

Raising the Stakes

A Full Length Play

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SCENE TEN: Butterfinger

Lights change. We are back in the past again, but closer to the present.

CAT comes back on stage with a dead baby rat in her mouth. She goes to the window with the rat. CAT begins to eat the rat.

CAT

(While eating the rat.)

I used to bring them in. I know better now. They don't like it when I bring them in. When they're not home... I bring them in anyway... She's nicer about it than he is. She's blood thirsty. I've seen it. She's proud of me when I make a kill. I'd offer you some, but I know you won't take any. Humans never do. Even she won't eat uncooked blood. It's fresh... I found the nest.

MAN

Hey! Stop that!

(Goes to the window.)

WOMAN

(Comes out into the living room.)

What's she got this time?

MAN

Uh, it's gross.

WOMAN

What is it?

MAN

It looks like a rat. No, it's too small.

WOMAN

Is it a mouse?

MAN

No, it's a baby rat.

CAT looks at them, and continues to eat.

MAN CONT.

She must've found the nest.

WOMAN

Good Girl! Yes, you're a very good girl. When you get done with that, I'll give you a little pat of butter if you want. Would you like a little Butterfinger?

MAN
Give it to her now, and I'll get rid of it.
(Gets two plastic bags.)

WOMAN
Good idea.
(Goes to fridge and puts butter on her finger, she comes back and sticks her hand out of the window.)
You wanna Butterfinger? C'mon. Good Girl.

CAT growls. Then smells the butter. She leaves the rat and licks the butter.

MAN
(Goes outside and uses the bags to pick up the rat.)
It's warm.

WOMAN
Good girl.

MAN
Will you hand me the cigarettes?

WOMAN
I'll come out there.
(Pulls her hand in.)

CAT
Wait a minute. What... Fuck.
(To the MAN.)
Give me my rat!

MAN
No.

CAT
Just give it to me. I know you've got it.

MAN
No.

CAT
Uhch'. You suck.

WOMAN

(Comes out with cigarettes, and a lighter.)

Here.

(They smoke. She sits. To CAT)

You're my baby arenchoo?

CAT sits next to her.

CAT

Yes, I am. Do you have another Butterfinger for me?

(Sniffs her hands.)

WOMAN

How about when I get inside I give you another Butterfinger for being such a good hunter?

CAT

Oooo, yes! I would loove that.

(Rubs her head against the WOMAN.)

MAN

You spoil her you know.

WOMAN

What's wrong with spoiling a cat?

CAT

Yeah? What's wro-

MAN

I wasn't spoilt. Spare the rod, spoil the child. Mum used to break wooden spoons on my butt. It's why I have such an incredibly firm ass.

WOMAN

She's a cat.

MAN

It just feels wrong to spoil something.

WOMAN

Why?

MAN

What if it's bad for her?

WOMAN

A tiny bit of butter? We don't give her milk or anything. She likes butter.

CAT

Ooo, yes I do, I do like butter.

MAN

What time do you finish work tonight?

WOMAN

Nine.

MAN

What do you want for dinner?

WOMAN

I don't know.

MAN

I'll marinate some steaks today if you want.

WOMAN

Sounds good.

MAN

I'll do the steaks then?

CAT

Do the steaks and give me the fat!!!!

WOMAN

Yeah.

(Stretches her legs out and rubs her shins.)

MAN

I'll do that.

CAT

Let him do it!

WOMAN

It's okay.

MAN

(Takes her leg and rubs her shin in long motions.)

They still hurting?

WOMAN

Ssssss. Ah. Mmhm.

CAT

See. It's nice to be petted sometimes.

(She rubs against WOMAN.)

WOMAN pets CAT'S head, and then wraps her arm around her.

MAN

I came up with a new marinate at work. It's ginger and garlic, with blood orange, some sweet soy, rice wine vinegar, chili flakes... I know it's not the same but you probably have to start using an elliptical machine.

WOMAN

Mmhm. I'll pick up the wine. Other one please.

(Lifts her other leg.)

MAN

(Rubs the other one.)

I'll do choy sum too, or I guess baby bok choy. Whatever I can find around here... I used to get chin splints all the time. I should start running again.

