

Now This

A play by Scott Kaiser

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Now This received a university production in the Quintero Theater at the University of Houston in April of 2011. The director was Sara Becker; the scenic/projection designer was Clint Allen; the costume designer was Paige Willson; the lighting designer was Travis Horstmann; the vocal coach was Jim Johnson; the musical director was Andrew Hager; the sound designer was Jacob L. Davis; the choreographer was Teresa Chapman.

The University of Houston cast included Lauren Ballard, Chris Battle-Williams, Melanie Burke, Sam Brown III, Melanie Burke, Domonique Champion, Sawyer Estes, Miguel Garcia, Andrew Garrett, Kimberly Hicks, Kevin Lusignolo, Katie Mattox, Benjamin Reed, Andrew Runk, Richard Sabatucci, Joel Sandel*, Jenna Simmons, Alan Wales, Rosie Ward, Lisa Wartenberg.

Now This was developed in 2009 and 2010 as part of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's *Black Swan Lab for New Work*. The Producer was Lue Morgan Douthit; the Stage Manager was Jill Rendall.

I am especially grateful to the following OSF actors for their generous contributions to the development of the script:

September and October, 2009:

Ryan Anderson, Catherine E. Coulson*, Richard Howard*, Jeffrey King*, Anthony Heald*, Miriam A. Laube*, Gregory Linington*, Terri McMahon*, Vilma Silva*, Derrick Lee Weeden*, Tyrone Wilson*.

August, 2010:

Tony DeBruno*, Michael Elich*, Brent Hinkley*, Miriam Laube*, Dee Maaske*, Terri McMahon*, Chinasa Ogbuagu*, David Salsa, G. Valmont Thomas*, K.T. Vogt*.

(*Denotes Member of Actor's Equity Association)

Story Synopsis

Welcome to the town of Purple Mountain, where teenager Joey Adderall is at the end of his tether. His girlfriend, Amy Clearblue, is pregnant; his father, Mort Soloflex, hasn't spoken to him in years; his mother, Purelle Swiffer, is a clean freak; his former teacher, Activia Green, is a raging liberal; his boss, Shad Rogaine, has anger management issues; his roommate's pit bull, Oswald, is a terror. He's broke, alone, and without hope. What's a young man to do? Joey heads to the Clear Cut Mall with a loaded pistol, and shoots his way out of his disposable life, taking with him several fellow consumers. It's all captured on CCTV by security specialist Randy Lenscrafter, and uploaded to the internet for everyone to see. Can the people of Purple Mountain ever hope to understand—and learn from—Joey's rampage at the mall?

CAST of CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

First Voice	Pharma-Godmother
Lunesta Richman	Shad Rogaine
Amy Clearblue	Dr. Lovebalm
Dash Goodyear	MIT Admissions Officer
Charmin Bounty	Sports / KPUR Radio
Johnny Viagra	Amerigo Vespucci
Purelle Swiffer	Strawberry Jam
Gardener of Eden	Gossip Girl 1
Sergeant Hartz	Gossip Girl 2
Activia Green	Time / KPUR Radio
Gutzon Borglum	Weather / KPUR Radio
Bobby Starkist	John Wilkes Booth
Lilly Eli	The Earl of Aricept
Randy Lenscrafter	The Duke of Darvon
William Zagnut	Lotto Jones
Hefty Rogaine	Warner Fox
Avis Adderall	Etno
Bud Starkist	Etdu
Nerf Goodyear	Human Boy
Merit McNugget	Lakota Sioux Tribesman
Mort Soloflex	Host / TSN TV
Joey Adderall	Store Mirror
Amana McNugget	Red Shoes
Pastor Poligrip	30's Radio Announcer
John Donne	Benny Goodman
Mr. Hyper-Griper	Gentlemen Dancers
Scale	The Old Book
Mr. Haff-Caff	911 Operator
Bacon	News / KPMT TV
Yogurt	Football / KPMT TV
Trauma	

A Note About Casting:

The number of actors required for the play, and the manner in which it can be cast, is highly flexible. Doubling issues can be resolved through the use of quick changes, abstract movement, masks, voice-overs, image projections, video projections, and any other theatrical devices you can dream up to tell the story.

