

BAD MEDICINE

By Michael Tennant

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P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011

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SYNOPSIS: Ackley Hornsby is a brilliant author whose best-selling novels attack big business pharmaceutical companies. Ackley is also a hopeless hypochondriac who suffers from 357 physical ailments and refuses to leave his apartment. Although he is in no danger of dying from a physical ailment, Ackley is in jeopardy of being murdered as the release of his newest book is announced. Ackley's literary agent warns him of death threats being phoned into his agency, as a mysterious woman from Ackley's past resurfaces after many years. Ackley struggles to keep his identity a secret, and to protect his greatest work, a manuscript called *Bad Medicine*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 3 males)

ACKLEY HORNSBY (m).....	30s-50s; Awkward and germophobic. He has a brilliant mind and imagination, but limited common sense. He's a loveable, nerdy character. (356 lines)
STEVE BOSNICH (m).....	30s-50s; A fast-paced businessman, who is very protective of Ackley. Successful, good looking. Steve has secrets and hides them very well. (265 lines)
DR. JULIA (f).....	30s-50s; A very deep, mysterious character. She has demons. She should be played as a realistic character, evoking real emotions from herself and the audience, even though her lines could easily be played over the top. (131 lines)

- GLORIA (f) 25-40; Smart, mysterious and attractive with several looks and disguises. She is not what she seems. (*83 lines*)
- CLEATUS FORSYTHE (m) 30s-60s; A private investigator. He can be as outrageous as the director allows, but his lines are delivered straight, very seriously. (*59 lines*)

COSTUMES

ACKLEY HORNSBY: A shut-in, who really doesn't have any reason to dress up. He might wear pajamas or a bathrobe if he's expecting company. He is socially awkward, and if he does choose to wear clothes, they're probably not top of the line or designer, even though he can easily afford anything. His attention is just not on his clothing.

STEVE BOSNICH: Steve is a suave business man and looks professional at all times. Finances are always on his mind. He has a cell phone.

DR. JULIA: Dr. Julia's main costume piece is her lab coat. She dresses professionally, but has an air of sexuality about her. She wears a moderately revealing top (or dress) under her lab coat. She is shrouded in mystery. Audiences should not know what to make of her, and her clothing options should not give them an opinion one way or another. She carries a medical bag that contains various vials of medicine and books. In Act Two, Scene 2, she wears a necklace covered in spare keys.

GLORIA: Gloria is a master of disguise, and is always thinking one step ahead so she will not be able to be identified by anyone who might see her. She might wear a few different wigs. We might not ever know her true clothing style. Perhaps in the final scene we may see the real Gloria... perhaps. She carries a gun.

CLEATUS FORSYTHE: Cleatus is the great foil for Gloria. He wears several disguises to blend into the surroundings. If the director wants to dive into the farce, Cleatus may disguise himself in ridiculous costumes, perhaps even as a woman. If the director would like to play up the suspense and mystery, more conservative choices might be made, such as different hats, coats, and glasses. At the director's discretion, he can wear one disguise or many throughout the play. He does wear a coat.

SETTING

The entire play takes place in the living room of Ackley's very clean apartment which includes a couch and table. There are various medical supplies all over, including every sanitizing spray known to mankind. The more anti-bacterial paraphernalia in the apartment, the more farcical the show. Ackley believes he has suffered from just about every physical ailment known to mankind, so any medical supplies will do, so long as there are no prescription drugs. Ackley is very wealthy and lives in one of the nicest apartments in the city; however, he doesn't care nearly as much about its elegance as he does about germs and possible infestations. He has a work station set up where he writes his award-winning books.

Ackley's apartment has a front door, a doorway into the kitchen, a door heading towards his bedroom, and a closet. The closet is the focal point of the set, and should provide a sense of mystery. There should be either a side wall missing in the closet, or a false back that will allow Gloria and Cleatus to enter the closet and disappear within seconds. There is a window where chemical emissions might enter the room to poison Ackley.

SOUNDS

- Cell phone ring
- Bumps and bangs from within closet
- Gunshots (if a blank gun or starter gun cannot be used on stage)
- [Optional] Book trailers to play in between scene changes (This allows time for costume changes, etc.)

PROPS

- Magazine
- Manuscript for Ackley's newest book
- Dr. Julia's special hand sanitizer
- Towel (Ackley uses to open the front door)
- Dr. Julia's medical bag full of various vials of homeopathic remedies
- Small, portable metallic cutting board, used to prepare her remedies
- Steve's cell phone
- Ackley's check for Dr. Julia
- Vial for strand of Ackley's hair
- Dr. Julia's emergency regiment (kept in Ackley's apartment)
- Newspaper
- Box of fan mail
- Typewriter
- Purse for Gloria
- Gun for Gloria
- Stapler/pens/things on Ackley's desk for Dr. Julia to steal
- Two glasses of salmon juice
- Contract/pen for Steve
- Vials of homeopathic remedies for Ackley
- Package of tater tots
- Plate for tater tots
- Fingerprint dusting kit or package that might look like it contains a fingerprint dusting kit
- Notepad for Ackley to write the word "Lockjaw"
- Check for Cleatus
- Spare keys on a necklace (hidden on Dr. Julia)
- Ackley's book of poetry
- Stack of uncashed checks
- Bad Medicine* manuscript
- Thick necklace (or body armor) made of spare keys to Ackley's apartment
- Ropes (hanging on Cleatus)

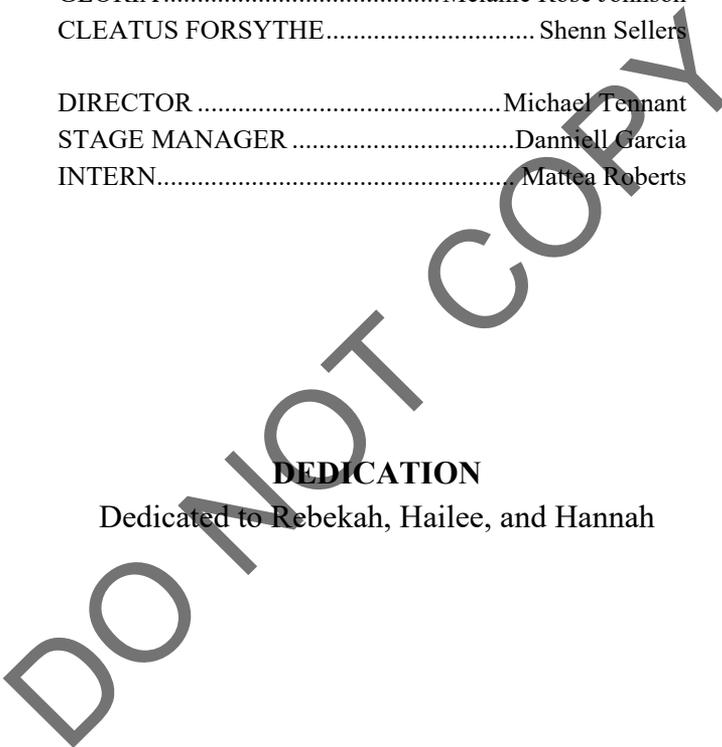
PREMIERE PRODUCTION

Bad Medicine premiered at Play With Your Food Productions in Hemet, California on January 12, 2018 with the following cast:

ACKLEY HORNSBY	Michael Tennant
STEVE BOSNICH	Gustavo Bermeo
DR. JULIA.....	Monica Reichl
GLORIA	Melanie Rose Johnson
CLEATUS FORSYTHE.....	Shenn Sellers
DIRECTOR	Michael Tennant
STAGE MANAGER	Danniell Garcia
INTERN.....	Mattea Roberts

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Rebekah, Hailee, and Hannah



ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT START: *Blackout. In the darkness, we hear a knock at the front door, and the voice of STEVE.*

STEVE: Ackley! Ackley, please, open up! Ackley, I'm worried about you! Ackley, please, come to the door!

Lights come up, we see ACKLEY slumped over the back of the couch. His body appears lifeless.