WOMAN

Come with me.

MAN

(Puts her leg down.)

Not this week. I'll start next week. I'll get some running shoes.

CAT moves over to MAN. He pets her.

CAT

Let's go for a walk.

WOMAN

Mmhm. I'm done.

(Puts her cigarette out. Rubs her legs again.)

CAT

No!

WOMAN

Thank you.

MAN
Anytime.

WOMAN
You coming in?
(She gets up.)

CAT
No!

MAN
Yeah.

MAN and WOMAN go in together.

CAT
They won't do anything in there. He'll play with his toy, and she'll leave. When she comes home they'll fight about something they didn't do, or shouldn't do. At what point does the heart take itself back? When do moral obligations start to replace the desire to do the right thing? They tied themselves together with deeds and promises. Between the favors and gifts, and the lack of gifts, and the forgivenesses and the demands, the dinners cooked and lunches cleaned, my litter emptied and the vacuuming done and dusting not done; they racked up debts to one another. The money they borrowed and paid back, and then gave and took. The score was never even. Each sacrifice weighed and measured, but never balanced, never forgotten, never, never, never, never, never brought back to zero. How do you erase the past? You don't. I made no promises to be counted on, nor asked for favors to be called in. My freedom was mine. So was theirs, if they had been able to untangle themselves from those sticky obligations, and morals. If each could have given up what they thought they owed, or were owed... but I couldn't do that for them.

CAT exits.

SCENE ELEVEN: Last pee

Back to the present. The lights are dim in the living room and the bedroom. MAN sits playing x-box and the WOMAN is lying on the blow up mattress.

(MAN)

The MAN watches her when she goes into the bathroom. When she does not look at him, he gets up and gets himself another beer. He walks unsteadily. He hears the flush, and rushes back to the couch. Quickly, he puts a few of the beer cans from the tub onto the floor to hide them.

(WOMAN)

The WOMAN bolts up in bed. She gets up to go to the bathroom. She doesn't make eye contact with the MAN. The WOMAN goes into the bathroom and shuts the door. The toilet flushes. The WOMAN comes out.

MAN

Hey.

WOMAN

Yeah?

MAN

Look. I just wanted to say, if ever you need anything. Anything at all, I'll be there for you. Whatever it is. If I can help you, I will. You're the most important person in my life. I just want you to know that I'll be here for you.

WOMAN

I appreciate that. Thank you.

MAN

Yeah, whatever it is you know. If you need money or whatever, just ask me.

WOMAN

Well... yeah.

(Disappointed.)

Thanks.

MAN

I do mean that. I want you to know, I'll be there for you.

WOMAN

Okay.

MAN

I know I keep repeating myself, but I want you to know you have somebody you can really count on. No matter what.

WOMAN

Okay.

MAN

Even if you're with somebody else or whatever-

WOMAN

Stop it.

MAN

Seriously. Even if you're with somebody else, and you guys want to stay with me for a visit, you can. I mean you can come for a visit.

WOMAN

That's the last thing I'm thinking about right now.

MAN

Yeah, whatever, but-

WOMAN

No. It's the last thing on my mind.

MAN

Yeah, I'm the king of no libido.

WOMAN

The last thing I want to do right now is get involved with somebody.

MAN

But, you will. I know you will.

WOMAN

I don't think so.

MAN

Of course you will. You're too nice not to.

WOMAN

What does that mean?

MAN

You'll... you'll meet somebody and then, you're just so nice...

WOMAN

Not really.

MAN

Yeah you are. You're the nicest person I've ever met. You mean more to me than anybody...

WOMAN

You mean a lot to me too.

MAN

FUCK!!!!

WOMAN

Hey!

MAN

I'm sorry.

WOMAN

I'm going to bed. You workin tomorrow?

MAN

No.

WOMAN

Are you done?

MAN

Well I gave my two weeks notice thinking I would be gone, but now with mum not getting my fucking ticket...

WOMAN

Just book it yourself. Fuck waiting for her. You know she's not gonna come through so just put it on a credit card and do it.

MAN

I will. Tomorrow. I just can't do it tonight.