PART I: MIDNIGHT

FIRST VOICE

Now this.

It is September. Starless night in the small town of Purple Mountain.

Hush now. No words. For all the consumers of the muted town are sleeping now.

(He takes out his cellphone and shuts it off.)

Unplug, be still, and listen—for you alone are wide awake at this unpowered hour of the Unisom night.

Listen. It is night down Brownfield Road, where the Dasani Creek trickles into the Aquafina River, where the Allosaurus and the Smilodon once drank deep, where the Dasani tribe once civilized a small village, where the first euro-settlers set up camp, where the lumber mill was built, where the garment factory stood, and where the waste-water treatment facility now stands.

Look. It is night along Big-box Boulevard, where the Clear Cut Mall stands like a suburban fortress moated by a vast black asphalt sea, flags waving gallantly in the valley's Frigidaire, rising high above white windowless walls bursting with the paparazzied glare of store signage and security floodage.

It is night at Richman's Auto-Mart on Lemonworth Way, where this year's plus-sized models line up hip-to-hip along the sidewalk, bumpers bared and headlights high, like a kick-line of rotund Rockettes, framed by a midnight-rainbow of buxom balloons, and splashed with Edison-daylight.

It is night on State Highway 29, heading south-south-south into town, where bang-the-drum billboards boast of 24/7 moldy-oldies on KPUR radio 98.6, the Cracker-Jack news team on TV-13 KPMT, the Best-Fricken-Sports-Channel-Ever on Red Rocket Satellite Radio, cheap diesel at the Ramparts Truck Stop and Car Wash, slots and 21 at the Dasani Creek Casino, and eighteen championship holes at the Broad Stripes Golf Club.

It is night at the Land-of-the-Free Gun Shop & Range, where locked glass cabinets of sidearms and loaded racks of rifles proudly wear the names that tamed the savage west—Eastwood Revolvers, Wayne shotguns, Fonda Rifles, Costner pistols, Hackman handguns, Ford Derringers, Cooper carbines, Stewart semi-autos, Mitchum Muzzleloaders, Palance pump shotguns, Autry assault rifles, and all the ammo, blammo and camo needed to regulate an unfringed militia.

Time passes. Come closer. And listen.

It is night at the Unilever Hospital, where overworked Birth hit the in-vitro-trifecta, bringing three fresh consumers into the world, hand-delivered one-by-one-by-one, naked, hungry, and sleepy, through amnio-slick mortal-portals, placed in shopping carts, and left to rest quietly, lit by the Dura-flame of their mother's flushed face.

It is night in a rock-a-bye corner of the Walbox parking lot, where RVers freely spend the do-not-pass-go night—resting their weary bones in save-a-bundle trundle beds aboard The GuzzleGreen, The FossilFeast, The LaneWeaver, The ReaperRacer, The GrandeFinale, and The DieBroker.

It is night at the Purple Mountain Eucerin Church, on the corner of Proctor and Gamble Streets, where the title of Pastor Poligrips's upcoming sermon—"Don't Discount your Unborn Child"—splashes the root-ruptured sidewalk with black Lucite letters lit from within.

It is night at the Bright Stars Strip Club, where Trix-elated Trauma knocked back shots with Mort Soloflex, who drank, in one happy hour, four-fifths of a fifth of scotch before hurtling himself home at hypersonic speed along Highway 29, sliding out of control at the sharp left turn by Ginsu Drive, executing an Olympic triple-axel down the embankment, and smashing to an unscheduled stop courtesy of an old stone wall buried beneath a BlackBerry patch.

Come still closer now. Quietly. And look.

