

DEBT

By Leah Ryan

All the scenes can be played by a company of four actors: two men and two women.

Scene 1: MAN, WOMAN and WAITER

Scene 2: MAN, WOMAN, and WAITER

Scene 3: MAN #1, MAN #2 and WAITRESS

Scene 4: WOMAN #1, WOMAN #2 and WAITER, Two VOICES

Contact: Ed Cheetham
Box 540
Poughkeepsie, NY 12604
edcheetham@vassar.edu

Scene One: WOMAN sits in a diner. MAN enters and joins her.

WOMAN

You're late.

MAN

Yeah, yeah. I'm late. Sorry. Did you call the electric company?

WOMAN

Yes, I called the electric company. They said there's no mistake. The bill is two hundred and fourteen dollars and seventy-seven cents. If you don't pay it by tomorrow, they're going to shut off the lights.

MAN

Did you do what I told you to do? I gave you very specific instructions. First, insist that there was a computer error. Second, if they give you a hard time, ask to speak to their supervisor. (*waiter enters and hands them menus; exits*).

WOMAN

Why don't you raise your voice?

MAN

You'll have to call again tomorrow.

WOMAN

I'm not going to call again tomorrow. Why can't you call again tomorrow?

MAN

I'm at school all day.

WOMAN

All you do is sit in the library. Besides, I have my own apartment to worry about. My own electric bill...

MAN

Who's fault is that? How many times have I told you to give up your place and move in with me?

WOMAN

Oh right. There'll be no electricity, I'll have to scrape the mold off the bathtub in the dark. I have a better idea. Why don't you just move in to the library, I'll stay where I am and your place can just...de-evolve. You should take out an ad, maybe someone will want to study it.

MAN

That's real nice. Thanks a million. (*they look at their menus.*) Fred got sick from lox yesterday.

WOMAN

Oh really?

MAN

Must have been belly lox.

WOMAN

What are you talking about?

MAN

Lox. It was probably poor quality. I was with him when he got it. It was cheap. Bagel, lox and cream cheese was just \$5.50. Too good to be true.

WOMAN

That's ridiculous. It was probably just spoiled. What do you mean by sick?

MAN

You know, sick. *(he makes loud obnoxious vomiting sound).*

WOMAN

Nice.

MAN

This is probably belly lox too. *(the waiter, who has been hovering, appears at the table.)*

WAITER

Take your order?

WOMAN

I'd like the baked chicken special but can I have French fries instead of the roast potatoes?

WAITER

Why not?

WOMAN

And I'd also like a small tossed salad with French dressing. Can I get the dressing on the side?

WAITER

Why not?

MAN

What is French dressing? It's orange.

WOMAN

I'd like a coffee, too, please.

MAN

What's this "A Coffee"? It's not "A Coffee." It's "Some Coffee". Or just "Coffee." Where did you pick up this "A Coffee"?

WAITER

For you sir?

MAN

Toasted bagel with cream cheese and lox.

WAITER

To drink?

MAN

Coffee. Some coffee. *(the waiter exits. The two sit in tense silence for several long moments.)*

MAN

You gotta keep digging at me, don't you? Dig dig dig.

WOMAN

I haven't said a single measly goddamn little word.

MAN

Oh, you don't have to, sweetheart. You don't have to. *(waiter returns with coffee.)*

WAITER

You wanted lox with your bagel?

MAN

TOASTED BAGEL WITH CREAM CHEESE AND LOX. *(waiter exits.)*

MAN

Isn't this nice. A coffee. A coffee for me, and a coffee for you. Two coffees.

WOMAN

Oh shut up.

MAN

Fred had a book on Chinese medicine.

WOMAN

Was he trying to cure himself of belly lox poisoning?

MAN

Very funny. No, he just happens to be fascinated by Chinese medicine.

WOMAN

Some people swear by it.

MAN

They don't believe in surgery, the Chinese.

WOMAN

What do you mean, they don't believe in surgery?

MAN

THEY DON' T BELIEVE IN IT. THEY DON'T CUT PEOPLE.

WOMAN

You're insane. That is completely untrue. (*waiter returns with salad*).

MAN

WHY CAN'T YOU ADMIT YOU'RE WRONG FOR ONCE?

WOMAN

But I'm not wrong. What about that famous cataract operation that the Chinese are so famous for?

MAN

That's not the goddamn Chinese...

WOMAN

It is too the goddamn Chinese.

MAN

THE CHINESE DO NOT BELIEVE IN SURGERY. Are you really going to put that gelatinous orange stuff on your salad?

WOMAN

Mind your own damn business.

MAN

You just can't stand being wrong can you? It makes you sick.

WOMAN

That's right. I'm sick. I'm really sick. I think I'll go to China and have an operation.

MAN

Why don't you do that. Why don't you see if they'll cut your goddamn head off for you.

WOMAN

I think it might be ancient Chinese medicine you're thinking of.

