

DARK HOURS

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CHARACTERS:

Rip Rorschach

Larry.....Rip's older brother

Anne.....Larry's wife

Cadence

Jane

NOTE:

The glass sculptures Rip created prior to the beginning of play should be characterized by amorphous shapes illuminated by shafts of light, rather than solid sculpture. All his new work should be actual clay statue/sculpture. The stained glass window should be the "wall" between the audience and the stage; all that is seen is the colored light playing over the stage.

There are no scene breaks. Transitions should be fluid, one scene almost on top of another, as no or few costume or set changes should be necessary. Characters accumulate accessories -- if they get dirty, let them stay dirty rather than interrupt the flow.

Jane never leaves the stage but often steps out of the circle of action.

I love my life's dark hours in which my soul quickens and grows deep.

--Rainer Maria Rilke

(Jane stands, spot-lit, talking to the audience)

JANE

Most of the time he sits in the chair and stays there. He finds it by hunching along the floor, searching out with his hands...so slowly. Obviously, he thinks he is alone. He doesn't know how to listen yet for the sounds of another person, their breathing. He's too absorbed in his own sounds, sitting in this chair like he can stare straight ahead, his blood slowing through his veins, his stomach growling, his cells dying, magnified, until that's all the world he lives in. He counts on the sounds to keep him awake....because right after it happened he dreamed only blackness, and he can't stand that, not even being able to dream color -- that's what leaves him sitting for hours, listening intently to the sound of his own body dying.

(lights up on Rip, eyes bandaged, sitting in his chair. Jane goes to him)

She sits against the wall at the corner and watches him. She crawls along the floor, inches away -- a game she plays -- see how close she can get to him without him being able to tell. Stands at the back of his chair and pretends she's the breeze from the window blowing along his neck and waits for him to shiver in the cool wind. She runs her hands so close to the edge of his body. He sits through the night.

RIP

Is somebody there?

JANE

All she wants is to wake his senses. All she wants is for him to know she's there, to acknowledge her -- somehow she knows that would make them both whole.

RIP

Who's -- Get out of my studio.

I'll hear you leave, y'know, even if I can't see I can hear you--

Make noise--footsteps receding into the distance. Hand on doorknob, twist, click, grunt, whoosh, click, slam. Quiet.

JANE

Now that he notices...it's not enough. She has to stay.

RIP

You there?

My ears and my hands and my nose and my tongue, they compensate for my eyes. So standing still won't matter. You can't stop breathing. I can hear your heart beat.

I'll hear where you are and I'll sniff you out and I'll find you with my hands and I'll taste you with my tongue -- just to be sure it's you. I can do that!

*(as he searches he knocks over tools, materials, glass
he cuts himself on a piece of glass. Blood flows.)*

RIP (*Continued*)

Oh shit. Damn!

(he is on the floor now, cradling his hand)

Is somebody there?

JANE

Hello? Hello? Excuse me...I'm looking for Mr. Robin Ripley or...uh... Rip --

--- Rorschach?

RIP

All present and accounted for.

JANE

It's so dark in here I can barely see.

(she clicks on a lamp)

RIP

Turn that off.

JANE

Look at you!

(he turns his face away)

RIP

Turn that off.

(as she speaks the sun floods the wall which is part of an unfinished huge stained glass window (fourth wall) It evokes the silence of a church and the beauty of the light falls over the room and Jane.)

JANE

I'm Jane. I knocked at the door....no answer. I came to see you -- to take care of you. The agency sent me. They didn't fill me in on any details about you. Just the address and the name.

Sorry I really don't know any more. I'm new in town.

I'll watch out for you. That's what I'm here to do. My mission.

You're a sculptor -- well they told me that.

(Rip motions to the huge stained glass window now flooding the room with colored light. Jane turns to notice)

Oh...I've never been very fond of stained glass....but this...it's lovely.

(she forces herself to turn back to him)

Look. I'll stay with you and make sure everything's all right. I'd like to stay-

(She is drawn to the window. Her hand touches her face, trails down her neck, following the pattern of colored light on her body.)

RIP

(disturbed by her silence)

Jane. Jane? Hello?

JANE

(She is startled out of her reverie)

You need taking care of.