For only you can see the wired-tired citizens of Purple Mountain drowsing in their lay-away bedrooms 'round the town—on View-lust Lane, where late shows flicker like unwatched plasma campfires; on Consumption Street, where smartphones snooze in kitchen-counter cribs, sucking electro-sustenance from the teat of the grid; on Sprawl Street, where dentures pillows zippers undies nails have been clipped, stripped, zipped, flipped, and dipped; on Encroachment Road, where romance novels lie, well-thumbed, in lonely laps, the lights still blazing; and on Have-more Street, where Beamers and Benzes, tucked nighty-night in triple-A garages, Beautyrest;

Listen. For only your ears can hear the hopes, wishes, prayers, fears of the recharging residents of Purple Mountain, lying quietly in the beds they made for themselves, as the spendthrift night consumes the unused minutes of their lives.

From where you are, you can hear their *dreams*.

(The CITIZENS begin to enter, as if sleepwalking. They are fully clothed, but barefoot.)

You can hear the dreams of Lunesta Richman, Purple Mountain's wealthiest denizen, owner of Richman's AutoMart, the Broad Stripes Golf Club, and the Clear Cut Mall, in his King-of-the-Cosmos bed, who REMs, in Cinemascope, of—

LUNESTA RICHMAN

—the moon. I own the moon. I bought it when it was low, and everyday I watch my investment rise. I'm waiting for the right moment to sell, when it's astronomically-high. In the meantime, it's my personal, private, 36-crater luxury golf course. I tee off at Fra Mauro Highlands, where Alan Shepard, commander of Apollo 14, played a par 4 with a low-gravity 6-iron, striking the Titleist with a one-armed shot—thwack—and watching it travel for miles and miles and miles towards the lunar horizon.

FIRST VOICE

You can hear the dreams of Amy Clearblue, six-days-shy of sixteen-years-old and no-returns-after-sixty-days pregnant, smitten with indecision, whose maybe-baby was undertaken, loveless and gloveless, on a too-hot summer's night, between two stone cherubim in the pioneer's cemetery, who dreams, in 3D Ultrasound, of—

AMY CLEARBLUE

Not a beautiful baby in my womb, but a tiny Joey in my belly, a joystick in his hands, using my body for his amusement—thumbing the buttons to bloat my boobs, to fuzz my brain, to puke my food; his quick fingers giving me pimples, clogging my bowels, popping my veins, swelling my feet, swinging my moods up-center-left-down-right, remote-controlling my entire life, until I can't take it anymore. So I take a Sharpie, draw a black hole on my tummy, reach in, grab the coiled cord of his boy toy, and—

FIRST VOICE

You can hear the dreams of Dash Goodyear, the former football quarter-pounder for Colgate Crest College, whose instant-replay-brain hallucinates, in Super 8, of—

DASH GOODYEAR

—steering a Revlon-red Corvette to the vacant lot behind Eveready Stadium, where Charmin Bounty, the Cheerio, inflates my pigskin and polishes my trophy the night after the big game.

CHARMIN BOUNTY

Rescue me, my hero sandwich! Get me on the scoreboard! Take me into the end zone, knock me one between the goal posts, and put—me—over—the—top!

FIRST VOICE

And Johnny Viagra, manager of the Land of the Free Gun Shop & Range, who returned from Iraq less two wings and a prayer, curled up like a burl in his powder-burned bed, who dreams, in night-vision optics, of—

JOHNNY VIAGRA

Patrolling Land's End at sunset, on pristine white sand, fingers enfolded with my fiancé, the amorous ocean gently rising to kiss our entwining footprints. Ahead, I see a log rolling softly in the surf, washing up onto the beach. As we approach, I see it's not a log—it's my left leg. As I let go of my lover's hand to pick up the limb, the sea turns black—crude oil black. When I look back, my bride is gone. Now my right leg rolls in

with the Coldwater Tide. As I reach for it, I find I can't move—I'm buried to my waist in the oil-soaked sand, and sinking fast.