STEVE: Ackley? I've been knocking for five minutes. I'm coming in! I'm coming in, Ackley!

STEVE opens the door, discovering ACKLEY'S body slumped over the couch.

STEVE: Oh... Ackley... Ackley.

ACKLEY stirs.

ACKLEY: What? What?

STEVE: Ackley, it's me... It's Steve.

ACKLEY: Oh... Steve. I thought I'd died again.

STEVE: I thought this time was it. I thought you were actually a goner. You about made my heart stop. You'd have woken up to find me lying dead on the couch next to you.

ACKLEY: Oh, now that would have been ironic.

STEVE: I can do without irony. What was it this time, Ackley? Another heart attack?

ACKLEY: No... my heart has been hanging in there the last few days.

STEVE: That infected ingrown toenail again?

ACKLEY: No, no.

STEVE: Then what?

ACKLEY: Chemical emissions from the factory across the street.

STEVE: So now it's chemical emissions?

ACKLEY: I was just settling in for the evening and I felt a breeze start to blow through my window. At first, I stopped and took a few deep breaths. Then I started to cough. It didn't take me long to realize what was happening. The factory was producing noxious, hazardous fumes. They do it at night when no one is paying attention. It keeps them under the radar. I closed the window as fast as I could, and I was about to reach for my oxygen tank, but I was too late. The last thing I remember was desperately trying to take a breath, but I couldn't. I must have blacked out.

STEVE: You were out all this time?

ACKLEY: I must have been. I don't remember anything until I heard your voice. I thought I'd gone to hell. It's times like these I'm glad I gave you a spare key. I've had enough. I need to move. I need to get away from that factory.

STEVE: Move? I'd like to see that. You never leave the apartment. And anyways, where would you go? You live in one of the nicest buildings in the city. Only a handful of people could even afford the rent in a place like this.

ACKLEY: Having neighbors who try to poison you puts a damper on it all.

STEVE: No one is trying to poison you! You're not thinking logically. Thousands and thousands of people breathe the same air as you do, and none of them dropped dead last night.

ACKLEY: But I'm different than they are. My body is weak. Susceptible to all kinds of diseases and bacteria and infesting infestations. I die easier than they do.

STEVE: Then why haven't you died?

ACKLEY: Show some sensitivity! You have the worst bedside manner I've ever seen.

STEVE: Bedside manner... you're perfectly healthy.

ACKLEY: You know, it's not enough that my body is deteriorating by the minute, but I'm also nursing a broken heart. When Sylvia left me... well... I've just never recovered. I've never told you that.

STEVE: You tell me every time I see you.

ACKLEY: Sylvia did her best to take care of me, but in the end, she just couldn't bring herself to sit by and watch me die. She knew it was inevitable. As much as she loved me, she just didn't have it in her to watch me suffer day in and day out. That's why she left me.

STEVE: She left you because you're an idiot.

ACKLEY: An idiot? Then why don't you fire me?

STEVE: Don't think it hasn't crossed my mind.

ACKLEY: Then why don't you. Go on, do it. I dare you!

STEVE: I can't. You make us way too much money. You may be the strangest person I've ever met, but people love your books. Are you feeling alright?

ACKLEY: Yeah, I think so. Dr. Julia will be over in a few minutes for my morning checkup. She'll know how to treat chemical emissions. She has good, homeopathic remedies.

STEVE: I get you don't like hospitals and prescription drugs, but I'm not sold on this homeopathic stuff. Some of these remedies seem hard to put so much faith in.

ACKLEY: Not if you have a doctor who knows what they're doing. Stick around and watch Dr. Julia work. She knows her stuff.

STEVE: She comes every morning? She makes house calls?

ACKLEY: Yep. Stops by on her way to the office and then again in the evenings on her way home.

STEVE: You're paying a private doctor for two house visits a day? I can't imagine what that must cost you.

ACKLEY: Good thing I make us both a lot of money.

STEVE: Does she have a copy of your apartment key, too?

ACKLEY: Of course. I would have difficulty letting her in if I was dead. See, I thought of everything.

STEVE: You're an idiot.

ACKLEY: Why'd you stop by?

STEVE: I need an update on your manuscript. Got a deadline to meet. I know I'm not scheduled to pick it up until tomorrow, but... just seeing where we're at with things.

ACKLEY: Good news. I finished it yesterday!

STEVE: Yesterday? Fantastic!

ACKLEY: I typed "the end" around lunch time, but as soon as I did, I started getting chills on half my body and hot flashes on the other half. Then my foot fell asleep. Kind of threw my day through a loop. I didn't die though.

STEVE: Well, on behalf of the agency, I'm glad you're still around.

ACKLEY: I recovered just in time to get taken out by the chemical emissions outside.

STEVE: Well... That happens to the best of us.

ACKLEY: You don't mean that, do you.

STEVE: No, you're an idiot.

ACKLEY: So what's the plan for the manuscript?

STEVE: The usual. I give it to the editors, and maybe you do a rewrite, maybe you don't. The publicity department takes over and we set a date for the release. And bam! We've got another best seller on our hands.

ACKLEY: Speaking of hands, I need to sanitize mine. Germs all around. (*Reaches for a bottle of hand sanitizer in a sketchy-looking homemade vial.*) Need some hand sanitizer? Dr. Julia developed it.

STEVE: What's it made of?

ACKLEY: I'm not sure, but it smells like onions and tuna fish.

STEVE: No thanks.

ACKLEY: When's the release date for the book? Any ideas yet? Couple of months out?

STEVE: Actually, we're going to release it as soon as possible. Now that the manuscript is done, we're going to have everyone working overtime to get this out.

ACKLEY: You don't need to promote it? Build up excitement?

STEVE: The excitement is there, believe me. And, I have great news! Your model took some new pictures for the book! They came out really well. Really sexy.

ACKLEY: I don't want to use that model! I want to appear in my own pictures!

STEVE: I know, and I talked to the publicity department about it. I really did. They just feel that because the majority of your readers are women, having a male model in his early 20s on the back of your books really boosts the sales.

ACKLEY: But that's not me! That's not what I look like!

STEVE: I know. That's exactly why we use him. Sort of the same reason you write under a pen name.

ACKLEY: No! That's why you publish me under a pen name. I want no part in it! I always submit my manuscripts with my name on it, and you people always change it!

STEVE: Ackley, how many women would purchase a novel by someone named Ackley Hornsby?

ACKLEY: All the ones who aren't shallow!

STEVE: So that's like... ten of them. But the name "Brenton Love" has put you on the best seller list seven times. And you're just getting warmed up. You handle the writing and leave publicity to us!

ACKLEY: I'm a fraud. A complete phony. If it ever gets out that I don't look like the picture on the back of my books...

STEVE: It won't. Only a handful of people know, and they are sworn to secrecy.

ACKLEY: I don't like it!

STEVE: Well, you can always go back to writing your crappy poetry under your real name and real picture. Remember how that worked out? Twelve copies sold. And I guarantee you, those twelve copies are either in the trash, being given away as gag gifts, or on eBay with a starting bid of a penny... Which is where that bid will stay.

ACKLEY: Shhhh... do you hear that? That buzzing sound? Listen!

STEVE: It sounds like a mosquito.

ACKLEY: Shhh... It's a mosquito. They carry Malaria. What you're hearing is the buzz of death.

ACKLEY grabs an old magazine, rolls it into a weapon, and hunts the mosquito.

STEVE: Well, it's got nothing on the buzz happening around your latest book!! Hey, I saw your neighbors are moving out.

ACKLEY: Yeah... Getting out while they can. They don't like the chemical emissions any better than I do.

STEVE: Maybe they don't like living next to a weirdo like you.

We hear a knock at the door.

ACKLEY: Oh, excuse me.

STEVE: Is this the famous Dr. Julia?

ACKLEY: Should be.

ACKLEY takes a towel and uses it to touch the door handle, avoiding germs, DR. JULIA enters through the open door.

DR. JULIA: Good morning, Ackley.