MAN

What?

WOMAN

ANCIENT China. ANCIENT China.

MAN

You just hate being wrong. That's your problem. (*Waiter arrives with food*).

MAN

I would like more coffee, please, too. No, make that Another Coffee. I would like One More Coffee.

WOMAN

Is this the kind of evening we're going to have? This is just great. (*the waiter exits. They sit in silence again, for several long moments, eating.*) What are you going to do about the electric bill?

MAN

It's wrong.

WOMAN

What do you mean, it's wrong?

MAN

It's wrong. It can't be right. It's too big. Someone made a mistake.

WOMAN

You made the mistake of not paying it for six months.

MAN

That's bullshit. Who told you that?

WOMAN

The electric company.

MAN

Listen, the electric company is an established evil. They don't deserve my money. I have to make difficult choices. I have to choose between paying the electric bill and going to the movies. I have to choose between paying the electric bill and buying socks. What difficult choices does the electric company have to make? Huh? What difficult choices -

WOMAN

- I do not know what difficult choices the electric company has to make.

MAN

Did you ask to speak to the supervisor like I told you? No.

WOMAN

The supervisor would have told me the same thing.

MAN

Oh, do you think so? Maybe next time you could try it out just to make sure.

WOMAN

Next time? What next time?

MAN

You have to realize that this is a major utility we're dealing with here. This is the scum of the earth we're dealing with. That's your problem. You act like you're dealing with people. They're not people.

WOMAN

What do you mean they're not people? You're out of your mind.

MAN

They're not people. They're a utility. A utility.

WOMAN

The person who answers the phone is a person. The person who answers the phone isn't a utility.

MAN

They're part of the utility.

WOMAN

No they're not. They're just people answering the phone.

MAN

No. No. Nobody's just people answering the phone.

WOMAN

You're out of your mind.

MAN

Hey, were you serious about that Chinese surgery you were going get? You know...*(makes decapitation gesture)*

WOMAN

Okay. For example. Our waiter. Is he a restaurant?

MAN

What?

WOMAN

See, you can't even follow your own logic. *(pause)* You know what you have to do. You have to call the electric company first thing in the morning and work out a payment plan.

MAN

I have to beg and grovel. I have to kiss their asses.

WOMAN

That's right.

MAN

Where's the check? *(yells to WAITER)* BRING THE CHECK!

WOMAN

Wait a minute, what's this Bring The Check? Do I look like I'm finished eating to you? *(WAITER arrives, begins totaling the check.)*

WOMAN *(to WAITER)*

I'm not done. Take your time.

MAN (to WAITER)

Go ahead and add it up.

WOMAN (to WAITER)

Actually, while you're here, can I ask a philosophical question?

WAITER

Why not?

MAN

Here we go...

WOMAN

Do you think of yourself merely as an instrument of this restaurant? Or is it an integral part of your identity? As in, would you find it difficult to identify where the restaurant leaves off and where you yourself begin? In other words, would you say that A., you work at the restaurant, or B., you are the restaurant?

WAITER

I don't think I really get paid enough to answer a question like that. That, of course, depends somewhat on you folks. More coffee?

MAN

THE CHECK.

WOMAN

But I'm not done...(WAITER rips out check and places it on the table).

MAN

What is this, the body and blood of Christ you're eating? Is this some sacred ritual?

WOMAN

Goddamn it. Shut up and leave me alone.

MAN

Everybody's looking at us.

WOMAN

Good. Why don't you take off your clothes and dance around.

MAN

You'd like that, wouldn't you.

(WOMAN whips out a \$20 bill and places it on the table. She fishes another piece of paper out of her wallet or purse.)

WOMAN

This is the number you have to call to work out a payment plan. Ask for Brenda. I got her all buttered up for you. I told her you were nuts. I told her you were just like a big kid who doesn't know any better. She'll go easy on you.

MAN

Okay.

WOMAN

You're welcome. Call first thing in the morning.

MAN

Can I call from your place?

WOMAN

Why.

MAN

My phone's shut off.

WAITER

Is this all set?

MAN (*overlap*)

- no...

WOMAN (*overlap*)

- yes...

Scene Two: WOMAN sits in a diner. MAN enters and joins her. WAITER hovers nearby.

MAN

I'm sorry I'm late.

WOMAN

Oh, no problem.

MAN

Did you call the electric company?

WOMAN

Yes. It's fine. I called this morning and got it all straightened out.

MAN

Really?

WOMAN

Yes, it was just a computer error.

MAN

Wow, that must be a relief.

WOMAN

You bet. I had a terrible night's sleep last night.

MAN

I was going to say, you look exhausted. (*WAITER appears with menus, exits*).

WOMAN

Well, that's enough about me. Do I really look tired? Just kidding.

MAN (*laughs nervously*)

Listen, it's my treat tonight.

WOMAN

Oh, that's not necessary...