FIRST VOICE

And Mrs. Purrelle Swiffer, sani-scrubbed in her pine-spruced, hepa-filtered, dust-busted hospital-cornered bedroom, tightly tucked beneath celery sheets and celibate wool, who dreams of—

PURELLE SWIFFER

—strolling in a divine, primeval garden—the Garden of Eden—naked, immaculate, and in perfect harmony with nature. And an ancient gardener—the Master Gardener of Eden—takes my hand, and shows me a tree, and speaks to me gently, and says:

GARDENER OF EDEN

This tree is your tree, Purrelle. It is the Tree of Love. I want you to take care of it for me.

PURELLE SWIFFER

And it's the most beautiful tree I've ever seen, with delicate branches, and velveteen leaves, and silk blossoms, and succulent fruit. And the very sight of it fills me with rapturous joy.

(Pause.)

But then I see that one of the blossoms has been spoiled by a tiny aphid, so I ever so gently pull off that one petal; but now the tree is ever so slightly out of balance, so I go to the other side of the tree and pinch off a leaf; but now the tree looks a tad lopsided again, so I reach down low and snap off a little twig; but still the tree looks a skosh crooked, so I reach up high and pluck off some fruit; but still the tree looks askew, so I pick, and I snip, and I tug, and I lop, at branch, leaf, bud, and fruit, until, before I realize what I've done—oh, my!

FIRST VOICE

And Sergeant Hartz, of Purple Mountain Animal Control, who dreams, as he does most nights, in pixilated dash-cam black-and-white, of—

SERGEANT HARTZ

—the unblinking marbleized gaze of the paralyzed doe, left-for-dead in the breakdown lane of Highway 29, her breath vaporizing in the cold night air, and the appalling pop, rattling off the trunks of petrified trees in the adjacent woods, as I pinch the trigger of my pistol, sending a bullet through her brain, releasing her from a world of pain.

FIRST VOICE

And Activia Green, a history teacher at Advil High School, who dreams, in grainy black and white, of—

ACTIVIA GREEN

Rappelling down the bridge of Lincoln's unfinished nose on a rope, bouncing both feet off his cheek, and slipping onto his lips, to speak with—

BORGLUM

Watch out now! I'm setting dynamite!

FIRST VOICE

The monumental sculptor, hanging from a harness, chiseling away at Lincoln's chin.

ACTIVIA GREEN

Borglum?

BORGLUM

What do you think—two sticks or three?

ACTIVIA GREEN

Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor?

BORGLUM

Love to make art with explosives!

ACTIVIA GREEN

Stop! This isn't art. It's eco-vandalism! You're desecrating the sacred landmark of an indigenous people!

BORGLUM

Poppycock! I'm creating an indelible landmark for the American people.

ACTIVIA GREEN

But this mountain isn't ours!

BORGLUM

Nonsense! This land is your land. This land is my land.

ACTIVIA GREEN

This land is Sioux land. They call this mountain Six Grandfathers.

BORGLUM

So what? It's also been called Cougar Mountain, Sugarloaf Mountain, Slaughterhouse Mountain, Keystone Cliffs—

ACTIVIA GREEN

Whatever you call it, it belongs to the Sioux. It was granted to them by treaty in 1868, in perpetuity—

BORGLUM

Meaning what exactly?

ACTIVIA GREEN

Meaning forever.

BORGLUM

Treaties aren't forever, missy, they're written on paper, and signed by men. Rock is forever, this granite is forever.

ACTIVIA GREEN

Well, carving faces into this granite is an act of enviro-narcissism.

BORGLUM

It's a work of monumental art.

ACTIVIA GREEN

It's a work of monumental arrogance.

BORGLUM

It will be known forever as my masterwork.

ACTIVIA GREEN

It was a masterwork of nature, until you gave it a colossal moustache.

