER

No!

(DORMINY cocks her gun - PRITCHER squints hard and pulls the trigger. BANG! The lights go down. The scene ends.)

Act III

Scene 1

TIME: Evening, Present day.

AT RISE: A detective interrogation room; at the lone table sits PRITCHER, one light bulb suspended on a wire above him. After a moment, DORMINY enters through a door and closes behind her.

PRITCHER

It's you!

DORMINY

(puzzled but indulgent)

Yes... and it's you. Now...

PRITCHER

No, wait.

DORMINY

The waiting can go on for as long as you like, but the same will proceed... whenever you're ready.

PRITCHER

(deflating)

Go ahead then.

DORMINY

Alright.

(puts down her file; settles across the table from Pritchler)

I understand you tried to waive your right to counsel. Why is that?

PRITCHER

(shrugs)

Futility. I haven't listened yet - I don't think I'll start now.

DORMINY

It's not just to advise you; counsel means an ally, to argue your case.

PRITCHER

What's ... argue with whom?

DORMINY

So, you're in complete agreement with the charges against you? Why did you plead not guilty?

PRITCHER

What would you have me do?

DORMINY

Start with the truth, for one thing.

PRITCHER

(scoffing)

Oh no - you obviously cannot imagine that.

DORMINY

What am I doing here right now?

PRITCHER

Have you even thought about what happened and how, or is it just left for me to explain?

DORMINY

A version of events is likely to unfold again. Take us back there.

PRITCHER

You won't allow that. What's done is done - one way or every way.

DORMINY

You've got to hold fast to your version, the way you saw things - whether there is mercy, you will be judged on your relation to this.

PRITCHER

But on the day in question, did you not leave enough room for this to be debatable later?

DORMINY

That was not my intention.

PRITCHER

Nor was that the question. You bring up truth, but you deflect the accusation; questioned about timing, you ponder significance. You're not acting very innocent.

DORMINY

Did I say I was innocent?

PRITCHER

You're saying *you're* guilty?

DORMINY

Certainly not. I've only one position to which to hold, one that I cannot betray.

PRITCHER

I should say the same.

DORMINY

Why don't you?

PRITCHER

There's no third plea - or there wasn't before. It's funny... but I've been freed in a certain way.

DORMINY

(curious)

Oh?

PRITCHER

These restrictions, this longing for truth... I've been unchained from them.

DORMINY

Well, that's going to go over well.

PRITCHER

Even so, however it is perceived, I've embarked on a separation, a very particular disjunction from how it can even be properly explained.

DORMINY

One way or another - you'll have to tell someone. Otherwise you'll be judged from this alone.

PRITCHER

Yes - but. I will anyway, don't you see? Just as I judged myself from it before, it's the only way I can be seen now.

DORMINY

I see, and yet... escaping certain constraints or shrouding motives does not change the fact of the charges against you. I mean, I'm glad you've been freed, but you're looking at a sentence with no alternate parsing.

PRITCHER

(concerned)

Oh?

DORMINY

Cheap and despised though it was, you took life and rendered a disavowal of its traditional role. I can tell you the judge will be very interested in your opinion on this.

PRITCHER

The judge?

DORMINY

What did you expect?

PRITCHER

I don't know; I guess I thought these things had already been decided.

DORMINY

No. And what's worse, they fluctuate with almost every case.

PRITCHER

Why should they?

DORMINY

Adhering to principle is a part of nature removed from action. You're supposed to set these aside - not work from them.

PRITCHER

What are they for, then?

DORMINY

Laws have many applications; this is just not one of them. You cannot enforce them yourself. Gravity, for instance.

PRITCHER

But I may *invoke* them.

DORMINY

Only if you are willing to see through the consequences, which I guess you are saying.

PRITCHER

(to himself)

So, there is a price.

DORMINY

What?

PRITCHER

(shaking his head)

Nothing. No thing. Not a single thing.

(A pause)

DORMINY

You seem quite resigned for a freed man.

PRITCHER

Maybe it's one of the consequences; I do this that I may qualify for something else.