ACKLEY: Good morning, Dr. Julia. Let me introduce you to my friend, Steve.

STEVE: Steve Bosnich.

DR. JULIA: It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Bosnich.

STEVE: I've heard nothing but great things about you.

DR. JULIA: How is my patient this morning?

ACKLEY: Not good. Not good at all. I almost died again last night.

DR. JULIA: It wasn't your heart, was it?

STEVE: No. Chemical emissions.

ACKLEY: Yes, from the factory across the street. I think the fumes have caused my insides to decay overnight. My liver feels squishy this morning.

DR. JULIA: Oh no! Not a squishy liver! Does it hurt anywhere, Ackley?

ACKLEY: Here... and here.... And here. *(Pointing to various locations.)*

DR. JULIA: Anywhere else?

ACKLEY: Here, here, and over here.

DR. JULIA: I have just the thing for you! *(Opens her bag and takes out a small drink container.)* Drink this. It will bring your liver back to normal and fix the harm caused by the chemical emissions.

STEVE: What is it?

DR. JULIA: It's a little homeopathic regiment I developed.

STEVE: And it helps with chemical emissions? And squishy livers? And you just happened to be carrying it with you?

ACKLEY: It cures all sorts of things. She gives it to me every day. It fixes me right up until I get sick again. I like to blend it with apple juice. I'll be right back. *(Exits.)*

DR. JULIA: Drink it all!

STEVE: You must truly be a brilliant doctor to come up with your own regiment that can cure everything.

DR. JULIA: Thank you, Mr. Bosnich.

STEVE: You look familiar. Have we met?

DR. JULIA: I don't think so. But I get that a lot. I have a familiar face I guess. If you'll excuse me for just a moment, I need to search the place for dust mites.

STEVE: Dust mites?

DR. JULIA: Ackley asked if I would inspect for dust mites the next time I came over. He looked for himself, but said he wouldn't be able to rest without the opinion of a professional.

STEVE: You're actually going to search for dust mites?

DR. JULIA: Breathing in too many dust mites can wreak havoc upon the sinuses. Sinuses, when clogged, can really impair one's breathing. Good oxygen flow is important for a healthy heart, and since Ackley has had trouble with his heart, we're trying to be proactive. Be right back.

STEVE: While you're at it, keep your eyes out for a blood sucking mosquito.

DR. JULIA exits. STEVE shakes his head, confused at his encounter with DR. JULIA. He pulls out his cell phone.

STEVE: Barbara... I'm at Ackley's place. Tell everyone I'm running a little late, but he's completed the manuscript and I'll be bringing it right over. I have a really great feeling about this one, I just do. I'll be in the office in an hour. Have everyone there ready to discuss the manuscript. This needs to hit the shelves as soon as possible!

ACKLEY enters, looking full of energy and enthusiasm.

ACKLEY: I feel good enough to be the body behind Brenton Love.

STEVE: Just stick to being the brains behind him, alright? Ackley, out of curiosity... which pharmaceutical companies did you go after in this book?

ACKLEY: Manufacturers of certain ointment products used for chicken pox. I imagine people will rethink highly priced antibiotic lotions, especially those with significant chances of risky side effects.

STEVE: Chicken pox? You think the female crowd will be into that?

ACKLEY: Chicken pox is largely something that affects children. These children all came from females.

STEVE: You may be onto something.

ACKLEY: Where's Dr. Julia?

DR. JULIA: (*Enters.*) Here I am. Just checked for dust mites, and I am happy to report you're in the clear.

ACKLEY: Thanks, Dr. Julia!

DR. JULIA: Well, I'm off!

ACKLEY: Oh, Dr. Julia, before I go, here's your check for this week.

ACKLEY starts to hand DR. JULIA the check, but STEVE takes it from ACKLEY'S hand and looks at the amount before passing it on to DR. JULIA.

STEVE: Let's just hope and pray you make a killing off this new novel. You're gonna need it.

DR. JULIA: One more thing, Ackley. Before I go, I'd like to take a strand of your hair back to the lab for tests.

ACKLEY: Oh... alright.

ACKLEY lowers his head and DR. JULIA removes a strand of hair. STEVE watches, not believing his eyes.

DR. JULIA: I'll see you soon, Ackley. If any of your conditions worsen, or if you develop any new conditions, you drink the emergency regiment I left you. Otherwise, I'll see you this evening. Oh, and if you'd like to experiment with the flavoring, you can try adding some melted blue cheese and cabbage. *(Smiles warmly and exits.)*

STEVE: *(Once DR. JULIA has exited.)* That's an interesting woman.

ACKLEY: She's the most brilliant woman I've ever known.

STEVE: Maybe she can convince you that there's no harm in having a telephone in the apartment.

ACKLEY: Not this discussion again. You put a cell phone to your head, and the next day you have a brain tumor.

STEVE: A land line then!

ACKLEY: They're a breeding ground for ear wax mites that seep out of your ears and live in the ear wax built up in your phone. Then someone else uses your phone, and you get some of their ear wax inside, and the next thing you know, your ear wax mites are fornicating with their ear wax mites, and you've got some hybrid breed going on the rampage. No thank you. Someone wants to talk to me, they can do it in person.

STEVE: At the cost of a \$30 taxi ride and an hour of my life. I'm going to have the contract for your manuscript drawn up right away. I don't suppose you'd like to come downtown to sign them.

ACKLEY shrugs.

STEVE: Ackley, you need to get out. How long has it been since you've set foot outside this apartment? You've turned into a recluse. How about it, Ackley... come visit us at the agency.

ACKLEY: I'd like to... I just don't think my body could handle all the germs and bacteria that's out there. Gum on the sidewalk, vomit in the subway, STD's you can inhale.

STEVE: How the hell can you catch an STD by breathing?

ACKLEY: I know a guy... he took the number nine downtown... ended up with a rash shaped like the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. All the talk of going outside has made me nauseous. Owww...

STEVE: Are you OK?

ACKLEY: My pancreas. My pancreas just started to hurt. Can stress damage your pancreas?

STEVE: You stress me out every day and my pancreas is fine.

ACKLEY: I think I'm having contractions.

STEVE: How far apart?

ACKLEY: About seven seconds.

STEVE: For heaven's sake, Ackley. I simply suggest you come down town to sign a contract and you're suddenly pregnant.

ACKLEY: I need Dr. Julia.

STEVE: I can't wait to see how she cures this! I can get you your emergency regiment, but I'm afraid I'm fresh out of blue cheese and cabbage.

ACKLEY: I'll be alright... I'll be... alright.

STEVE: Look, relax, Ackley. I'll go into the office, I'll get the contracts, I'll bring them back here tomorrow morning, and once again, you'll have more money than you know what to do with.

ACKLEY: Wait... wait... if I die...

STEVE: For heaven's sake!

ACKLEY: If I die...

STEVE: Ackley!

ACKLEY: If I die... I have one last novel. It's the best novel I've ever written. It's to be released only after I'm gone. Released under my real name. Using my real picture. And dedicated to my fans.

STEVE: You have another novel? It's ready to go now?

ACKLEY: Only to be released posthumously.

STEVE: Well... what's it about? Can I read it?

ACKLEY: I'm sure you will soon enough. But, that's all I want to say right now. It's a truly great work, Steve. I just... wanted you to know about it.

STEVE: Well, alright then. You've got me all curious. Is there anything you can tell me about it, other than it exists?

ACKLEY: No.

STEVE: Another novel though... this could mean big things to the agency.

ACKLEY: This is only for when I'm gone.

STEVE: Alright. I'll respect that. But if you change your mind, we'd be very interested in it. Are you... alright now?

ACKLEY: Yeah.

STEVE: Contractions stopped.

ACKLEY: I'm fine.

STEVE: We'll be in touch. Very soon. Take care, Ackley.

STEVE exits, closing the door behind him. ACKLEY picks up the magazine and returns to the mosquito hunt. ACKLEY puts it down at lightning speed, looking desperately at his hands.