MAN

I know it's not, but you've had a rough couple of days, and well. It's nice to see you.

WOMAN

Thanks. It's really nice to see you too. But you don't have to buy me dinner.

MAN

I know I don't have to. I want to.

WOMAN

Okay. Well thanks a lot, that's really sweet.

WAITER

Can I take your order?

MAN

I'm sorry, I haven't even really looked at the menu yet.

WOMAN

I guess you'll have to give us another minute.

WAITER

Of course. No problem.

WOMAN

So how are things with you?

MAN

Pretty typical. Busy, tired, you know.

WOMAN

Yeah.

MAN

I have a confession to make, actually.

WOMAN

Oh really?

WAITER

Can I take your order?

MAN

Give us another minute.

WAITER

Sure. That's just fine.

WOMAN

Don't keep me in suspense.

MAN

Well, when this whole thing happened with your electric bill, I was kind of worried.

WOMAN

Oh, that's sweet.

MAN

Well, I wasn't worried like that...I mean. Hmmm. How do I say this?

WOMAN

Just say it. It's alright.

MAN

Okay, well I hate to seem like I have a lot of baggage, you know, but my last girlfriend, well, she had a lot of problems...

WOMAN

Uh huh...

MAN

I mean, a lot of problems.

WOMAN

You mean like financial problems?

MAN

The financial thing was part of it. It was really a symptom. She drank, she was addicted to valium and Percoset and something else, I don't remember what it was. She had a hard time keeping a job. And she would just...throw her bills away. Her utilities were always getting shut off, and I would always bail her out.

WOMAN

Hmmm.

MAN

I got really sucked in to being the hero and saving her all the time. And no matter what I did, it was never enough. Meanwhile, she was going out with other guys, and I was the last to know about it.

WOMAN

Wow.

MAN

The thing that really freaked me out was that she seemed completely normal when we met. I mean, totally normal.

WOMAN

Huh.

MAN

I was in therapy for a while after we broke up...don't worry, I'm not all hung up on her anymore. But when you called and said they were shutting off your electricity, it kind of...well, brought some things back.

WOMAN

I didn't know. I -

MAN

- I know you didn't. You did nothing wrong. It's just that I've been so...happy since we met and I just like you a lot. So I guess it just scared me a little, that's all. So I thought you should know.

WOMAN

I'm so glad you told me.

MAN

It has absolutely nothing to do with you.

WOMAN

I understand. Really. I think it's really important to get these things into the open.

MAN

Wow. I'm so glad. Things have been so incredibly...easy between us, you know? I've literally enjoyed every minute. I was really nervous about bringing this kind of thing up, but it was on my mind....

WOMAN

You did the right thing, really.

WAITER

Can I take your order?

MAN

Sure. *(to woman)* Are you all set?

WOMAN

I think so.

WAITER

Praise the Lord in Heaven. Okay, shoot.

WOMAN

You go first.

MAN

I'll have a BLT on wheat toast and a diet coke. Do you want to share some French fries?

WOMAN

Okay.

MAN

An order of fries, too, then. *(he hands WAITER the menu.)*

WOMAN

Hmmm. Let's see. I'm going to start with the shrimp cocktail. And I'll have the prime rib, medium rare.

WAITER

Baked, mashed, or fries?

WOMAN

Mashed.

WAITER

String bean, tossed salad, peas and carrots, spinach or corn?

WOMAN

I'll have the tossed salad -

WAITER

French, Russian, Oil and Vinegar, Blue -

WOMAN

Blue cheese dressing.

WAITER

Soup or tomato juice?

WOMAN

What's the soup?

WAITER

Minestrone or chicken -

WOMAN

I'll have the minestrone. And can I have a glass of red wine please?

MAN *(to WAITER)*

Do you take Mastercard?

WAITER

Yes. Will that be all?

WOMAN (*thoughtfully*)

I guess so. (*she hands her menu to WAITER. He exits*). So do you feel better now that you got that off your chest?

MAN

What? Oh, yes. Tons better.

WOMAN

Good. I wouldn't want you to feel bad.

MAN

Well, I just thought -

WOMAN

- No, really, I understand that you just want to make sure I'm not crazy like your last girlfriend. That's perfectly reasonable. I can imagine that if you found yourself going out with one wacko after another, you'd start to wonder if it was you.

MAN

If it was me?...

WOMAN

Yeah, you know. You might start thinking that they were honing in on you in particular. You might start thinking you're a psycho magnet or something.

MAN

Well, I -

WOMAN

- And all because there was a minor computer error with my electric bill. (*WAITER brings her wine, soup, and salad. She knocks the wine back and begins shoveling the salad in*).

MAN

I can see that I've upset you, I'm sorry, I -

WOMAN (*full mouth, can barely speak*)

- I'm not upset. I'm not upset at all.

MAN

Well, you certainly seem upset. And I'm afraid it's my fault, I never should have -

WOMAN

- Don't be ridiculous. How long have we known each other? Waiter! Excuse me. More wine please.