DORMINY

Something further? What if it's damaging?

PRITCHER

To what? And is that something I get to choose?

DORMINY

To do it or not, yes, I suppose you do.

PRITCHER

Yet if the outcome informed my choice...

DORMINY

You would merely be on the lookout for something else, something unclouded with foreshadow. I see your resignation.

PRITCHER

It's what I didn't see that now has my full attention, or rather...

DORMINY

Go on.

PRITCHER

My concentration is pulled toward what I know the least about.

DORMINY

You'll have a hard time answering for yourself, then.

PRITCHER

Oddly, on this I can acquit myself well; I am actually removed from this as a matter of course.

DORMINY

It's not about you?

PRITCHER

Not in the proper sense. It's about that space that I don't understand. I'm drawn to it in a way in which the consequences are only one element.

DORMINY

I think you understand better than you imagine; you may even be cunning.

PRITCHER

I certainly have to hope that's possible.

DORMINY

But doesn't it undercut the space?

PRITCHER

(shaking his head)

The space is actually only half as potent without that possibility.

DORMINY

It's an essential part, that you don't even fully believe in.

PRITCHER

It's just a possibility.

DORMINY

A possibility like that is a language unto itself.

PRITCHER

That sounds like a warning; am I supposed to, then, be careful?

DORMINY

You'll have to ask yourself what you've gotten into.

PRITCHER

A sort of pre-consequence avowal, before I even know? No thanks. There's got to be something left to find.

DORMINY

Remains?

PRITCHER

A path that can be followed. Not in egress but something that... becomes more obvious with time.

DORMINY

Mystery loves company.

PRITCHER

Like it has a choice. We're drawn to it and how it validates our repudiations - or vice versa.

DORMINY

It *is* a ploy then.

PRITCHER

Not enough of one, I'm afraid.

DORMINY

Reproducing results is no easy feat.

PRITCHER

But it's the measure of stamina; an idea survives as long as belief in it does not go unchallenged.

DORMINY

You'll know if it can ever be done again.

PRITCHER

How?

DORMINY

Reverting to that particular sort of desire, that a thing can only be achieved through you.

PRITCHER

That sounds maniacal - and you're going to use this to defend me?

DORMINY

It's just egoism; and whether it's true or not is beside the point. You've got to leverage the possibility that only you can do it.

PRITCHER

Against what?

DORMINY

Everything else; sometimes one at a time, but occasionally in mass.

PRITCHER

I suppose it's true, that only I can arrive there in the way in which I will.

DORMINY

You do understand.

PRITCHER

But I'm just as free not to get there at all, and then there'll be nothing to repeat.

DORMINY

Except the effort. And as long as failure is your placeholder, you won't allow it to stand.

PRITCHER

I'll be the one to decide that. Talking about such decisions doesn't put nearly as much at stake as making them.

DORMINY

And yet they are the same when the prosecutor is doing the talking.

(PRITCHER stands as the grips changing the scene intrude over the last minute. Now he pays

more attention to the change in setting as the conversation continues with *DORMINY* in place as Judge, sitting at a desk higher than *PRITCHER* who continues to stand.)

Scene II

PRITCHER

Your honor?

DORMINY

Yes.

PRITCHER

You spoke to me like an ally, but I should have known.

DORMINY

I guess we often do, Mr. Pritchler. Now...

PRITCHER

Now?

DORMINY

Now. The charges against you are as follows:

PRITCHER

I'm not guilty of those.

DORMINY

But you didn't give me a chance to list them. You may enter a plea after you have been formally accused.

PRITCHER

My confidence has been breached.

DORMINY

How?

PRITCHER

You know, as well as anyone. If we continue in this context, what I was made to do will surely come out, and it won't reflect well upon you.

DORMINY

What you were made to do? Is that some sort of accusation?

PRITCHER

The worst kind.

DORMINY

Looking over your file, you have no history of intent; the question before you now is, what did you want to do?

PRITCHER

When?