WOMAN

Alright, I'm goin to bed. It's late.

MAN

Sorry.

WOMAN

It's okay.

(Walks to the kitchen to get a glass of water.)

No, sorry.

MAN

I'm tired.

WOMAN
(Gets the water.)

Um' ...

MAN

WOMAN pretends not to hear. MAN reaches out his arm to her, but she doesn't take it. He motions for her to take it. She doesn't.

It's my fucking birthday.

MAN

Look, at some point you have to stop feeling sorry for yourself.

WOMAN

Fuck you!

MAN

I'm trying to be your friend.

WOMAN

Fuck off!

MAN

(He drinks some of his beer.)

You wouldn't talk like that to one of your girlfriends.

WOMAN

Yes I would.

MAN

No you wouldn't.

WOMAN
(She goes to him.)

Yeah, I would. You want me to be your friend? As a friend, it's not all about you.

MAN

Yeah it is. For once it's all about me. It's my fucking Birthday, all my friends ditched me, I hate this fucking place, I'm going back home...without you. It doesn't get any worse.

WOMAN

Okay, so it sucks. I agree but how long are you gonna wallow in it?

MAN

Fuck off! Don't tell me what to do.

(WOMAN)

Walks away, and goes back to her room.
Goes to her computer turns it on and
begins to write... She catches him. She
shuts the computer off.

(MAN)

The MAN goes to the door and watches
her.

MAN

Writing about me again?

WOMAN

Spying on me again?

MAN

I wasn't... I haven't...

WOMAN

Since when? When was the last time?

MAN

Since you told me not to.

WOMAN

Which time was that?

MAN

The last time. I promised I wouldn't do it again and I haven't.

WOMAN

Well, gee, thanks.

MAN

Can't you just be nice to me?

WOMAN

I'm trying. Believe it or not, I am actually trying to be nice to you. Imagine if I wasn't trying. Imagine if I said everything I was thinking all the time instead of smiling and choking on it.

MAN

You're so angry. Why are you so angry?

WOMAN

Because I am... Let's not get into this now. There's no point.

MAN

No, what did I do to make you so angry?

WOMAN

I doesn't fucking matter anymore!.. Fuck.

MAN

Fine. I'll leave you alone. Sorry, again. Sorry.
(Starts to walk away.)

WOMAN

I just don't see the point.

MAN

I still want you in my life. You're the only friend I've got.

WOMAN

I don't know how to be your friend without getting pissed off at you. And... I'm just tired.
We have one more session with the shrink. Why don't we save it for that?

MAN

I don't think it does anything.

WOMAN

Well, you can't go in there and lie about shit. The whole point is to talk there.

MAN

You're the only one I can open up too. I still love you.

WOMAN

I don't want us to end up killing each other.

MAN

I couldn't get through this without you.

WOMAN

I don't have any regrets.

MAN

I do.

WOMAN

I can't do this. I need to go to bed. I need this promotion. I need the money. When you leave, I have to pay- I know you said you'd pay have the rent until the lease is up, but what if you can't? I mean what if you get back there and you don't get work right away? I'm really far away, and what's to stop you from just not... Not that you would, but if you just don't have it...

(Puts her hands over her eyes and rubs them lightly.)

MAN

I would never do that to you. I told you-

WOMAN

You say that now, but... I just... I need to go to bed.

MAN

I'll let you get to bed.

WOMAN

Good night.

MAN

Good night. Sleep well.

(MAN)

He walks away leaving the door open
The MAN drinks more. He goes to the couch and lies down on it. He adjusts himself, turning over and over. The MAN gets up again but falls over this time. He knocks over the plastic tub and all the beer cans. It makes a very loud noise. He hurts himself. The MAN doesn't call out, but lies on the floor in pain and covered in beer. Long pause.

(WOMAN)

She gets up and locks it. She then lies down on the blow up mattress. She does not sleep. The WOMAN hears the noise and sits up quickly. She doesn't say anything, but waits. Long pause.

WOMAN

(Calls out loudly.)

You okay?