MAN

Six weeks, right? Six or seven...

WOMAN

Exactly! Not very long. It's natural to be cautious. I could be a real screwball. Anybody can look normal for a month or two, you know? (*WAITER returns with wine and food*)

MAN

I guess so...

WOMAN

It's a two-way street. How do I know you're not going to haul off and stab me with a steak knife any second? I don't. There's no way of knowing. It's a crap shoot.

MAN

Huh. I guess I never thought of it that way. Wow, look at the time. You know, I just remembered I have to get up really early tomorrow....

WOMAN

Aha. Typical. As soon as reality rears it's ugly head, you're outta here. Well, don't forget you're the one who brought up your fucking wacko ex-girlfriend. I didn't start it.

MAN

Look, I'm just going to get the waiter to total this up. You just relax and enjoy your meal. I think I need to -

WOMAN

It's just dandy in the beginning, isn't it. You meet, you talk about nothing in particular, and before you know it, you're fuckin all day, and it's so great, oh we have so much in common, and you fuck some more, and it's just great until it gets REAL, isn't it?

MAN

Um, waiter? Excuse me? Could I have the check -

WOMAN

In the beginning, it's easy to be nice. You know why? Endorphins. Know what that is? It's like goddamn heroin. Only it's natural, it's in your brain all the time. Certain things wake it up and get it going. Like sex. I'll bet you've never done heroin.

(the WAITER appears, throws down the check, and runs away. MAN desperately thrusts his Mastercard in the WAITER's direction, to no avail).

MAN

No, you're right, I haven't...

WOMAN

Well I've done heroin. I've done lots of it. And let me tell you, it's great. You know what's great about it? You don't give a shit about anything. You don't give a shit about reality. You see the connection? That's how people get into relationships. That's how people get married, for Christ's sake. People are stupid. They think they're in love, but it's just endorphins.*(the WAITER re-appears, MAN begins his transaction)* Very few people can deal with reality. Take this hunk of meat here. It's a goddamn piece of a cow. Reality isn't pretty.

MAN *(finishes paying the check)*

Okay, well, I really have to get going, I don't feel well -

WOMAN

Wow...you don't look good, actually. You look terrible. You're the wrong color.

MAN

Yes, I feel wrong, I feel like the wrong -

WOMAN

Listen, I don't think you should go anywhere right this second. I think you should just sit right here, have a drink of water, take some deep breaths...*(he does)*. Is that the deepest breath you can take?

MAN *(tries harder)*

I guess so -

WOMAN

Relax. Jesus. Do you have an anxiety disorder?

MAN

Not to my knowledge -

WOMAN

Probably just never been diagnosed. Well, listen, I think you need therapy. If this relationship is going to continue, I think it's important that we both work on our problems, don't you agree?

MAN

Yes, since you mention --

WOMAN *(pulls out a business card)*

Here's my shrink's card. We've talked about you, so she'll know who you are. I'm sure she'll be able to give you a referral. We should probably think about couples counseling, too. Want a Xanax?

MAN

No thanks...well, okay. Sure. *(he takes a pill bottle from her, opens it and carefully takes out one pill.)*

WOMAN

And listen, do you think I could stay at your place tonight? My electricity...well, it's true that there was a mistake. But it wasn't exactly the kind of mistake that I said...well, it's kind of a long story....see, I believe that the electric company wants me dead. Because of things I know.

(MAN shakes several more pills into his hand. He takes them all with a big gulp of wine. WAITER arrives)

WAITER

Can I get you folks anything else?

MAN

No. No more. *(yells)* No more!

WOMAN *(confidentially, to WAITER)*

I think I must have a gift for attracting wackos. Know what I mean?

WAITER

Exactly. You have yourself a pleasant evening, now.

(WOMAN stands up, WAITER and WOMAN regard each other. MAN remains seated, appears relaxed and prepared to sit there all night. Blackout)

Scene Three: MAN #1 sits in a diner. MAN #2 enters and joins him. WAITRESS hovers nearby.

MAN #1

You're late.

MAN #2

I know, I'm sorry. I'm fucking sorry alright? Jesus goddamn Christ....

MAN #1

Whatever. Did you call the fucking electric company?

MAN #2

Yes, I called the fucking electric company.

WAITRESS

Menus?

MAN #2

Yeah.

MAN #1

Thanks. *(they take the menus and she exits)*. So what happened?

MAN #2

What happened what?

MAN #1

What happened with the fuckin' electric company?

MAN #2

Do you mind? I'm trying to read.

MAN #1

Well pardon me.

MAN #2

What's the difference between a fuckin' cheeseburger and a fuckin' cheeseburger deluxe?

MAN #1

Three fuckin' bucks...

MAN #2

Yeah, besides the three fuckin' bucks.

MAN #1

Can't you fuckin' read? Jesus...