(to the audience)

He does need taking care of. You can see that. Obviously his friends and family, all those hundreds of people who were at his show's opening that night, each one sending a thoughtful basket of flowers with an overpowering stink to the hospital, accompanied by a card he can't see to read. "Our thoughts are with you. I am praying for you. Get well soon." All of them had vanished as quickly as his sight. Splash. Someone has to put him to bed at night, get him up in the morning, get him dressed. I heard it on this talk show once -- that only infants need love -- if they don't have it they will die, failure to thrive -- and adults they don't need love, they can live very well without it, they just want love -- crave it --, even if they won't admit it. He is so helpless, like a little baby, needing all that love.

(BATHROOM: with a huge clawfooted tub.

Jane stands at the entrance as Rip gropes his way to the toilet and stands in front of it, unzipping his fly)

JANE

You might find it easier to sit down.

RIP

Fucking voyeur that's what you are.

JANE

I'm just telling you--

RIP

Don't.

JANE

I'm trying to help.

RIP

Don't need it, want it or value it.

(Rip stands next to the toilet and bends over feeling with his hands the exact spacing of the hole in the center. He positions himself)

You still there? You still there? Hey!

JANE

I may be working for you. I may be playing seeing eye dog, but I've got a name.

RIP

You're still there.

JANE

I like to hear you use it, Mr. Robin Ripley.

RIP

It's Rorschach.

JANE

It is the one you were born with.

RIP

Rip Rorschach.

JANE

And that one is not even legal.

RIP

Jane. Is this how you get your kicks, Jane? Advising blind men how to piss?

JANE

No.

RIP

Eat breakfast, crunch toast and your eyes tell me there are crumbs on my face I can't find, something's not right about the colors I'm wearing, telling me I missed the ashtray and the embers are burning a hole in my rug and my house down and that all my souvenirs from Bangladesh and Hawaii and Graceland are going up in flames. Your voice is so tender -- you think since I can't see your face I don't know you scan me for things wrong and gloat over every one.

JANE

You have yellow stains under the arms of your shirt. From your sweat. I'll bleach them out for you.

(she goes to him to get his shirt)

RIP

I don't want you to do anything for me. I don't want you to wash my clothes and tell me not to trip or teach me how to piss.

I've been pissing without helping hands since I was three. Yellow spray dancing into the bowl over the rim til the touch of my hand brought it under control. My hand. Mine.

JANE

Do it your way.

RIP

Maybe you want me shooting into you and not the bowl -- like some romance novel heroine. Probably how Nurse Janie spends her evenings -- loving fuck books and eating bon bons and dreaming of some prince.

Come here -- give me your hand --?

I'll spray my piss on you if that's what you want.

JANE

Find me.

(Rip starts peeing at the bowl and realizes that it's going anywhere but in in his anger. The trickle dies and he sinks against the wall)

RIP

I don't know if I can --

Are you there?

JANE

I'm here.

RIP

It goes through my mind over and over. The only thing I can see. There was a black leather coat black boots, thin chain catching the light playing over and over -- are you there?

JANE

I'm here.

RIP

Where?

(She puts a hand on his shoulder. He grabs it.)

Black leather coat, black boots, thin chain catching the light. I didn't have time to make out his face. And the voice, a whisper, could have been anyone, I don't know. Shadow under the streetlights covered him so well. Sometimes I think he wanted me to see him before he threw it, wanted his face to be one last look over and over I see it and I'm straining to look at his face. Are you there?

JANE

Right here.

(Rip moves out of the action.)

JANE

(To the audience:)

One by one they come out of the woodwork.

(Larry enters, examines the sculptures in the room)

JANE(*continued*)

Look at him. The second he walks into the room hands all over everything. Touching. Have to spend hours wiping away fingerprints -- they should stay....pure. Frisk him on his way out and find things in his pockets. Pieces. Little pieces that he thinks no one will miss -- maybe. He's looking for something. When he called to justify his visit there was a dog barking in the background and a tv on low and a woman's voice, prompting. Acted as if coming over was for Rip's benefit. All those bits he picks up and puts in his pocket, he can't wait to get home and fit them together -- like a puzzle -- but he's always missing a piece.

(Larry picks one of the small sculptures up, examining it, putting it down sheepishly when Jane turns to him. They stand, facing each other off awkwardly)

LARRY

You don't look anything like I'd pictured. You say nurse and all that comes to mind is a crisp white starched little lady constantly shaking a thermometer down with one hand and trying to stick it up your ass with the other. Can't be that easy to deal with, my brother. I mean he never was before....and now.

I don't know what to say to him...he's still my brother, same as before, right?

He's...difficult.

When my job was making sure he didn't go further than the corner in his crazy wheel he ended up in the woods two miles away, spinning around in this orange plastic machine, his body arched funny so he could lean his head way back to look at the light through the leaves.