(MAN)

The MAN doesn't respond. He lifts his head and shoulders off the floor but doesn't get up. This makes more noise knocking over more stuff. Although he is hurt, it is obvious that it's nothing more than bumps and bruises. The MAN stares at her while and slowly gets up rubbing his back. His shirt is completely drenched in beer. We get the sense that this has happened before.

(WOMAN)

The WOMAN gets up and goes out into the living room. When the MAN sees that she has come in he begins to get up. She watches him get struggle to get up in pain and drunk for a moment. Then she goes to him. She begins to pick up some of the beer cans.

MAN

Fuck.

WOMAN

You okay?

MAN

I hurt my back.

WOMAN

The floor's all wet.

(WOMAN)

WOMAN goes into the kitchen and comes back with a couple of kitchen towels and some paper towels. She begins to clean the floor. The WOMAN begins to move faster and faster. She takes the empty and half empty beer cans into the kitchen sink and starts pouring out the left over contents.

(MAN)

Stares at her for a long time. He goes to say something.

MAN

Ah'-

WOMAN shoots him a sharp look while she is pouring out one of the cans.

MAN CONT.

(Stops what he was going to say and sits on the couch slowly.)

Do we have anything to eat? I didn't have any dinner.

WOMAN
I have a Lean Cuisine in the freezer.

MAN
Can I have it?

WOMAN
(Short Pause.)
Yeah.

MAN
Will you make it for me? I think I just need to eat something.

WOMAN
(She opens the freezer and get out the frozen meal.
She puts it in the microwave.)
But then,
(Looks at him coldly.)
I'm going to bed.

MAN
Thanks.

WOMAN
Where the cigarettes?

MAN
In my coat pocket.

WOMAN
I'm gonna have one.

MAN
Go ahead. Take a few if you want some for later.

WOMAN
I will. Thanks.
(She goes to his coat and takes a few cigarettes from
the pack. She puts on her boots without doing them
up, and grabs a coat. She goes to the door to go
outside.)

You coming?

MAN
(Sheepishly.)
Yeah.

MAN gets up and she hands him his coat. They go outside and smoke. As usual MAN stands, and WOMAN sits while they smoke. WOMAN does not look at MAN.

MAN CONT.

What time do you start tomorrow?

WOMAN

Early.

Pause.

MAN

What are you thinking?

WOMAN

Lotta things.

Pause.

MAN

My life sucks.

Pause.

WOMAN

It's for the best.

MAN

Yeah.

WOMAN

Yeah.

(Puts out the cigarette.)

MAN

You cold?

Pause.

WOMAN

I'm gonna go back in. That meal should be done by now.

I'm not really that hungry.

MAN

(Pause.)

But I know I should eat.

WOMAN goes back inside, and he follows her immediately.

Commin in?

WOMAN

Yeah, I should eat.

MAN

(He is still unsteady on his feet.)

Once they are inside the MAN goes into the other bedroom we can't see and leaves the door open. He is changing. WOMAN goes to the fridge and gets a bottle of vodka out of the freezer. She takes it out and looks at it. It is much emptier than she expected. There is hardly any left in it. She pours what is left into a little shot glass. She shoots it quickly. She picks up the phone and calls someone.

WOMAN

Hey Frank... I know it's late and you're probably in bed... I just wanted to let you know that I might be a little late tomorrow. I... I had car trouble on the way home. I just got home now. Anyway, I got a lot of the set up done tonight so I'm sure everything will

(She fights back tears, and refuses to cry.)

be fine. I'll be there before we open, but I might just be a little late.

(She hangs up. She takes the meal out of the microwave and sets it on the counter with a fork, and puts the empty bottle right next to it.)

The lights change.

SCENE TEN: Therapy

We are in the past again, and again closer to the present. Lights are dark except for CAT, who is at the window of the office.

CAT

Things didn't get like that over night. It was a slow decay. The rotting began from the inside and worked its way to the surface. She would lock herself in that room. She would stay away when he was home. It wasn't fare. He would miss her. She would hide.

(She walks into the living room.)

I tried to help. Such as I can.

WOMAN picks up a coffee cup and takes a drink as if it's hot.

CAT CONT.

Hey moooooouuum.

WOMAN

Hey Percie. C'mere sweetie.