MAN #2

Fuck you, man...

WAITRESS

Ready to order?

MAN #2 *(flatly)*

No.

MAN #1

Give us a minute, please. *(she exits)* The deluxe has lettuce and tomato and fries.

MAN #2

Big fuckin' deal. What a fuckin' scam.

MAN #1

Man, you are so fuckin' stupid.

MAN #2

Hey fuck you.

MAN #1

The fries cost \$2.75 if you get 'em separately. Jesus...

MAN #2

Yeah, but how many?

MAN #1

What?

MAN #2

How many fries do you get with a goddamn deluxe? As many as you get with a fuckin side order? I don't think so.

MAN #1

Okay, well look. If it'll make you fuckin happy, I'll get the cheeseburger and a side of fries. You can get the deluxe. And we can count the fuckin' -

MAN #2

- Well, duh, if you order them together, duh, they're going to put the same fuckin' number of fries on the plate.

WAITRESS

Are you ready to order?

MAN #1

Thank you, yes, I am. I'll have the cheeseburger deluxe please. And can I have a coke?

WAITRESS

Why not?

MAN #2 (*reading, apparently thinking hard*)

I'll have the fuckin' ...cheeseburger. Yeah. Just regular. Not deluxe. And a side of fries. And a coke.

MAN #1 (*patiently*)

I want you to tell me about what happened with the fuckin' electric company. (*WAITRESS exits*).

MAN #2

Since when is it your fuckin' business.

MAN #1

Oh fuck you, man...

MAN #2

I owe two hundred fuckin' bucks, that's what fuckin' happened with the electric company.

MAN #1

No fuckin' way. I thought you said it was a mistake.

MAN #2

Well it kind of is, because listen. You remember how fuckin' Bob like never paid his bills, right? And I kept saying, hey fuckin' Bob, man, when are you going to pay your fuckin' bills and shit? And Bob would say, (*he imitates Bob*) "oh, I'm fuckin' sorry, man, my hours got cut back, blah blah fuckin blah," and I was like, "you know what Bob, I'm fuckin' sorry about your fuckin' situation, but it's not my goddamn problem. The fuckin' bills have gotta get paid, alright?" And Bob would be like "oh, woe is fuckin' me, my boss is an asshole..."

MAN #1

Cut to the chase, willya? (*WAITRESS appears with their cokes.*)

WAITRESS

Your burgers will be right out.

MAN #1

Thanks.

MAN #2

Well, you know the rest of that fuckin' story, right? I had to kick Bob out because he fuckin' did major damage to the fuckin' property....

MAN #1

What the fuck did he do?

MAN #2

He ripped the fuckin' sink off the goddamn bathroom wall, man...

MAN #1

How the fuck did he do that?

MAN #2

He got fuckin' wasted and he fuckin' fell on it.

MAN #1

Fell on it?

MAN #2

Well, he was falling, and he leaned on the sink to hold him up, and...it fuckin' didn't hold him up, man.

MAN #1

Fuck.

MAN #2

And of course he never paid his fuckin' bills. I didn't pay the electric because it was half Bob's, right? And he never gave me any fuckin' money. So then, like, before I knew it, it was fuckin' pretty large.

MAN #1

So what's going to fuckin' happen?

MAN #2

They're gonna shut the shit off.

MAN #1

Oh, man. Fuck.

MAN #2

What do you care?

MAN #1

Well what about fuckin' band practice, man?

MAN #2

Oh, is that it? Is that what your fuckin' problem is? Fuckin' band practice?

(WAITRESS arrives with burgers, appears to wait for the right moment to interrupt them).

MAN #1

Yeah, what's the matter with that?

MAN #2

Oh fuck you, man.

MAN #1

I've been giving you money toward the fuckin' electric bills, man. You've been blowing it on fuckin' beer. Now I'm out all that fuckin' money and there's no goddamn place to practice.

MAN #2

Hey I gotta fuckin' live there. If I can live there, like 24 hours a day seven days a week, we can most certainly fuckin' have goddamn band practice there.

MAN #1

With no electricity? Fuck you.

WAITRESS

Um, here's your food. *(she puts the plates down)*

MAN #1

Thanks.

WAITRESS

Anything else I can get you?

MAN #1

I think we're all set, thanks. (*she exits*)

MAN #2

Man, I am fuckin' hungry.

MAN #1

Now why don't you tell me how we're going to have band practice without juice.

MAN #2

We'll be..."unplugged".

MAN #1

No way, man. Fuck that. People have to give a shit about you before you can be "unplugged". We're fuckin' nobody. We'll just be...quiet.

MAN #2

The fuckin' band sucks anyway.

MAN #1

What?

MAN #2

I said the fuckin' band sucks. You heard what I goddamn said.

WAITRESS

Everything alright here?

MAN #2

Since you mention it, no. There's supposed to be fuckin' cheese on this burger. It's supposed to be a fuckin' cheeseburger.