ACKLEY: Oh no... ink poisoning!

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT START: *Blackout. There is a knock on ACKLEY'S door.*

GLORIA: Mr. Hornsby? Mr. Ackley Hornsby? Are you home?

Lights up. We see ACKLEY lying across a table, he appears dead.

GLORIA: Mr. Hornsby? Ackley? Listen, I'm coming in! (*Opens the door slowly and emerges cautiously. Sees ACKLEY'S body.*) Mr. Hornsby? Mr. Hornsby? (*Nudges ACKLEY, thinking he's gone.*) Mr. Hornsby?

ACKLEY stirs.

ACKLEY: Hmm... what?

GLORIA: You're breathing. Are you alright?

ACKLEY: I thought I died.

GLORIA: Should I call an ambulance?

ACKLEY: No. I don't trust 'em.

GLORIA: Mr. Hornsby, what happened?

ACKLEY: It's all kind of foggy. I was... going to watch the news. I was in the other room, and I turned on the television... that's when it got me.

GLORIA: Did you get shocked?

ACKLEY: No... radiation... from the TV screen. I managed to stumble out here, but I didn't make it. Everything went black, and I died right here on the table.

GLORIA: But you didn't die. Not really.

ACKLEY: That's really good to hear. Who are you?

GLORIA: Oh! I'm so sorry. My name is Gloria. I'm with your publisher.

ACKLEY: Are you new?

GLORIA: I just started last week. I brought over a box of fan mail for you.

ACKLEY: Did you have them checked for Anthrax?

GLORIA: No...

ACKLEY: Get 'em out of here!

GLORIA: Right.

ACKLEY: Steve send you over to check on me?

GLORIA: Not at all. I really wanted to meet you. Being the new girl, I'm trying to get up to speed and meet all of our clients. And of course you're the biggest name we represent. Brenton Love. It's a real pleasure to meet you. I would have called ahead of time, but...

ACKLEY: I know. No phone.

GLORIA extends her hand.

ACKLEY: Oh... Would you mind?

ACKLEY offers GLORIA hand sanitizer. GLORIA uses it.

GLORIA: What is this?

ACKLEY: A special hand sanitizer my doctor developed. It's really good.

GLORIA: Smells like melted bologna and vodka. You know, you don't look anything like the picture on the back of your books.

ACKLEY: You sound disappointed.

GLORIA: Not at all. You see one guy with his shirt off, showing an absolutely perfect physique, riding a stallion bareback, you've seen them all.

ACKLEY: You should see the picture that's going to appear on the back of my newest book. He's wrestling an alligator.

GLORIA: I have a full sized poster of it in my office. I've never been so jealous of an alligator in my entire life.

ACKLEY: Gotta sell those books.

GLORIA: I'm curious.... How do you handle your book signings?

ACKLEY: The model who plays Brenton Love goes in my place. Always draws a big crowd. Even illiterate women come to buy my books. May I ask how you got in? I made sure to lock everything up. This place should have been like Fort Knox.

GLORIA: I found your key under the doormat.

ACKLEY: Ah...

GLORIA: I wouldn't have barged in, but I heard about your conditions, and... was a little concerned.

ACKLEY: Yes. I'm battling 357 physical ailments. All of them life threatening.

GLORIA: You don't look so hot, you know?

ACKLEY: Will you stop comparing me to the Brenton Love model?

GLORIA: Oh, trust me. There is no comparison. What I meant is, you're looking a little pale. Are you sure I can't get you a doctor?

ACKLEY: No, no, Dr. Julia will be here soon. She's my private doctor. The only doctor I ever want to see.

GLORIA: So you really don't trust hospitals, doctors... pharmaceutical companies?

ACKLEY: Especially not the pharmaceutical companies. They're frauds! You know, for our entire marriage, my wife Sylvia had a headache every night. We were married two years and I'm still a virgin. I spent a fortune on aspirin. No brand ever worked. That was my first clue I was being cheated. Like clockwork, those damn headaches would start just before bedtime and never went away until morning.

GLORIA: I know that corrupt pharmaceutical companies and doctors have been the themes of your last five books, but I didn't know you actually had a poor opinion of them.

ACKLEY: My works are classified as fiction, but I believe each novel has a large element of truth involved.

GLORIA: Your readers must agree. Your last novel, about the church that worked with the pharmaceutical companies to make healthy holy water, and the priest that had his mind altered by it, had a profound impact on readers. Pharmaceutical stocks took a massive hit. I'll admit, my heart broke for the priest. In the final chapter, when the over the counter healthy holy water had driven him completely crazy and he was seen for the last time running nude upon Mt. Everest. You don't by any chance have an extra copy of your newest manuscript laying around do you?

ACKLEY: I gave my only copy to Steve. Pulled it out of the typewriter yesterday.

GLORIA: You use a type writer? How very 1970s of you. So, no extra copies of it that I could read lying around?

ACKLEY: Afraid not.

GLORIA: Well, I knew it was a shot in the dark, but... I had to try. To be among the first to see your work would have been a real honor.

ACKLEY: You know, you're really pretty.

GLORIA: Ummmm... thank you, Mr. Horny. Uh, Hornsby.

ACKLEY turns his back. GLORIA pulls out a gun from her purse.

ACKLEY: And I think I know what's going on here.

GLORIA: Oh you do? (*Silently approaches ACKLEY from behind.*)

ACKLEY: I'm pretty perceptive. I can always tell when something is amiss.

GLORIA: Oh, I can see that.

ACKLEY: Steve thinks I'm crazy because I suffer from 357 life threatening conditions.

GLORIA: It's the 358th that will do you in. *(Raises her gun.)*

ACKLEY: I think he sent you over to talk me into giving you the new book I told him about this morning. But if he thinks that's going to work, he's crazier than I ever was. I still think you're really pretty.

ACKLEY turns to GLORIA. She quickly smiles and hides the gun.

GLORIA: You're saying that, you have another book? A different book than you gave to Mr. Bosnich earlier today?

ACKLEY: Isn't that where you were about to segue the conversation?

GLORIA: Not at all.

ACKLEY: You mean, you didn't know?

GLORIA: Mr. Bosnich never mentioned it.

ACKLEY: You mean... you didn't come here to try and seduce me? Try to wear me down by showing me some leg?

GLORIA: I didn't even shave. Wanna feel?

ACKLEY turns his head, reaches down and touches her leg.

ACKLEY: Ouch. *(Shakes finger like he's been poked by a cactus.)*

GLORIA: Sorry. Are you... alright? You look like you're turning green.

ACKLEY: I think I'm seasick.

GLORIA: Well, that's... understandable.

ACKLEY: So, you really just came here to get to know me, like you said?

GLORIA: I assure you, my intentions here are purely innocent and honorable.

ACKLEY: I'm very sorry.

GLORIA: You really have another book?

ACKLEY: Yeah... Steve was wanting it. I told him it was my best work yet.

GLORIA: Is it?

ACKLEY: Yes, but it's not to be released until after I die.

GLORIA: Are you... expecting to die soon?

ACKLEY: I'd thought I'd be gone months ago.

GLORIA: You keep the book here?

ACKLEY: Hidden safely away. Don't worry, it's in no danger. No one will find it where it's hidden.

GLORIA: I'm surprised Mr. Bosnich hasn't grabbed it up.

ACKLEY: If my health continues to go downhill like it is, he won't have to wait long.

GLORIA: I should be going.

ACKLEY: Listen... could I ask you to please... keep this book a secret?

GLORIA: Of course. I'll keep your secret if you'll keep mine.

ACKLEY: You have a secret?

GLORIA: Mr. Bosnich doesn't know that I came by today. I was supposed to be meeting with some other clients and running some errands, but... I was so anxious to meet you.

ACKLEY: I won't say a thing.

GLORIA: You know... you really have a charm about you. Maybe... we can talk again sometime?

ACKLEY begins to blush.

ACKLEY: Swing by anytime. I'm always here.