DORMINY

Your insolence is noted, Mr. Pritcher, but the question remains the same - please see through and beyond it, as you are able.

PRITCHER

I've... I meant to cause no harm.

DORMINY

Mr. Pritcher!

PRITCHER

There was no indication that any of these certain tasks would result...

DORMINY

Ah. Which tasks? A ritual assessment of results is just that if you do not first enumerate the desired outcomes.

PRITCHER

Well, it's not that easy, and the point is...

DORMINY

The *point*, Mr. Pritcher?

PRITCHER

Okay... as I said, these tasks - whatever they are - that we, I, am involved in... they don't take particular direction on their own.

DORMINY

Go on.

PRITCHER

So if you take a measure of what I wanted at any point and remove it from this context, I'm afraid that... well, I'm

afraid that you - or I - might change what it was that I meant.

DORMINY

So you are saying that you can't say.

PRITCHER

I'm saying I can, but I would be doing something else, wanting something different, in doing so.

DORMINY

So, if I may, I am to release you on the basis of concurrency?

PRITCHER

Well, there's some question as to whether I am being held and then, whether I can be released, but...

DORMINY

(impatiently)

Let me assure you that you are being held and that the decision whether to release you grows clearer in my mind as these moments pass.

PRITCHER

Yes, okay, but let me venture to say that the question is not about multiple simultaneous happenings, but my role in a certain chronology.

DORMINY

And your desire toward a certain outcome.

PRITCHER

But I wished for nothing in particular.

DORMINY

And you're saying that's not an outcome? Please, openness of borders, even personal ones, is not a defense, but nor is it an abdication of will. No thing happens in such a vacuum.

PRITCHER

But admitting that I wanted something I did not is surely an offense to my willingness..

DORMINY

So you did want something. No need to perjure yourself here.

PRITCHER

I have no need.

DORMINY

But is it your desire?

PRITCHER

No, it is not. There's something beyond wanting a particular ends that sees unto seeing, that knows beyond what is known, that perfectly accepts what comes of it outside and apart from knowing what, if in fact anything, will come of it.

DORMINY

So you were willing to accept nothing at all, as well as anything?

PRITCHER

Mustn't I be?

DORMINY

Well, there's some dispute about that. Our entire notion of what is acceptable and not is based on a whole other set of suppositions.

PRITCHER

And what do those premises suppose? That I am naturally inclined to want one thing and pursuit it only, when in fact, this is far removed from what I could reasonably expect.

DORMINY

That expectation takes a certain license to overcome. Will you endeavor to create this opposing set of assumptions?

PRITCHER

I don't know that I want to do that.

DORMINY

But keep in mind, that is what you're saying. You can't not want this and still stop it from happening. There is a

certain amount of connivance involved - resistance, collaboration.

PRITCHER

That much is certain. But on the part of whom, is the question.

DORMINY

A question which has just one answer, I'm reminded. You reconcile that answer and ally yourself accordingly.

PRITCHER

But allies are only as strong as their common beliefs. Trusting you only to an extent does perhaps as much harm as good. That's why we step outside ourselves so gingerly, and then sneak back in at the earliest opportunity.

DORMINY

And then you realize not an ally, but an -

PRITCHER

(interrupting)

Don't say it!

(A pause)

DORMINY

Like you, I'm inclined to distinguish facts from their deeds a little prematurely.

PRITCHER

I'm just trying to use what happened to be prepared for what is coming.

DORMINY

But you lift the very veil of doing nothing by hinting at these expectations. What profit do you see from this adjustment?

PRITCHER

Adjustment? I'm bending to the will of the moment, here and now, not calibrating my reaction.

DORMINY

It's the same.

PRITCHER

No... it's not. The specific immediacy of the situation disallows the very thing of which I stand accused. In fact, it's impossible to properly posture, for better or worse.

DORMINY

So, you willingly risk error, even injury?

PRITCHER

Willingly... would suppose a choice, but if I live in this moment or the next, or the last, I do so at a posture to equal measures of glory or peril.

DORMINY

I must condemn the rashness and danger of such behavior. If everyone did this, what kind of world would we live in?