WAITRESS

Oh, wow, sorry.

MAN

Fuck...

MAN #1

Calm down, willya?

WAITRESS

It'll only take a minute to fix it.

MAN #2

I'm really fuckin' hungry.

WAITRESS

I wish I cared.

MAN #2

What?

WAITRESS

I wish I cared. If I cared, maybe I could make some real money at this goddamn job. Every day, I think I'm gonna figure out the angle. Someone will say, "Miss! There's a hair in my sandwich" and I'll genuinely give a shit, and I'll take care of it and look like a hero. Then I'll get a good tip. I try thinking about the money...I always think that'll motivate me. But it doesn't work. I'm just not a good actor. *(she heaves a deep sigh)*. Do you want me to put some cheese on that or not?

MAN #2

Yeah, I guess....

WAITRESS *(takes his plate)*

Alright, I'll be back in a jif. *(she exits)*

MAN #2

That's so fucked up. Let's chew and screw.

MAN #1

No, why don't you talk to me more about the band and how it sucks.

MAN #2

We only know one fuckin song, alright? Don't you think that's kind of lame?

MAN #1

"Wild Thing" is a good song.

MAN #2

I know it's a good song. That's the fuckin problem. It's been a good song for twenty years. Every asshole that can play two fuckin' cords can play "Wild Thing." It's a good song once, twice, maybe three times. But after you hear it like a million or so times, you realize that it's actually really fuckin' stupid. *(he sings, plays air guitar)*

WAITRESS

Here's your burger. Sorry about that. Well, not really. *(she exits)*

MAN #1

Well, maybe I'm fuckin' wrong, but I think we add something new.

MAN #2

You're fuckin' wrong. The last person who added somethin' fuckin' new was Hendrix. He lit his fuckin' guitar on fire.

MAN #1

Well, what if I told you I've been workin' on some new material.

MAN #2

What kind of new material?

MAN #1

I taught myself a new song this week.

MAN #2

What fuckin' song did you learn? (*pause*),

MAN #1

"Louie Louie".

MAN #2

That's not a new song, man. That's the same goddamn song.

MAN #1

Not exactly.

MAN #2

Almost fuckin' exactly the same stupid fuckin' song.

MAN #1

Maybe we can do something...different with it.

MAN #2

Fuck that, man. A band that has one set that consists of fuckin' "Wild Thing" and "Louie Louie" has no fuckin' future.

MAN #1

I wish you wouldn't be so fuckin' negative all the time. At least I'm trying to --

MAN #2

Look, I'm sorry, but I'm gonna have to quit the band.

MAN #1

Quit the band? Fuck you.

MAN #2

I've given this a lot of thought, alright? I just don't see it going anywhere.

MAN #1

You've never given anything "a lot of thought" in your fuckin' life. This is fuckin' bullshit. You never want to fuckin' practice. Of course it's not going anywhere.

MAN #2

I'm sorry, but as your friend, I really think you need to get over this band thing.

MAN #1

Fuck you. You're not my fucking friend. This 'band thing', as you call it, is my whole fucking life.

MAN #2

My point, exactly.

WAITRESS (*from off*)

I don't give a shit. Get your own side of mayo.

MAN #1

What the fuck is that supposed to mean?

MAN #2

Alright, I'll be harsh. If a band that has a fuckin' repertoire of "Wild Thing" and "Louie Louie" is your whole fuckin' life, it's time to get a new life. (*WAITRESS enters and speaks to an offstage presence*)

WAITRESS

Fuck you. (*she begins untying her apron.*)

MAN #1

You suck.

MAN #2

You have to get real. You think you can play "Wild Thing" in my living room once a week and one day you're going to wake up and be a fuckin' star on MTV.

WAITRESS

'Notice'? Okay, what kind of notice do you want? Um, I noticed that this job sucks, so now I'm quitting. How about that? How's that for notice?

(*At this point WAITRESS has pulled all the focus in the room.*)

MAN #1

I know what we need. We need a girl singer.

WAITRESS

Don't you threaten me with that. Keep the fucking paycheck. Oh yes. Go ahead. You don't have any hold on me. Do the words "Health Inspector" mean anything to you?

MAN #1 (*to WAITRESS*)

Hey you're a singer, right?

WAITRESS

No, I'm not a fuckin' singer. (*she throws her apron on the floor*)

MAN #1

Well, you should be. Really.

WAITRESS

Do the words "Department of Labor" mean anything to you? *(pause)* You fuck off. *(she picks up MAN #2's plate and throws it at the unseen enemy. She then exits).*

MAN #1

Later. *(he rises, wistfully watches WAITRESS exit. MAN #2, wishing to avoid paying the check, sneaks off. Blackout.)*

Scene Four: WOMAN #1 sits in a diner. WOMAN #2 enters and joins her. WAITER hovers nearby.

WOMAN #1

You're late.