CAT goes to her in the kitchen and hops up on the counter.

WOMAN CONT.

You know daddy doesn't like you up here.

(Pets her.)

CAT

(She likes the petting.)

Yeah, I know, but you don't care.

WOMAN

I don't care.

(She wipes her eyes and hugs CAT.
WOMAN pulls away quickly.)

CAT

Hey, it's okay.

(She nudges the WOMAN with her head.)

WOMAN

I don't know what's wrong with me. I don't know how to stop this.

(Pats CAT again.)

CAT

Be a cat.

WOMAN

It would be so much easier to just be a cat.

CAT

Try it. Stop hiding. He loves you.

WOMAN

I don't know if I love him anymore.

CAT

You're bad. He loves you. You should love him too.

WOMAN

He's different.

CAT

So are you.

The phone rings. The WOMAN answers it.

WOMAN

Hello?... Yes, this is her... Oh thank you. I called because... I... We... yes both of us, we wanted to see somebody... Yes... I don't know, I mean... We're having problems. Obviously, I mean why would we need to see somebody if we weren't having problems?... Um, yeah Monday is fine for me... Well. Actually, he... he doesn't want to go. I'm trying to get him to go, but he doesn't want to go... He...

The lights slowly begin to change and
CAT goes to the window.

WOMAN CONT.

Is it okay if I come by myself?... Okay. It might be just me then. I want him to come, but he might not so... yeah. Okay, thank you. I'll see you then.

The lights darken in the living room.
CAT goes outside.

CAT

I started going out a lot more. I didn't want to be around them when they were together. It felt... bad to be around it. The winter was coming but it wasn't that cold yet. There were plenty of squirrels running around like nuts. Ha ha, sorry. Couldn't help it. Nuts inside, nuts outside. I guess that's the way of people sometimes. Trapped inside even when you're outside. Sad. I never stopped loving them you know. I didn't love them the same

CAT CONT.

though. I can say that. I'm not bound by pretenses of fairness. Love isn't fair. It just isn't. You would never see a cat pretend to love two people in equal amounts. That's preposterous. Besides, you know the truth anyway. You just don't want to admit to it. I don't see why? Yes it hurts to be the one who is loved less, but doesn't it hurt to pretend that you don't know you're loved less? All of this talk makes me want to run and kill something. I can't always eat things that come from a can. They taste like metal.

CAT exits and Lights Change.

SCENE THIRTEEN: The Ten

We are back to the same night.
MAN in the other room puts a clean shirt on.
He comes out and gets the food off the counter. He
looks at the bottle, guilty, and then he looks away
ignoring it. The MAN starts eating.

MAN

This is good. I hadn't eaten anything since lunch.

WOMAN

You gotta eat.

MAN

I just don't have any appetite. I've lost all the weight I put on.

WOMAN

I'm going to bed.

The MAN gets up quickly and gives her another
hug. She pulls away gently.

MAN

Jesus Christ! Would it kill you to show a little affection?

WOMAN

Leave it.

MAN

No. You're such a bitch!

WOMAN

THAT! That is why I'm not affectionate. Because I have no choice in the matter. If I'm
not, if I don't, whatever, then you... you fucking snap.

MAN

It's my birthday. I'm sorry, I just... you don't have to.

WOMAN

Yes. Yes I do have to. Like Thanksgiving when I didn't want to have sex. You kept me
up until what fucking time in the morning? Three thirty, four? Because you were mad.

MAN

It wasn't about that. You got drunk. You weren't supposed to get drunk.

WOMAN

It was exactly the same at our session on Tuesday.

MAN

How's that the same?

WOMAN

You sat there in the office and said to him, you were a ten. On a scale of one to ten how committed you were to ending it, you said you were a ten like you were the one who wanted to end it.

MAN

I told you to ignore what I said in therapy!

WOMAN

The whole fucking point of going is to be honest. To get help.

MAN

I was trying to seem tough.