PRITCHER

That's an excellent question, but one I'm sorry that we're not availed to answer, as yet.

DORMINY

Oh, I'm quite sure I can answer it.

PRITCHER

But will you spare yourself the crucial prejudice? For knowing this much about ourselves and our fellows, we can only be sure that we do not live in the way I describe, and therefore take a much more frightful path lighted by known fears buttressed by eminently workable schemes.

DORMINY

I remind you where you are, then also that it has gotten us this far.

PRITCHER

That is precisely... *(cuts himself off)*

DORMINY

What?

PRITCHER

(shaking his head)

I don't want to influence your decision with my own motives and lack of humility. You see, I have everything to gain.

DORMINY

On the lookout for such ramshackle scavenging, I suppose.

PRITCHER

One of us, that's for sure.

DORMINY

But you wish to elude the watchful gaze of authority.

PRITCHER

Oh no; please be forewarned, I wish for much more than that.

DORMINY

To destroy the order which you hold in so much contempt?

PRITCHER

Let's not get ahead of ourselves - it's at the point of dissolution anyway that it would be a gross misappropriation of effort.

DORMINY

But why not hasten its decline?

PRITCHER

Because it's unnecessary, and outside of the moment, as a matter of course.

DORMINY

Your reverence for time is noted, but these restrictions may leave you unprepared for what is to come.

PRITCHER

How can they? If I survive desire, then I will be free to want nothing, and so be amenable to anything.

DORMINY

That lack of preference will be your undoing; what have we achieved if not the ability to discern what we want and do not want? Are we to venture toward a place where we relinquish these?

PRITCHER

I don't come to bury preference, but to praise a greater appetite.

DORMINY

Is that your defense?

PRITCHER

I don't have a defense, unless it is a slight to imagine more.

DORMINY

I'll be forced to provide you with the maximum sentence then.

PRITCHER

Do as you must; but remember to reserve it twice for yourself.

DORMINY

Your disregard is contemptible.

PRITCHER

But I must prevail upon you to reserve such until you have established some boundaries to search beyond.

DORMINY

(sarcastically)

As *you* have done?

PRITCHER

As I *will* do.

DORMINY

(sighing)

Take what you can from this emersion in fantasy, and sacrifice the will that is guiding you on such enlightened raiding parties.

PRITCHER

Is that my sentence?

DORMINY

That is your crime.

PRITCHER

Have you noticed a difference?

DORMINY

You have inflicted one from the very beginning. These accusations cannot stand apart from their consequences.

PRITCHER

The causes are their effects, related back and forth in conversation.

DORMINY

This is no dialogue.

PRITCHER

No; that is where you are wrong. It *is* a dialogue...

(PRITCHER looks up and notices the grips embarking on the scene change, yet the setting is only slightly being changed - though it is being altered.)

PRITCHER

... of supplication.

Scene III

The setting has been changed to the visiting chambers of a jail or prison, except the room only has one kiosk where a visitor sits and faces the prisoner in a sort of booth, separated by plate glass. They see each other but speak into telephone receivers; stage lit to illicit only these items. They are dressed similarly, purposely so as not to differentiate the incarcerated from the visitor.

DORMINY

And now?

PRITCHER

Look at where what you have done to me has placed you.

DORMINY

What have *you* done?

PRITCHER

What *have* I done?

DORMINY

Your concept of a destroyed soul is simply unacceptable, too far ranging.

PRITCHER

Have I even hinted at destruction?

DORMINY

Would you? It is this for which the lookouts took notice.

PRITCHER

And now look at you.

(Dorminy straightens herself)

DORMINY

It is not me that deserves circumspection.

PRITCHER

If not now, then when? Those worthy of regard are twice as valuable in captivity.

DORMINY

Captivity!

(Pritcher, holding the phone in one hand, taps on the glass with the other)

PRITCHER

Not only can they be studied at leisure, but their supposed public danger, their nuisance, is severely restricted.