GLORIA: Goodbye for now, Ackley. *(Exits.)*

ACKLEY starts to disinfect the room with a disinfectant. There is a knock at the door.

ACKLEY: Forget something?

ACKLEY opens the door and DR. JULIA enters

ACKLEY: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were someone else.

DR. JULIA: You mean the brunette who just passed me by?

ACKLEY: What? No, the lady who just left was blonde.

DR. JULIA: I just saw her leaving. She was a brunette.

ACKLEY: No... definitely blonde.

DR. JULIA: Ackley, are you feeling alright?

ACKLEY: I think... I may be sea sick.

DR. JULIA: Oh no. It must be a very bad case for it to happen in a high-rise apartment building.

ACKLEY: I think... I might have scurvy too.

DR. JULIA: Well, that's been going around. Here... why don't you sit down, until you get your sea legs back. I have something that will help.

DR. JULIA hands ACKLEY her special regiment.

ACKLEY: Thanks, Dr. Julia. I don't know what I'd do without you.

DR. JULIA: It's really nice outside. You should open your curtains—the sky is beautiful.

ACKLEY shrugs

DR. JULIA: Ackley... Have you ever thought of going back out?

ACKLEY: Out where?

DR. JULIA: Out of this apartment. Back into the world.

ACKLEY: There's nothing good that lies beyond that door.

DR. JULIA: Nothing?

ACKLEY: Nothing for me. For other people, maybe, but nothing for me.

DR. JULIA: You're locked up in here, Ackley. Trust me... you don't want to live your life locked away.

ACKLEY: Have you ever been sea sick before?

DR. JULIA: Once... oh, yes... I wasn't in an apartment when it happened though. I was on a boat, with my father. I must have been fourteen or fifteen. I remember looking out at the ocean... as far as I could see... across the horizon... and just wanting to sail away. I just wanted to drop everything and go. And that was a very new feeling for me, because usually I have such a hard time letting go of things that I love. I find something that I love, and I just... hold onto it. But this day was different. I could feel the ocean calling to me. It was beautiful, and it was deep... and it spoke to the deepest part of my soul. And then... I threw up over the side of the boat. The ocean never really talked to me after that. I think I offended it. Before I go... I need another strand of your hair for the lab.

ACKLEY: What happened to the first strand you took?

DR. JULIA: The results were inconclusive. We need a strand of hair from your chest. It's close to your heart, and it should give us the information we need. You'll feel just a tiny little tug.

ACKLEY opens his shirt.

DR. JULIA: You can close your eyes if you want. When you open them, it will all be over.

ACKLEY closes his eyes. DR. JULIA puts her face right next to his chest and smells him. Then, she licks her lips. Carefully, she pulls a strand of hair out of his chest and places it into a vial.

DR. JULIA: There you are, Ackley. We're all done. Feeling any better?

ACKLEY: I'm sleepy.

DR. JULIA: Good. The regiment is working. Lay down your head and sleep, Ackley. You're not ready to leave this room in body, but in dreams you can fly across the world.

DR. JULIA watches ACKLEY until he's asleep on the couch. She walks over to his desk, picks up a stapler and kisses it. She puts it inside of her purse. Blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT RISE: *GLORIA knocks on the door. ACKLEY answers it.*

ACKLEY: Oh... good morning. I thought you were Steve. Did he send you over here with my contract?

GLORIA: Oh, no, he didn't. Is he coming by this morning?

ACKLEY: He should be here anytime.

GLORIA: Oh, then I don't have much time with you.

ACKLEY: There's no rush. Why don't you sanitize and then join me for some salmon juice.

GLORIA: Salmon juice?

ACKLEY: Dr. Julia swears by it! It detoxes your liver and fortifies your uvula against germs.

GLORIA: Ewwwww...

ACKLEY: It's delicious if you combine it with soy sauce and peanut butter. It tastes like purple.

GLORIA: Like purple?

ACKLEY: If purple had a flavor, I imagine it would taste like salmon juice and peanut butter. I'll get us both a nice glass full and then we can chat.

ACKLEY exits into the kitchen. GLORIA looks around briefly but thoroughly, searching everywhere on stage that could hide a manuscript. Finally, her attention is drawn to the closet. She opens it and looks closely inside. She returns to the couch when she hears ACKLEY coming back. ACKLEY enters with a thick, pink concoction, like he just put a salmon in a blender.

ACKLEY: Mmmmm... delicious. Here's a glass for you.

GLORIA: Thank you, Ackley... I wanted to talk to you about your book.

ACKLEY: Steve says it's going to be released very soon.

GLORIA: I mean... your other book

ACKLEY: My posthumous work?

GLORIA: Yes.

ACKLEY: There's nothing to talk about. It will be released when I'm dead, and until that time there's no point in discussing it with me.

GLORIA: I can't discuss it with you after you're dead though.

ACKLEY: You make a good point. Cheers.

ACKLEY clinks GLORIA'S glass and drinks his salmon juice.

GLORIA: But Ackley...

ACKLEY: Drink up!

GLORIA takes a small drink and gags... a lot.

ACKLEY: Mmmmm... Now just wait. In a minute, you'll feel it hit your liver, and when it does, it will tingle. It's magical.

GLORIA: It's... stunning.

ACKLEY: So, what brings you here?

GLORIA: Your manuscript...

ACKLEY: No!

GLORIA: Just hear me out. Please, just listen...

ACKLEY: No!

GLORIA: I have something for you, from the agency – to protect your manuscript.

ACKLEY: What is it?

GLORIA: A stamp that the agency uses. They put it on manuscripts to protect them. It has an official date, and the agency's name. It just makes it all official.

ACKLEY: I've never heard of anything like that. If it existed, Steve would have told me.

GLORIA: If I could just see the manuscript, I could stamp it and then...

ACKLEY: No!

GLORIA: Ackley...

ACKLEY: You'd of had better luck seducing me than taking the route you're trying. Is your liver tingling yet?

GLORIA sighs. She puts an arm around ACKLEY and pulls her dress up slightly.

GLORIA: Is this this working?

ACKLEY: Not yet, but it shows me you're desperate.

GLORIA leans in to kiss him

ACKLEY: Gross! You have salmon breath!

GLORIA: *(Standing up, exasperated.)* That's what happens when you drink a dead fish!

ACKLEY: I'm sorry, this isn't working for me. No seducing me today. But maybe you could come back tomorrow and try again.

GLORIA pulls a gun from her purse

GLORIA: I wanted to do this the easy way, but you are going to give me that manuscript.

ACKLEY turns away from her and starts to choke.

ACKLEY: Oh no...

GLORIA: What?

ACKLEY: The salmon juice... it has lead in it... the salmon must have been captured while swimming in polluted water. I'm allergic to lead.

GLORIA: Stop messing around and get me that manuscript!

ACKLEY passes out.

GLORIA: You have got to be kidding me!

There is a knock at the door.

STEVE: Ackley, it's Steve. I've got your contract.

GLORIA is in a bind. She looks around desperately.

STEVE: Ackley, everything alright in there? I'm coming in.

GLORIA runs into ACKLEY's room. STEVE unlocks the door and enters, finding ACKLEY unconscious.

STEVE: Ackley! Ackley, are you alright?

ACKLEY stirs slightly.

ACKLEY: Get my anti-lead medicine.... It's there... on the table...

STEVE rushes over to a table full of emergency vials.

STEVE: I see... anti cobra venom medicine... anti yellow snow cleanser... anti-epilepsy medicine, Dr. Julia made all of these for you?

ACKLEY: Steve... hurry, I'm dying...

STEVE: You're an idiot. Anti-Philippine Flu, Anti-Mongolian Measles...

ACKLEY: Steve...

STEVE quickly grabs a vial.

STEVE: Got it! Anti-lead... It's... empty.

ACKLEY: Oh no... goodbye, Steve... my manuscript... you can find it in...

ACKLEY collapses. STEVE rushes to him

STEVE: Ackley... Ackley...

STEVE turns ACKLEY over and begins to give him chest compressions. He leans in to give him mouth-to-mouth and gags.