WOMAN

Well, yeah'- No, the whole point is you sat there and said 'Oh I'm a ten' and then after therapy you wanted a hug- even though I didn't want to... And then you wanted *another* one, and *then* I said no. You, you said 'Fuck you! It's fine when you want it.' And then you nearly ran me over in the parking lot. Let me ask you. When do I ever want it? When do I ever reach for you, when? Never! Every time it's for you. I do it because I have no choice, because you throw a temper tantrum if I don't. I let you hold me, or I hold you, and I wait until I think you've had enough, or until I can't stand it any longer, and I have to pull away. I smell your skin and it sickens me. Didn't you notice I stopped having a shower before we had sex, and started having one after? Why do you think I would put my pillow on the floor when I got out of bed? I would get up and slide my pillow under the bed, because I couldn't stand your smell any more. And you know something, I wasn't an eight. I said I was an eight because I knew you were lying. I knew you weren't even a fucking five, but instead of saying ten, which I was- I am! I said an eight to make you feel better. I'm a ten. I'm the Fucking Ten!

MAN

I... I...

WOMAN

Yes, you! You!

MAN

I gave up everything for you.

WOMAN

Yeah, such a promising career.

MAN

They were gonna promote me! They said-

WOMAN

When you told them you were leaving. Why didn't they offer it before? Why didn't you ask for it before?

MAN

No, they were gonna promote me. They said they would pay to train me, but I had to come here, with you.

WOMAN

Had to?

MAN

You had to come here, to this shit hole. So, I came with you. I left everything. I left my friends, everybody.

WOMAN

You could've said no.

MAN

Just take responsibility, you asked me.

WOMAN

Fuck, you're a big boy, you came because you wanted to.

MAN

I came here to nothing.

WOMAN

That's not my fault.

MAN

The job here, the franchise... nothing, nowhere. Fucking nowhere.

WOMAN

You could've made something of it.

MAN

What? What could I have made of it?

WOMAN

I don't know. Something, anything, but you didn't even try. You just sat around drinking and playing that stupid fucking game.

MAN

That's because I have no friends here. Everybody at work is worthless. They all sit around jerking each other off about how good they are, but they wouldn't last a minute back in-

WOMAN

Bullshit! Every job you leave is great, and every one you have you hate. EVERY TIME!

MAN

No.

WOMAN

Yes.

MAN

Well, this one does suck.

WOMAN

They all suck until you quit.

MAN

Fuck you! I gave up everything, and you don't even care. My whole career has been put on hold, gone backwards for the past two years so you could be here? This is a shit hole. You left here for a reason, remember that? You left because it sucks. And then you bring me back here with you, and expect me to be happy. The food here sucks, the people here suck, the whole-

WOMAN

Jesus Christ! When are you gonna fucking man up and say- 'I came here.' I didn't drag you here. I said 'I'm going back home. I need to, I have to.' Yes I wanted you to come, but you could've said no.

MAN

And... And lose you.

WOMAN

You lost me anyway.

MAN

Did I ever have you?

WOMAN

Don't be stupid.

You were too good for me. MAN

Not then. WOMAN

But now... MAN

That's not what I meant. WOMAN
(Apologetically.)

What did you mean then? MAN

You had me. You were able to get me, but you lost me. Somewhere along the way, you lost me. WOMAN

How? MAN

I don't know. WOMAN

Was I a good lover? MAN

I'm not gonna answer that. WOMAN
(Pause.)

Just tell me. MAN

I'm not... I'm not having this discussion. WOMAN

I need to know. MAN
(Desperate.)

I'm going to bed. WOMAN

(WOMAN)

The goes into her room and starts to lay out her clothes for the next day. She leaves the door open this time. She looks at the clock, it's very late... The WOMAN comes out of her room and closes the bathroom door while he pees. She goes back into her room... When he comes out, she goes into the bathroom and flushes the toilet. She goes back into her room, and closes the door and locks it. She makes a few more wild angry gestures in the air. She then rubs her face and turns off the lights.

(MAN)

The MAN finishes the food and leaves the container on the tub. He goes to the bathroom and pees with the door open... After he's done peeing he opens the door and then washes his hands and comes out of the bathroom without flushing. He goes back to the living room and stands there looking around rubbing his back... The MAN gets another beer and wanders back to the couch and starts to play X-box. He picks up the phone and calls someone.

The lights go dark.