BORGLUM

I'm proud of Teddy's moustache. Think it turned out rather bully! Now watch out! This thing's gonna blow!

ACTIVIA GREEN

I'm warning you—don't light that!

BORGLUM

Look on my works, ye Feeble, and despair!

FIRST VOICE

And Bobby Starkist, straight-A, capital-A, all-American senior at Advil High School, eagle-scouting, chess-king-crowned, V-card-carrying, MIT-bound wonder-son, who dreams of—

BOBBY STARKIST

—the instant of celestial conception, when virginal Space, who looks a lot like Amy Clearblue, is inseminated by the seed of rapacious Time, who looks a lot like me, swelling her big-belly with our voluminous new universe, which, for some 13 billion years, a blink of Time's blushing eyelid, she will nurture in her cosmic womb, patiently

awaiting the moment when, after eons of uber-gestation, she will push it through a wormhole between her divine legs, giving it place in the Omneity.

FIRST VOICE

And Lilly Eli, a graveyard-nurse at the Twilight's Last Gleaming Retirement Home, stealing 13 winks on the sagging Wint-o-Green sofa in the break room, her bloodstream richly mixed with embezzled medications, and her purse thick with surreptitiously filched scripts, who dreams, as she often has since mid-life caught her napping, of—

LILLY ELI

Driving along the Equatorial Highway in a huge U-Haul, racing the fading light to the horizon, pushing a thousand miles an hour, when suddenly I get too close and smash into the setting sun. Everything I own is thrown from back of the van and strewn all over the road. I scramble out, trying to gather all of my precious treasures, but I've injured the sun, and it's bleeding to death, and I can't see to retrieve my suitcases stuffed with old hopes; can't rescue my boxes crammed with hoarded bitterness; can't recover my tubs jammed with collected rejections; can't save my shoeboxes of hands-never-held, lips-never-kissed, bodies-never-savored scattered along the road. Now it's completely dark, and they're gone forever—the apologies ignored, friendships neglected, blessings squandered, truths untold—and I'm lost without them, can't navigate, have no identity. I sit in the middle of the road and cry myself blind. But then, I look up, and I see the little dipper in the pristine sky, and it winks at me, and I suddenly feel...calm.

FIRST VOICE

And Randy Lenscrafter, security specialist at the Mall, who dreams, in 35 millimeter stock, of—

RANDY LENS CRAFTER

(Clap) Exterior—A Flower Garden—Day: Wide Shot of Randy beginning to endomorph from a human being into a bee.

(Clap) A series of Close-ups on Randy's anatomy as it grows wings, thorax, mandibles, compound eyes, antennae, stinger.

(Clap) POV shot of a honeybee's ommatidium vision: the flower garden seen through sixty-three hundred tiny hexagonal lenses.

(Clap) Zoom in to an Extreme Close-up on the Randy-bee launching himself into the air, his wings beating two-hundred times a second.

(Clap) A series of Steadicam shots: the Randy-bee flies from flower to flower, beckoned by their flirtatious folds, drawn by their kaleidosized colors, fretting from petal to petal, flitting from pistil to pistil, sucking up their precious nectar, eager to bring the honey home to feed the hive.

FIRST VOICE

And William Zagnut, an estate lawyer for Robbins and Baskin, who, for the past thirty-one years, ten months, four days, seven hours, and fifty-three minutes, has been drawing up the final testaments and executing the last wishes of his signatories to the smallest sub-sub-sub-atomic-heading, the details of which he can recall instantly with punctilious precision, now fast asleep in his wheelbarrow-narrow bachelor's bed, who dreams of—

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

My unsettled clients, buried with as much as they could take with them—diamond rings, gold watches, pearl earrings, silver fillings, titanium hips, silicone tits, Teflon joints, Jarvik hearts, standing at my bed to contest the unexpected execution of their earthly estates—

HEFTY ROGAINE

Remember me, Will?

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

You're Hefty Rogaine!