STEVE: Why does his breath smell like rotten fish?

Just as he is about to give him mouth-to-mouth, DR. JULIA enters.

DR. JULIA: Oh... my...

STEVE: This is not what it looks like.

DR. JULIA: I can come back later.

STEVE: He's not breathing... He's out of anti-lead medicine!

DR. JULIA: I've got it!

DR. JULIA opens her medical bag and removes a vial of anti-lead medicine.

DR. JULIA: Here Ackley... drink... It's Doctor Julia, Ackley. Follow my voice... follow my voice, Ackley. Come back to me. If you see a light, don't follow it. If you feel extreme heat, don't follow that either.

STEVE: What the hell?

DR. JULIA: Exactly. Open your eyes, Ackley... open your eyes and come back to me.

ACKLEY slowly opens his eyes.

DR. JULIA: There you are... don't say anything for a minute... just rest. If you don't remember... well, it sounds like you had a very fast-traveling lead poisoning.

ACKLEY tries to sit up and warn them about GLORIA.

STEVE: Ackley, rest...

ACKLEY: She has a gun.

DR. JULIA: Who does, Ackley?

ACKLEY: She's in the apartment. We have to get out.

STEVE: There's no one here.

ACKLEY: She's in the apartment.

STEVE: Where?

ACKLEY tries to talk, but can't.

DR. JULIA: No more talking, Ackley. It's alright.

STEVE: I'll have a look.

DR. JULIA: Be careful.

STEVE goes to the closet and cautiously opens the door. Then he crosses to the kitchen, and finally the bedroom. STEVE disappears into the bedroom while DR. JULIA stays with ACKLEY.

DR. JULIA: Your color is coming back, Ackley... can you see? Is your vision blurry?

ACKLEY: I can see.

STEVE comes out of the bedroom.

STEVE: There's no one here, Ackley. I looked everywhere. Closets, bathrooms...

ACKLEY: The shower?

STEVE: I looked twice in the shower. *(To DR. JULIA.)* Ackley has a history of crazy women in his shower.

ACKLEY: She's here!

STEVE: No... there's no one here. When you're feeling better, I'll walk you through the house and show you.

ACKLEY: Steve!

DR. JULIA: Ackley...

STEVE: Is it possible he's hallucinating? Could he have hit his head?

DR. JULIA: It's possible.... But he really seems to be doing fine to me.

STEVE: Can we sit him up?

DR. JULIA: Yeah...

DR. JULIA and STEVE sit ACKLEY upright.

STEVE: Ackley... do you feel well enough to sign your contract?

DR. JULIA: Mr. Bosnich!

STEVE: Well, I have to get back to the office. We both know he's going to be fine, and this contract is urgent.

ACKLEY: Her name is Gloria. She works for you... at the agency.

STEVE: Who does? The lady you say was here?

ACKLEY: She wanted... you know what. She was after it.

STEVE: You say she works at the agency? And, she knew about "you know what"?

ACKLEY: Her name is Gloria. Your new executive.

STEVE: Ackley... we don't have any new executives at the agency.

ACKLEY: We have to call the police.

STEVE: We can't... for obvious reasons.

During this discussion, STEVE and ACKLEY shoot glances at DR. JULIA, trying to figure out how to discreetly have the conversation they need to have. It's obvious to DR. JULIA that they don't want her to overhear.

DR. JULIA: Do I need to excuse myself? This sounds like a private conversation.

STEVE: There's nothing left to discuss, really. Ackley, there's no one named Gloria who works at the agency, and there's no one in the apartment. There was no one here when I came in. Just you, gasping for breath. Now here's a pen.... Can you sign, Ackley? We'll get things taken care of at the agency.

ACKLEY takes a pen and weakly signs the contract.

STEVE: Now Ackley, before you passed out and... died, or, whatever it was that happened, you were about to tell me where I could find a certain something.

ACKLEY: No!

DR. JULIA: Mr. Bosnich, please...

STEVE: Alright, alright... I'll be back later to check on you, Ackley. In a day or two. I hope you feel better. *(Exits.)*

ACKLEY: It's always all about the money.

DR. JULIA: Ackley... can you tell me anymore about the lady in your apartment, or does it hurt to talk.

ACKLEY: You saw her the other day, while you were leaving. The blonde.

DR. JULIA: I saw a brunette.

ACKLEY: I'm not making this up... she was in here and she tried to steal my... my...

DR. JULIA: Virginity?

ACKLEY: No! Well, I can't tell you what she tried to steal but...

DR. JULIA: Did she try and seduce you to get you to give it to her?

ACKLEY: Yes... how did you know that?

DR. JULIA: Because... the brunette who was in here wears a blonde wig.

DR. JULIA removes a strand of blonde hair from near ACKLEY'S neck.

ACKLEY: Holy S!

DR. JULIA: There was a woman in here who had a gun, Ackley? She wanted to hurt you? What happened?

ACKLEY: I don't remember much after the lead poisoning hit me.

DR. JULIA: You have to call the police.

ACKLEY: Two problems... no phone...

DR. JULIA: Don't be ridiculous, that's an easy problem to fix. I can even create you a concoction that will prevent ear wax mites from fornicating if that's still a concern of yours.

ACKLEY: The bigger problem... the much bigger problem is, Steve will never sign off on having the police involved. Unless he believes there is a real danger, which he doesn't. And even then, it would take some convincing. See, there's a privacy issue that he's protecting, and he does a great job at it.

DR. JULIA: So... she was in the apartment and she's not here now... where did she go?

ACKLEY: Out a window? If she went out the kitchen window, it would be about a ten-foot drop to a lower rooftop. If she went out the bedroom window, she would be on a ledge. It also means... oh no...

DR. JULIA: Ackley, what?

ACKLEY: If she opened the window, she let in chemical emissions. We've been breathing them all this time.

ACKLEY faints. DR. JULIA rushes to him. Blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

AT START: *Lights up. ACKLEY is walking about the room, wiping things down and sanitizing the apartment. There is a knock at the front door. We hear the voice of STEVE.*

STEVE: Ackley... It's Steve... can I come in?

ACKLEY opens the door. STEVE enters.

STEVE: Why is there a "do not disturb sign on your door"?

ACKLEY: I put it up in case Gloria comes back.

STEVE: You put up a "do not disturb sign" to stop a lady who wanted to kill you.

ACKLEY: Yes, and I also stopped keeping a key under my door mat.

STEVE: You're an idiot.

ACKLEY: You don't believe me anyway, so, what's the difference? I was just about to sit down and have dinner. It's Tuesday! Tater tot Tuesday! Would you like some?

ACKLEY sits down and picks up a big plate of tater tots. STEVE takes the plate away from him.

STEVE: There's still a lot that doesn't make sense to me. But... there's some... developments that have happened since this morning that have made me... a little more interested in your story.

ACKLEY: What developments.

STEVE: Now... I don't want to upset you, and I know you're easily upset, so I'm going to approach this topic very delicately. We've gotten some phone calls today, down at the agency... It appears that you've been getting some threats. Now, all of our big authors get threats now and again. Most of them are just people who are mad because they spent \$20 on a book and weren't happy with it. Kind of like the people who bought your twelve crappy poetry books. But your threats have been... coming in very suddenly... and a little more frequently. And it's just that... the voice on the other end says the same thing every time. "Brenton Love is going to get a taste of his own bad medicine." We've gotten eight calls today.

ACKLEY: Bad medicine, you said?

STEVE: Yes... "Brenton Love is going to get a taste of his own bad medicine." Does that mean anything to you?

ACKLEY: Bad Medicine... is the title of my manuscript. The one that no one has seen.

STEVE: I did not see that coming. Now you're positive that no one has seen it.

ACKLEY: I'm positive.

STEVE: How long ago did you start writing it?

ACKLEY: About two years ago.

STEVE: You might have mentioned it to someone in that time. Even in passing?

ACKLEY: No one.

STEVE: Could it be coincidence? All your books are technically about bad medicine, after all.