DORMINY

I'll tell you what is severely restricted... your perception of reality. Was it not you who stood before the... and was sentenced to...

PRITCHER

To what? What did you see there?

DORMINY

It's not what I saw... it is what happened that has confined you here.

PRITCHER

My confinement has merely been regained, an expression of our inadequate state of security. The separation has always existed; now it has merely been codified.

DORMINY

Your insistence is enshrined among truly the greatest of well-wishers.

PRITCHER

I insist on knowing, that is all. I'll even allow you to remain where you are, if that is your desire.

DORMINY

Am I not free to come and go as I please?

PRITCHER

Only you can answer that, at your own pace, of course.

DORMINY

Like so many other things.

PRITCHER

But uniquely unlike all the rest; there is an opening and we can wait, but what comes will be the same.

DORMINY

(squints toward PRITCHER)

Do you subscribe that I relinquish this freedom for your sort of captivity?

PRITCHER

That *is* a rather stark formulation. And I wouldn't insist that you do anything - for then what you do becomes something else.

DORMINY

Loses the meaning you first intended.

PRITCHER

My intentions are considerably more harmful than your insults suggest. I would leave them aside, if I were you.

DORMINY

(sarcastically)

'*would leave*'; For this I'm sure you're attended famously.

PRITCHER

Only to be mocked.

DORMINY

Tell me, what is it, then, that describes what... no, how, I come and go - and you do not?

PRITCHER

Simple. You have no destination, whereas everywhere, every single place as well as all places, are available to me.

DORMINY

(scoffing)

That's preposterous.

PRITCHER

Is it?

DORMINY

Yes. The truth is, you can no more go anywhere at all than I can have my breakfast on a passing cloud.

PRITCHER

Ah, the truth. And I'll note the analogy. But you understand, the question is not where I can go, but where you do not.

DORMINY

If you had set this up earlier, you couldn't be more wrong. These questions are all about course change, of which I am highly availed.

PRITCHER

Precisely! Availed, but not disposed.

DORMINY

But come what may, I will surely entertain.

PRITCHER

Of most things, you certainly will not. Elimination of these has been your primary activity.

DORMINY

How could you know?

PRITCHER

For once, I can see what has been shown to me. Maybe it was pointed... out, maybe it was a passing blur.

DORMINY

There was a time when you were not even open to these.

PRITCHER

(sarcastically)

There was a time... there was a time... I asked you to see this as a chronology, but only in terms of what is *about* to happen.

DORMINY

But what I can't determine is this: do you begin something - or does it pick up somewhere and continue beyond you?

PRITCHER

Yes!

DORMINY

Which?

PRITCHER

It doesn't matter! You're getting it.

DORMINY

It doesn't make sense.

PRITCHER

But I'm understanding your idea of concurrence now.

DORMINY

(chidingly)

That wasn't mine.

PRITCHER

(shaking his head)

Seizing what is not ours to fashion is no matter; it's out there, a willing propriety comes into view, then within reach.

DORMINY

Where?

PRITCHER

Just beyond. I don't see the part of anything larger, anything beyond desire. That type of grasp is for the lighted pathway. Not here.

DORMINY

Where, then?

PRITCHER

The severed, unlit fate, of course... could be anywhere and probably is, but it's critical that it be...

DORMINY
(*interrupting*)

Somewhere?

PRITCHER

I guess.

DORMINY

You don't know? Oh.

PRITCHER

I can't. That's...

DORMINY
(*deflated*)

Yes. You've just got to want it to be.

PRITCHER

To some that means a life of meager asceticism... but they're just forgiving themselves ahead of time.

DORMINY

I might do that; but can I...

PRITCHER

Your faults are less worthy of contempt than you imagine; in fact, they might be exactly what's required.

DORMINY
(*skeptically*)

Can I enable - enlist them?

PRITCHER

Can you not? You will serve them one way or another, in profligacy or in abeyance. So might you choose whether, doing so with care but strictly without mercy.

(*A pause*)

DORMINY

I can, but will I?

PRITCHER

In this, you already have.