HEFTY ROGAINE

They found me at work one Monday morning, rooted to my desk, composting like a November pumpkin!

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

Such a shame.

AVIS ADDERALL

Do you see me, Will? The heartless soul at your ear?

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

Avis Adderall. You were texting a friend, when you crossed the double-yellow line on Peterbilt Road, and kissed an eighteen-wheeler.

AVIS ADDERALL

They harvested my parts, put them on choppers, and spread them around the country in coolers.

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

Yes, you made parting gifts of your anatomical parts—your heart spared a woman in Hartford, your liver saved a little girl in Livermore, your eyes sighted a mother in Iowa, your kidneys rescued a kid in—

BUD STARKIST

Grab my hand, Will—hold on tight!

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

Bud Starkist! You drowned in Purple Lake on Memorial Day.

BUD STARKIST

I stripped down to my birthday suit, and jumped out of the boat for a swim. Hit my head on the hull and never came up again.

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

I remember. They said your blood alcohol was twice the legal limit.

NERF GOODYEAR

Watch out, Will! I'm out of control!

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

Nerf Goodyear? You passed on the slopes of Purple Mountain.

NERF GOODYEAR

We were playing football on skis—I went out for a pass, and lumber-jacked into a tree, face-first.

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

There was blood in the snow. So sad.

MERIT McNUGGET

Give me a light, will you, Will?—for old times sake?

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

Merit McNugget!

MERIT McNUGGET

I made love to a lit cig, fell asleep, and burned the house to the ground.

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

Yes, I saw the report. Cause of death: asphyxiation—they said you never woke up.

MERIT McNUGGET

But I did.

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

Horrible.

HEFTY ROGAINE

How are all my loved ones?

(The questions of the dead overlap, building to a crescendo.)

AVIS ADDERALL

Did my brother Joey get another job?

MERIT McNUGGET

Did my daughter Amana find her one true love?

BUD STARKIST

Did my grandson Bobby solve the mysteries of the universe?

HEFTY ROGAINE

Did my son Shad learn to curb his temper?

NERF GOODYEAR

Did my cousin Dash win back the trophy?

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

(Cutting them off) O you poor troubled souls, I've closed the files on you—all of you.

ALL OF THE DEAD

But, how are things above?

MERIT McNUGGET

Are there still willow trees and saxophones?

AVIS ADDERALL

Pineapples and hummingbirds?

NERF GOODYEAR

Ice skates and fields of Lupine?

HEFTY ROGAINE

Silk pajamas and windchimes?

MERIT McNUGGET

Bubble baths and pecan pie?

BUD STARKIST

Shooting stars and fireflies?

WILLIAM ZAGNUT

Yes, but who has time to notice? Certainly not the living. Now let me rest in peace.

FIRST VOICE

And Mort Soloflex, on his Ultimate Sleep bed in the Vaseline Intensive Care Unit at Unilever Hospital, with needles, tubes, and wires pumping remorse, shame, and fear into his nostrils, arms, and chest, who dreams, in sepia-tones, of—

MORT SOLOFLEX

—looking up from the bottom of my grave, and seeing my only son, my second-wife’s first-born, Joey, the boy I haven’t seen, called, or written since his confirmation, his eyes blazing down on me as he unzips his fly, takes aim, and pisses on my barren chest.

JOEY ADDERALL

You’re still on fire, dad. Here, I’ll put you out. I’ll put you out of your misery.

FIRST VOICE

And Amana McNugget, a real estate agent with Trophy Home Realty, 39 and unhappily unmarried, asleep in her beautifully appointed master suite with walnut floors, soaring ceilings, gas fireplace, and a spacious balcony with majestic views of Purple Peak, her tabby cat, Fisbo, sprawled out beside her on the sale-pending bed, who dreams, in IMAX, of—

AMANA MCNUGGET

Swimming slowly south, among a pod of grey whales, gracefully propelling my buoyant bulk through spacious seas, eating nothing but amphipods strained through my baleen, following an ancient aquatic avenue running along the North American continental shelf, paddling, gliding, breaching, diving along the same underwater way that’s been followed for eons by my ancestors, from the Bering Sea to the balmy waters of Baja, until, shortly after arriving, I will choose a favorite male companion, and in the same warm-water lagoon where I was born, breed.