ACKLEY: It could be, but the dots seem too connected for it to be coincidence.

STEVE: I agree with you... and... I did a little digging. This is a security camera image from last week. Look closely... is this your girl?

STEVE shows ACKLEY an image on his cell phone.

ACKLEY: The one on the computer screen with no clothes on?

STEVE: No, not the girl on Dennis' computer... ignore Dennis... oh Dennis... jeez... I'll speak to Dennis later. Look over here, in the corner. Is that her by any chance?

ACKLEY: Yes... I think it is, but with different hair.

STEVE: The color or the style.

ACKLEY: Both. When I saw her, she had blonde hair. When Dr. Julia saw her, she had brown hair, and here, she's a redhead.

STEVE: Dr. Julia saw her?

ACKLEY: Just briefly, in the hallway.

STEVE: But you can identify her from this picture? Does she have other features that you recognize?

ACKLEY: Yes... two of her features in particular... they... stick out.

STEVE: She worked in the mail room for six days. Then, she just stopped coming into work. She cleaned out her work station completely. But some of the other workers said she was asking a lot of questions about "Brenton Love." She came to us using the name Kathryn Bixby.

ACKLEY: We need to call the police.

STEVE: I did us one better. I hired a private investigator. He'll work directly with the agency. He'll be better than the police, because he'll be able to give the case his full attention. Not like the police who have to concentrate on a bunch of different cases at the same time. And, he's sworn to secrecy. It's just one person that we'll have to trust with your identity. He comes highly recommended.

ACKLEY: When do I meet him.

STEVE: Right now. He's outside. I wanted to talk to you first. Can I bring him in?

ACKLEY: Yes... so long as he sanitizes.

STEVE opens the door and CLEATUS enters.

STEVE: Come on in, Mr. Forsythe.

CLEATUS: Please, call me, Cleatus.

STEVE: Ackley, this is Cleatus Forsythe, Private Investigator.

CLEATUS reaches out to shake ACKLEY'S hand. ACKLEY hands him hand sanitizer.

CLEATUS: What's this?

ACKLEY: It's hand sanitizer.

CLEATUS: It smells like sour milk and snodgrass.

CLEATUS sanitizes and shakes ACKLEY'S hand.

CLEATUS: It's a real pleasure to meet you. My wife loves your books.

Well, I'm not actually sure if she's actually read them or if she just stares at your model on the back page, but I don't mind. It keeps her quiet when I'm trying to watch football. I trust Mr. Bosnich has brought you up to speed.

ACKLEY: I believe so.

STEVE: Yes.

CLEATUS: This lady is really something. She came in with a purpose in mind, and then she disappeared. She didn't leave anything behind, not even fingerprints. I could tell within the first ten minutes of the investigation this was going to be a tricky case. Most people are sloppy. She isn't. She was trying to stay one step ahead of everyone else.

STEVE: But Ackley, I'm assuming she touched things in here?

ACKLEY: She did...

CLEATUS: Terrific.

CLEATUS starts to open up a fingerprint dusting kit.

ACKLEY: I didn't waste any time wiping it down and sanitizing. It's thoroughly cleansed.

CLEATUS sighs loudly and starts packing his fingerprint dusting kit back up.

STEVE: You're an idiot.

CLEATUS: I tell you what, gentlemen. We have nothing to go on. She left nothing at the agency. The name she gave you when she applied was a fake. The phone number was a fake, and the address she used led me to a gay night club.

ACKLEY: Why didn't you check her credentials more thoroughly?

STEVE: She was applying to work in the mail room, Ackley. Any idiot could have gotten that job.

CLEATUS: And that was why she applied. Low level position to get her nonchalantly in the door.

STEVE: So what do we do, Mr. Forsythe?

CLEATUS: It's her move. We have to wait for her to strike again. And my guess is, that will happen sooner rather than later. But what does she want?

ACKLEY: My manuscript.

CLEATUS: And who is she working for? Or with? Your novels have ruined a lot of lives, Ackley. Your books have bankrupted quite a few pharmaceutical companies, including some very powerful ones. Ackley, my gut instinct tells me you're in danger. A lot of danger.

STEVE: Should we get him out of here?

CLEATUS: We could... but I have a better idea. Ackley stays right here in his apartment. He doesn't go outside, he doesn't open the door to anyone he doesn't know. I'll stake out the lobby. I'll keep a sharp eye out. When she shows up again she won't get past me. I'm going to get going on this. Gentlemen. *(Exits.)*

STEVE: Ackley... the manuscript...

ACKLEY: No!

STEVE'S cell phone rings. STEVE answers it.

STEVE: Barbara, yes? You're kidding... seven more threats, all referencing *Bad Medicine*? Thanks for letting me know, Barbara. I'll be back in the office soon. *(Ends the call and looks at ACKLEY.)* This discussion isn't done. You make sure this place is locked up tight! I'm going to call a locksmith and get you some better security.

ACKLEY: And I'll make a "do not disturb" sign that looks more menacing.

STEVE: Great... I'm sure that will help. Ackley, I know you're not going to leave the apartment, but I need you to be smart, alright. Be smart.

ACKLEY: I will... maybe I'll start in on a new book. I have some ideas. I'm going to go after the company that makes catheters. I already have the title. *The Catheter Crisis of Czechoslovakia.*

STEVE: It should pass the time away nicely. I have some good news for you. We just announced the release of your new book, scheduled for 14 days from now, and we've already had requests from bookstores for over a half a million copies – and that's just here in the States. Worldwide distribution will be so much more! This is going to do big things for the agency. This could be your biggest seller yet!

ACKLEY: That's good. I've been thinking of asking Dr. Julia to come by three times a day. And I'd like to give her a raise. I get worried that she may quit on me one day. Then I'd die for sure.

STEVE: Ackley... listen... I need to give you some tough love right now.

ACKLEY: Oh, Steve... I... listen, you're one of my best friends, but all there can ever be between us is friendship.

STEVE: You're an idiot. We need to talk about Dr. Julia. I'm worried that she may be taking advantage of you, of your money. Now, I don't know her, but... with all that's been going on, and with these threats, and the security breach...

ACKLEY: That's right. You don't know her. But I do. And she's worth every penny.

STEVE: But do you really know her, Ackley? Do you really?

ACKLEY: I'm not going to entertain any more of this conversation. I'm going to eat my tater tots.

ACKLEY eats a few tater tots as STEVE continues to reason with him.

STEVE: Wouldn't it make sense to find out a little bit more about her? Do you know where her medical office is? How long she's been practicing?

ACKLEY: Uh oh... Uh oh... Uh oh?!

STEVE: What's wrong?

ACKLEY: These taste funny. *(Runs to the kitchen.)*

STEVE: Ackley...

ACKLEY comes running from the kitchen with a bag of tater tots.

ACKLEY: These expired three days ago!! Oh, how could I have been so careless!

STEVE: Ackley!

ACKLEY: I have food poisoning!

STEVE: Ackley, stop!

ACKLEY: It's killing me. Goodbye, Steve. Goodbye. You can find my manuscript in... *(Collapses lifeless to the floor.)*

STEVE: You have to be kidding me!

Blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

AT START: *Lights up. STEVE bangs on the outside door.*

STEVE: Ackley... Ackley! Open the door!

ACKLEY opens the door, but doesn't say a word. He can't.

STEVE: Ackley, good. I see that the lock smith came. That's good news. The lock on your door looks a lot sturdier now. The phone calls at the agency seem to have slowed down a little. Hopefully they'll just stop on their own. Maybe it was just a coincidence after all. Has there been any sign of Gloria?

ACKLEY shakes his head "no."

STEVE: Our P.I. has been stationed down in the lobby. He hasn't seen any sign of Gloria coming or going. Three days now... I don't want to jump the gun, but, maybe we're in the clear. Maybe she knows we're on to her, and skipped town. What do you think?

ACKLEY shrugs his shoulders.

STEVE: Why aren't you talking?

ACKLEY reaches for paper and a pen and he writes a note to STEVE.