DORMINY

If anyone is open to these choices, don't they reach a certain cacophony, in all the striving to be heard?

PRITCHER

In this pursuit? Not to worry. It's too much like a sentence from the outside, an accounting of all that must be shed, instead of that brought to muster. If it was seen in that light...

DORMINY

Then it would be heroic.

PRITCHER

But there is no light, where it actively exists. There is no reaching to illuminate what is not darkened. That's why all the analogies to bulbs, flashes and fires.

DORMINY

Take that away, and I'm disoriented, bounding between pleasure and slaughter without consequence.

PRITCHER

The mind stretches toward infirmity, in flights of mad pursuit away from what it most needs. It's the opposite of what's there.

DORMINY

And so, you struggle against it?

PRITCHER

Beauty actually absolves the darkness, indictments of the void are just protestations in reverse.

DORMINY

I can see without light and I can feel without hands, but when I think without want, I anticipate a sort of hope I know well cannot arrive, will not arrive.

(PRITCHER, holding the phone, shakes his head furiously.)

PRITCHER

It's not the hope that you don't understand; the notion you expect of what is coming simply bears no relation to the freedom from want. Escaping this notion is like moving the mountain with a pick and shovel. You're better off on the side of the road with a carpet and some crystals.

DORMINY

There are things that one needs, surely you'll agree?

PRITCHER

To what? Incontrovertible though it may seem, I'm distracted from its essence by the very tip of what I want.

DORMINY

No harm there.

PRITCHER

Only without it.

(DORMINY pushes her chair back from the partition and drops the phone onto the surface, not in frustration but in kind of open rumination. The stage widens slightly with light, PRITCHER remains at the glass with the phone, watching and listening as DORMINY stands and takes several steps around the floor behind the partition, still in view of PRITCHER. Finally she looks at PRITCHER, comes back over to the phone, pulls it to her ear, then reseats herself at the partition.)

DORMINY

Are you alone in there?

PRITCHER

(smiles)

Are you?

DORMINY

(shakes her head)

I'm just asking because, well, I thought for a moment that if you had been left to consider these things...

PRITCHER

Rather than condemned to...

DORMINY

... then it might not be you who is confined.

PRITCHER

Who might it be then?

DORMINY

Why is the missing motivation always assumed to be some altruistic passion?

PRITCHER

You don't believe you're worthy of doing something for yourself.

DORMINY

No, er yes, but what it is might be too great for one person.

PRITCHER

To do?

DORMINY

To appreciate. It's the contradiction in our individual idyll.

PRITCHER

That perfect assumption is constantly interrupted with inefficiency and shortcomings. I see what is not there and resolve to address it.

DORMINY

I won't discount that, but seeing what is not there infers some sustained state of grace.

PRITCHER

Simply because your view won't allow you to believe it. That idyll is made up of nothing but contradictions. Deeming to sort them is a sort of higher-plane arrogance usually reserved for wars and conquest.

DORMINY

Places we'll only go for killing or worship are reserved a special kinship.

PRITCHER

But they're the same - the only - connections to creation. You must think with the same righteous ability. A belief in

annihilation bears an eerie resemblance to 'couldn't hurt a fly'.

DORMINY

In a sense.

PRITCHER

(shaking his head)

There's no sense about it. You leave this place tomorrow or forty years from now, your ticket has the same stamps on it.

DORMINY

In that light, 'do you want to live' is the same as 'do you want to die'.

PRITCHER

And once you're beyond this gate, it's the answers that are different, rendered in colors absurd to the imagination, lines...

DORMINY

You violate the commandments of what you are asked to do.

PRITCHER

But not as a rule; only as a throughway.

DORMINY

To where?

PRITCHER

In this lifting darkness, orientation is secondary. Who's around? Are you alone? Do you care? These are fundamentally unanswerable until right then.

DORMINY

When?

PRITCHER

You decide. I call them purpose filters; get rid of them in any manner you choose. But get rid of them.

DORMINY

I thought it was all about a higher purpose.