WOMAN #2

I know, look, I know. My life is insane, alright? I'm really sorry. Did you call the electric company?

WOMAN #1

Where's your watch? I thought you'd finally gotten one.

WOMAN #2

Did you call the electric company?

WOMAN #1

Yes. What happened to your watch?

WOMAN #2

My life is insane.

WOMAN #1

So you said.

WOMAN #2

The battery died. I brought it to the Jeweler. Turns out he watch takes some kind of obscure battery. They have to order it, it will take a month. Then the jeweler goes out of business, turns out the guy is some kind of weird criminal.

WOMAN #1

A weird criminal?

WOMAN #2

Yes, not a normal criminal like a drug dealer or a robber. He's a...contortionist? No, that's not right.

WAITER

Menus?

WOMAN #1
I know what I want.

WOMAN #2
I know what I don't want. That's a start, isn't it?

WAITER
Why yes. It is.

WOMAN #2
I'll have a cup of coffee. And a menu.

WAITER
Excellent.

WOMAN #2
Where was I?

WOMAN #1
Contortionist.

WOMAN #2
Yes...but that's wrong.

WOMAN #1
Did it rhyme with contortionist? Or was it similar to a contortionist?

WOMAN #2
What would a jeweler be jailed for that is similar to a contortionist? (*WAITER arrives with menu and coffee*).

WOMAN #1
I have no idea.

WOMAN #2
It must have rhymed with contortionist. (*thinks*) Fuck. I don't remember. What happened with the electric company?

WOMAN #1
The bill is two hundred dollars. I can't pay it. That's what happened.

WAITER
Ready to order?

WOMAN #1
Can I just get an order of toast?

WAITER
Of course.

WOMAN #2
No, that's crazy. You can't just have toast.

WOMAN #1
Why not?

WOMAN #2
Because. *(to waiter)* Can you just give us another minute?

WOMAN #1
What's wrong with you?

WOMAN #2
How much money do you have on you?

WOMAN #1
That's none of your business.

WOMAN #2
I told you I would buy you dinner.

WOMAN #1
I don't want you to do that.

WOMAN #2
Why the hell not? You told me you couldn't afford to go out to eat, and I said don't worry about it, I'll buy you dinner. *(goes into her pocket, gets a crumpled bill, throws it across the table)*. Here, take this.

WOMAN #1
What the hell is that?

WOMAN #2
It's ten bucks. Just shut up and take it. *(WOMAN #1 has begun to weep silently.)*

WOMAN #2
Oh, fuck. *(WAITER appears)* Can you give us another minute?

WAITER
Of course.

WOMAN #2
Shit. I tried to help, I'm an asshole, I made you cry.

WOMAN #1
It isn't your damn fault. Stop thinking about yourself all the time.

WOMAN #2
How can I help you?

WOMAN #1 *(pathetic)*
I want toast.

WOMAN #2 *(moved)*
Oh...oh boy. Well you can certainly have toast. Will you let me pay for it?

WOMAN #1

Okay.

WOMAN #2

Will you just take this money? Get whatever you want with it. Toast or whatever.

WOMAN #1

Okay. *(she takes the crumpled bill, wipes her eyes. WOMAN #2 signals the waiter).*

WOMAN #2

Can't you work out some kind of payment thing with the electric company?

WAITER

Are you ready to order?

WOMAN #1

It isn't just the electric company.

WOMAN #2

I'll have a grilled cheese on rye and a diet coke.

WOMAN #1

White toast, please. And a cup of coffee.

WAITER

Excellent choice.

WOMAN #2

What do you mean it isn't just the electric company?

WOMAN #1*(starts to cry again)*

Oh, god, where do I start?

WAITER

Listen, I hope you don't mind my being really...forward, but I couldn't help overhearing.

I just want to tell you that I have the name of a good extortionist if you need one.

(he exits).

WOMAN #2

Extortionist! That's what he was.

WOMAN #1

What who was?

WOMAN #2

The jeweler that I brought my watch to. Which is why I don't have one, which is why I was late.

WOMAN #1

But did he really mean extortionist? Why would I need an extortionist?

WOMAN #2

I wonder if he's been listening to our whole conversation.

WOMAN #1

Ooo. I just got a chill.

WOMAN #2

Do you think he meant abortionist?

WOMAN #1

Why, do I look pregnant?

WOMAN #2

No, it's just that you're...you know, weeping uncontrollably and everything.

WOMAN #1

I'm not weeping uncontrollably.

WOMAN #2

Oh. Sorry. You're not pregnant?

WOMAN #1

No, I couldn't be.

WOMAN #2

You and Mark didn't break up did you?

WOMAN #1

No, but I've just been a nervous wreck lately....I haven't been in the mood.

WOMAN #2

For how long?

WOMAN #1

Like six weeks. Five weeks and four days.

WOMAN #2

Wow.

WOMAN #1

Maybe he did mean extortionist. Actually, I could use an extortionist. (*WAITER appears with food*).