STEVE: Lockjaw? You have lockjaw?

ACKLEY nods.

STEVE: You can't open your mouth?

ACKLEY shakes his head “no.” DR. JULIA appears in a slightly revealing attire from the kitchen, not covered by her medical jacket.

DR. JULIA: Here you are, Ackley. I've prepared a nice homeopathic regiment that will cure your lockjaw in no time.

STEVE: How's he going to take it? He can't open his mouth.

DR. JULIA: I'll just apply a little with my fingers, right on his lips....
There we go, Ackley... you are such a good patient.

DR. JULIA touches his lips in a way that blurs the line between professional and seductive.

STEVE: That's a very interesting outfit, Dr. Julia. Do you wear that into work often?

DR. JULIA: Well... unfortunately, Ackley developed an allergic reaction to my medical jacket, so, I had to take it off. Here, Ackley, try to drink a little now. Maybe that loosened your jaw?

STEVE: Well, I'm sure if your cure doesn't work, your outfit will make his jaw drop.

DR. JULIA: Mr. Bosnich, I'd appreciate it if you refrained from making inappropriate comments. It really shows a lack of professionalism for my patient, and a certain sense of naivety.

ACKLEY gives STEVE a dirty look.

STEVE: Ackley, you can't just – damnit. I'm sorry, Dr. Julia. My apologies.

DR. JULIA: *(Not acknowledging his apology.)* There now, Ackley. I'll be back later and check up on you. Your jaw should loosen anytime. Bye now. *(Exits.)*

STEVE: So... you developed an allergic reaction to medical jackets now, have you?

ACKLEY smiles cleverly, shakes his head “no.”

STEVE: I see. Well, you're faking allergies today, but tomorrow it will probably be a real thing. I wish I could remember where I've seen her before.

ACKLEY starts to move his jaw around.

ACKLEY: There we go! I'm cured! Dr. Julia sure is a miracle worker!

STEVE: You're an idiot.

ACKLEY: I'm not in the clear though.

STEVE: Oh, here we go.

ACKLEY: No, really... I think I may be in danger of the black plague.

STEVE: What?

ACKLEY: I think I have a rat in here. Maybe several of them.

STEVE: Have you seen a rat?

ACKLEY: No, but I've been missing trinkets.

STEVE: What?

ACKLEY: Several of my trinkets have been vanishing lately. Pens, a stapler, one of my favorite erasers. Then, I started hearing strange noises from my closet. I think there may be a rat nesting in there.

STEVE: So why not put out some rat poison?

ACKLEY: You want me to release poison in my apartment?

STEVE: Rat traps?

ACKLEY: Any rat that is cunning enough to steal a stapler and my favorite eraser is too cunning for a trap!

STEVE: You're an idiot.

ACKLEY: Suppose you just took a look in the closet. Suppose you did, just to see if you find anything.

STEVE: Suppose you're an idiot.

ACKLEY: If you find my favorite eraser, you can keep it.

STEVE: I can't believe I'm doing this. (*Heads for the closet.*) I'm a wealthy executive, going through the closet of the world's most famous author, trying to find his favorite eraser, because he's afraid if he does it himself, he'll come down with the black plague. You've defeated food poisoning by tater tots, lockjaw, lead poisoning, chemical emissions, heart attacks, and a sudden bout with third-trimester pregnancy, but the black plague simply must not be trifled with. Ackley, there is nothing in here. No rats, no rat nest, no rat noises...

ACKLEY: You have to close the closet door. They only come out in the darkness.

STEVE: That does it. Come here.

STEVE grabs ACKLEY, who tries to run away. STEVE takes him to the closet.

STEVE: This is tough love, Ackley, but you're going to see, there are no rats in here!

STEVE takes them both in the closet and shuts the door.

STEVE: There is nothing in here!

CLEATUS enters using a key.

STEVE: You want out?

ACKLEY: Yes!

STEVE: Too bad, you're staying in!

ACKLEY: Let me out,

STEVE: No!!! Not until you admit it! Do you see a furry creature in here?

ACKLEY: No, let me out!

CLEATUS looks about, stunned.

CLEATUS: Mr. Hornsby, Mr. Bosnich?

The closet door swings open. ACKLEY and STEVE smile sheepishly at CLEATUS.

STEVE: I can explain.

ACKLEY: Steve was showing me tough love.

CLEATUS: Please... don't. I need you both to sit down.

Confused, STEVE and ACKLEY sit on the couch.

CLEATUS: Some news just broke. And it's not good.

STEVE: What news?

CLEATUS: It's all over the television and the radio. Brenton Love is gone.

STEVE: Gone? What do you mean gone?

CLEATUS: I mean he's gone. Missing. His bedroom was completely ransacked. Neighbors heard yelling and screaming. When it hadn't stopped after a few minutes, they called the police. When the police arrived, they found signs of a struggle, and your Brenton Love model was nowhere to be found.

STEVE: This can't be.

CLEATUS: Mr. Bosnich, you can't keep this to yourself anymore. You have to involve the police.

STEVE: We can't.

CLEATUS: By not reporting what you know, you are withholding evidence. If you don't go to the police, they will come to you. The detectives may already be down at the agency.

STEVE: I just spoke with him yesterday. Everything was fine.

CLEATUS: I know you're trying to protect the agency, but people's lives are on the line.

STEVE: You think they may be at the agency right now?

CLEATUS: I think it's entirely possible.

STEVE's cell phone rings. STEVE answers it.

STEVE: Barbara, yes? Yes, I just heard. I don't have too many details, but I heard. I'm with Ackley right now. I'll come right down.

CLEATUS: I need to go. I need to find out what this means. I have some friends in the police department. They may be able to get me some inside information. Be safe. And Ackley, keep this door locked! (*Rushes out.*)

STEVE: I need to go too, Ackley, but first, I need you to get your manuscript to *Bad Medicine*.

ACKLEY: No, Steve!

STEVE: Ackley, it's not safe here. We both know it. I'll take it to the agency and keep it in the vault.

ACKLEY: But *Bad Medicine* is for after I'm dead. It's the only way I'll be able to have a piece of writing that's my own.

STEVE: I won't read it, I'll just protect it. Ackley, this is gone far beyond the realm of what I thought was possible.

A look of defeat crosses over ACKLEY's face.

ACKLEY: Alright, but it's not for you to read. This novel means everything to me.

STEVE: Where is it?

ACKLEY: In the bedroom. I'll take you.

STEVE and ACKLEY exit to the bedroom. GLORIA emerges from the closet with her gun drawn. From offstage, we hear ACKLEY scream.

ACKLEY: *(Offstage.)* No, no, no, no!

STEVE: *(Offstage.)* What?

ACKLEY: *(Offstage.)* It's gone! *Bad Medicine* is gone.

An exasperated GLORIA throws her arms in the air and runs back to the closet, closing the door behind her. ACKLEY and STEVE come back to the stage. ACKLEY is in hysterics.

STEVE: It's not where you left it?

ACKLEY: No!

STEVE: No one has been in the apartment?

ACKLEY: No!

STEVE: You're sure you looked in the right spot?

ACKLEY: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes... no... oh no, he's awake! He's awake! He's stirring!

STEVE: Who is, Ackley?

ACKLEY: My tapeworm! He's moving around in there!

STEVE: You're insane! You are insane!

ACKLEY: He's been dormant for the last five years, but he's awake...

I think he wants to feed. *(Looks at STEVE and gasps.)* Steve... don't move! Hold still! It's right by your ear!

STEVE: What is?

ACKLEY: The mosquito that's been trying to give me Malaria!

ACKLEY swings at STEVE'S head, squishing the mosquito, but sending STEVE flying.

STEVE: Oww!!!!

ACKLEY looks at his hand, seeing the squished mosquito.

ACKLEY: Oh no! Malaria! It's seeping through my skin, into my blood stream! Dr. Julia!!!!

ACKLEY faints. STEVE is bent over in pain. Blackout.

INTERMISSION.

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