PRITCHER

But not for you. Not for this; yours is only godly - turning darkness into light. Forget any other purposes.

DORMINY

Or any higher than that.

PRITCHER

As you like. What is important is what is necessary.

DORMINY

That seems admirable enough.

PRITCHER

It's actually a distasteful proposition. If you want to be admirable, provide comfort - be a priest of some sort, or a prostitute. To make anything actually calls for you to be an accomplice in your depravity.

DORMINY

But that's not serving any purpose, either.

PRITCHER

But you'll be letting them off easy, which is all they want.

DORMINY

As opposed to challenging their very existence.

PRITCHER

What it takes for us to exist - there's a difference. Not that you should be here, but that you be here differently.

DORMINY

I see. Perfect desire.

PRITCHER

Can you get around the tree of knowledge without begetting a vengeful, paranoid God?

DORMINY

If he was these things before, won't he still be them after?

PRITCHER

Only if he doesn't have company.

DORMINY

I asked if you were alone.

PRITCHER

Did I answer?

DORMINY

Sometimes we answer by not answering.

PRITCHER

But it's interesting; we cannot listen by not listening.

DORMINY

You're saying there's a relation?

PRITCHER

I don't know. Ideas hatch monsters so you'd better watch out.

DORMINY

(cracks a smile)

It's funny; It always seems like it's the other way around.

PRITCHER

I don't know how it could be any other way. For expression to endure requires a type of nod to its mystery. All you could report on this you could simply overwhelm by making something up.

DORMINY

That's all it takes?

PRITCHER

Once you resolve to, yes.

DORMINY

I've stepped outside of the shadow for once, does that mean I have to join you in there?

PRITCHER

In where?

(DORMINY pauses, twice as long as at any previous juncture.)

What is it?

DORMINY

I'm not sure how to answer that question.

PRITCHER

Because you perceive a barrier.

DORMINY

Yes, and it fundamentally effects everything else I can say.

PRITCHER

What else?

DORMINY

Anything I can do, or think.

PRITCHER

What is it that you want?

DORMINY

I don't know.

PRITCHER

(nodding)

That's the confusion; all else is invited from there.

DORMINY

Invited or not, I'm unable to detect or differentiate.

PRITCHER

What do you see?

DORMINY

That this is an affliction.

PRITCHER

Upon whom?

DORMINY

I don't know; I don't feel like myself.

PRITCHER

Maybe you're more than just yourself, one person.

DORMINY

How can that be?

PRITCHER

(trying to interrupt the last question)

Don't!

DORMINY

Sorry. Does the suffering go away?

PRITCHER

Do you mean will it, or can it?

DORMINY

I think I see what you mean.

PRITCHER

But this symbolizes no thing. It is exactly it.

DORMINY

While my perceptions are not just mine, they have sharpened.

PRITCHER

You realize that the first thing you detected outside of yourself was suffering.

DORMINY

And I'm saddened in way that focuses my mind.

PRITCHER

It's not sadness, for it has no opposite. Commensurate justice will not be attained. Because the situation is not merely unjust.

DORMINY

Suffering on the basis of inequity or iniquity is not just.

PRITCHER

Did you decide these things? Did you cover them with darkness, or is that just another perceived barrier?

DORMINY

I did nothing at all.

PRITCHER

Yes... and how long can you continue this, knowing what you now know?

DORMINY

I... there is... what can I do?

PRITCHER

You are... cursed with options, the tyranny of profound compass. A better question is the one you've always longed to understand, have embraced into romance and back again. And now you may wonder no longer.

DORMINY

What's the opposite of inevitable?

PRITCHER

I don't know... Not inevitable, I guess. Or maybe it's just something we can avoid.

DORMINY

(takes a deep sigh)

We'll see.

PRITCHER

We usually do.

(Stage fades to dark.)

END.

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Alan Flurry is a writer living in Athens, GA. His short story CENTURY 2.1 was published by Azure in 2018. His feature screenplay THE NEXT PARIS was an official selection of the 2019 Beverly Hills Film Festival, where he met a lot of nice people.*