WOMAN #2

Thank you.

WAITER

I just thought about it and I realized that it was really very wrong of me to interlope on your conversation like that. I hope you'll accept my sincerest apologies.

WOMAN #1

It's fine.

WAITER

Well, no it isn't. But when I saw you sitting there in this very public place, in this completely unflattering light, crying your eyes out, I have to say that I was really quite touched.

WOMAN #1

Well, good. I guess.

WAITER

And to tell you the truth, I've been under a lot of stress lately myself, and it was just so nice to see someone really open up and be really REAL, you know?

WOMAN #1

Yes, I -

WAITER

Because you know everyone's freakin' miserable, but will they admit it? No way José. All they care about is sex, and money...oh, I'm sorry. I understand that's a sore subject for you. And let me tell you, I can relate to that one hundred percent. Why do you think I'm such a basket case? I had to get a root canal and I put it on my darn Mastercard. Isn't that pathetic? 36 years old and I can't even pay for my own dental work. Between paying that off and making my student loan payments, honey, I am screwed but royally.

WOMAN #2

Yes, I understand -

WAITER

I started sending back those Publishers Clearinghouse things. That's how desperate I am. Do you know how long it takes to put those things together? Especially if you're not ordering a magazine. Put the red Corvette sticker here, put the ten million dollar sticker there, put it all in the envelope marked "NO, I do not wish to place an order at this time but PLEASE enter me in the GRAND PRIZE DRAWING"....can I get you folks anything else today?

WOMAN #2

I don't think so, thanks. (*WOMAN #1 has begun to weep again*) Oh, Jesus. Can you just start at the beginning and tell me what's going on?

WOMAN #1

You won't understand.

WOMAN #2

What are you talking about? What do you mean I won't understand?

WOMAN #1

Do you get misty when Marvin Gaye comes on the radio?

WOMAN #2

What?

WOMAN #1

Marvin Gaye. Marvin Gaye. See, you're too young.

WOMAN #2

I can't believe that Marvin Gaye is the yardstick by which you measure our friendship.

WOMAN #1

You're what, 27 or something?

WOMAN #2

27, yeah.

WOMAN #1

So if you end up quitting your job, going into debt, trying to be an artist, living in a hovel...

WOMAN #2

You don't live in a hovel. What's a hovel?

WOMAN #1

It's okay for you to be a bum. You're still in your twenties.

WOMAN #2

That's ridiculous.

WOMAN #1

No it's not. Ask anybody. Say, here's a woman that's 27 and she doesn't have a car or a house and she's up to her ears in debt, and she's temping for a living because she's a painter. People will think it's marvelous. But apply the same set of circumstances to a 35-year-old. People will think she's a bum. You heard the waiter...36 and can't pay his dental bills. He feels pathetic. He feels like a loser because he mails in sweepstakes entries.

WOMAN #2

And where does Marvin Gaye fit into all this?

WOMAN #1

If you're old enough to remember Marvin Gaye, you don't get any slack.

WOMAN #2

But this is all projection based on what you assume other people think.

WOMAN #1

So what?

WOMAN #2

What matters is how you feel about it.

WOMAN #1

Okay. I feel like a loser. How about that?

WOMAN #2

But do you feel like a loser because you feel like a loser, or do you feel like a loser because you think other people think you should feel like a loser?

WOMAN #1

Do you really think that's an important distinction?

WOMAN #2

I think so.

WOMAN #1

But how do you sort it out? You've been taught to value certain things, you don't live up to it somehow, and you feel like a loser.

WOMAN #2

Yeah, but they're not your values.

WOMAN #1

They're not the values I want to have, no. But they are my values, see? I'm an American. I won't get a good night's sleep until I have a microwave, money in the bank, and some kind of ugly mutant purebred dog.

WOMAN #2

So basically, you're doomed to a life of inner conflict and self-hatred.

WOMAN #1

It looks that way. (*WOMAN #1 picks up a dull butter knife and begins sawing at her wrist with it.*)

WOMAN #2

Oh, don't do that.

WAITER

That's not funny. Some of my best friends have committed suicide. I refuse to participate in this mockery. (*WOMAN #1 continues to hack at herself. Lights begin to flicker and fade, eventually into a brownout. The voices of the restaurant's owners emerge.*)

OWNER #1

Holy fuckin' Christ...did you call the goddamn electric company like I told you to?

OWNER #2

No, I'm not your personal slave. I thought you were gonna call the electric company.

WOMAN #1

Hey, I'm in the middle of something here. I can't see a goddamn thing...

(Strains of a recognizable but not too obvious Marvin Gaye song. Flashlight beam appears. The WAITER has a flashlight and a small battery -operated tape player. He begins to exit, sweeping the other characters with the beam of his flashlight. WOMAN #1 has stopped sawing at her wrist.)

WAITER

Batteries.

(Tape volume increases as he exits. End.)