FIRST VOICE

And Pastor Poligrip, slumbering, as he has since his first unholy emission, with cotton socks cloistering his feet—

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Lace...

FIRST VOICE

—a feather pillow squeezed between his knees,

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Brace...

FIRST VOICE

—and a scratch pad on the nightstand to catch his cream-filled dreams,

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Chase...

FIRST VOICE

—the better to find the words to paint the verbal-essence of his beloved Joey Adderall—

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Grace...

FIRST VOICE

—whom he longs to touch with his Vlastic hands,

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Embrace...

FIRST VOICE

—kiss with his ChapStik lips,

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Trace...

FIRST VOICE

—but dare not, lest he should offend the eleventh commandment,

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Place...

FIRST VOICE

—who dreams, in flickering De La Tour taper-light, of—

PASTOR POLIGRIP

—my metaphysical muse, the poet John Donne, obliging me with a rhyme for Joey's face.

JOHN DONNE

Try “disgrace.”

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Yes, “disgrace” is good, very good.

FIRST VOICE

In the darkness, still asleep, the pastor reaches for his Cross pen and scrawls words on the pad in a dribble-scribble only he, come morning, will be able to read.

PASTOR POLIGRIP

Where I can never love but in disgrace.

DONNE

Yes, that's good. Well done. Well done. Now sleep. Sleep.

FIRST VOICE

And nineteen-year-old Joey Adderall, ejected from his home by his mother, dumped by Amy Clearblue, his first-and-only girl, stripped of his job by Shad Rogaine, manager of the Sushi Shack at the mall, sleeping fitfully on the dog-haired, mite-infested, sex-stained, bong-watered sofa-cushions on the living room floor of the home of Lotto Jones, a tenuous friend at best, in an apartment warren on Have-not Street, a .22-caliber Costner pistol tucked in the glovebox of his shiftless Ford Sinestra, who dreams of—

JOEY ADDERALL

Washing dishes in the kitchen of the Vista on Existence Restaurant, the city spread out like a billionaire's buffet 107 stories below me, when a jumbo jet slams into The North Face of the building, destroying any way to escape above the impact, trapping nine hundred and eleven souls.

As the flames climb upward, the room smolders, and the building quivers. The toxic stench of jet-fuel burns my nostrils and singes my windpipe as I breathe. All around me, people freak—ankles char; eyes burn; throats sear; lungs choke; they're on fire, flailing, rolling, screaming for mercy, God-in-Heaven, mercy.

Like a super-hero born with super-powers, able to walk through flame, to breathe in fume, to see in smoke, I pull out my Costner, take careful aim, and start shooting people, one by one by one, putting them out of their misery, ending their torment, cleansing their pain forever. A banker, a lawyer, a doctor, a janitor, a cook. My father is there, on fire. I shoot him dead. My mother is there, swallowed by flames. I shoot her dead. My boss is there, being eaten by fire. I shoot him dead. My girlfriend is there, blazing like a torch. I shoot her dead. I shoot them all. Not out of malice, but out of mercy. Not out of hatred, but out of love. Not like a mortal man, but like a God.

Then, with a shudder, I feel the coming collapse of the tower. With my last bullet, I shoot at the window, shattering the glass; My super-powers failing, I stand on the sill and stick my head out into the sky; the flames lick at my legs, tongue my pelvis, kiss my torso, caress my arms; I lean out, as far into the sky as I can, out, but it's not enough; I can't breathe, can't bear the heat.

But I refuse to die in flames. I step out into the sky...