I can't tell if he's all right.

JANE

I wouldn't know about same or different. But he hasn't escaped from me yet.

(Larry reaches to touch the big stained glass window. Rip stands in the doorway a moment)

RIP

Don't touch it.

JANE(*she moves out of the action*)

Good morning.

RIP

Jane.

I have to keep telling you that, Larry?

LARRY

How did--

RIP

Fragile, klutz. This stuff is fragile. Getting to be quite rare, too. Should buy some up along with your stocks, bucko. Endangered species.

(Rip carefully negotiates his way across the room. Larry goes to him)

LARRY

Here--

RIP

Going extinct.

(shakes him off)

LARRY

Robin.

RIP

Rip.

(Larry grabs his arm)

)Out of business.

Don't touch. I can do it myself.

LARRY

--Sorry.

(Jane enters, silent, carrying a tea tray. She places a cup next to Rip)

JANE

Cups at 6 o'clock, water's at 3.

RIP

Christ.

JANE

If you flail about like that you'll knock it over and if you knock it over you'll hurt yourself.

RIP

Pure unadulterated logic from Nurse Janie. She's got little fog feet to roll in on.

(Jane gives Larry cup and saucer)

Offer my brother some too, Janie.

JANE

She beat you to it.

RIP

What kind of tea is this?

Figure it out for yourself.
(exit) JANE

What kind of tea is this? RIP

Can't hear you... JANE(from off)

Tell me. RIP

Read the label. JANE

That's not funny. RIP

It's not funny 'til someone loses an eye. You tell me. JANE

(grabs bag and inhales. Shouts)
I hate blackberry tea. RIP

(appears) JANE
Well, why didn't you say so? What can I get you instead?
Lemon? Peppermint? Chamomile? Apple?
(Rip nods)
Apple. Larry?
(exits)

I'm...I'm fine. LARRY

She gone? RIP

Yes. LARRY

RIP

Fucking never even know when she's in the room.

LARRY

I want to ask you.

RIP

Creeping up behind me.

LARRY

Look, she's just--

RIP

Creeping up in front of me, even, doesn't matter.

LARRY

She's just doing her job.

RIP

Bitch. Fucking bitch.
(Jane materializes)

LARRY

Rip.

RIP

Bitch. Bitch. Bitch. Bitch. Bitch.

JANE

Apple teabag. In the cup.

RIP

Have you ever heard of knocking?
(*Jane sticks her tongue out at him.*)
Larry. Larry? C'mon asshole. Answer me.

LARRY

Yeah?

RIP

(*Jane goes to Larry, grabs his hand and arranges it so he's giving Rip the finger.*)
Larry! Talk to me so I know you're there.

LARRY

Uh.

(*She lets go of his hand. He doesn't know what to do with it.*)

RIP

Is she gone? Larry? Jane. Please. Leave.

JANE

Certainly.

(she smiles at Larry and vanishes. Larry waves his hand in front of Rip's face)

LARRY

Annie wanted to come with me but she had to work.

(he recovers his hand)

RIP

I'm sure she misses me a whole lot.

LARRY

We were thinking... There's the study -- the room I keep my computer in in the house. It's got its own bathroom. It's on the first floor.

RIP

Don't even offer.

LARRY

Tommy'll just have to learn to pick up after himself.

RIP

Don't.

LARRY

Don't think Annie would mind either and Tommy likes you better than me sometimes, I think.

RIP

Please.

LARRY

We want to help.

RIP

Stick me into suburbia. Make me part of your picket fence. Larry, Annie, Tommy and blind old Uncle Rip sitting down to chicken, rice, green vegetable and a couple of episodes of the family hour. Every morning I can feel my way around the block for some exercise. Hey neighbors, how ya doing? Maybe I can take Rover with me.

LARRY

It's an offer.

RIP

Watch me rot.

LARRY

You're feeling sorry.

RIP

For me. For me. Yes, damnit. I'm feeling fucking sorry for me.

You weren't there. You were still inside. You were still inside and you were drinking champagne -- to me. A few seconds -- that's all. I'm stepping outside for a breath of fresh air. I'm going to think for a minute on how well life is going. I'm where I want to be; I've worked so hard for this show, these critics, this moment. I don't pay attention to the footsteps but I'll hear them so clearly for the rest of my life. I can still see his clothes, his shoes, but no matter how hard I remember his face just isn't there. I should have looked at his face.

I hear my name.

JANE AND RIP

Splash.

LARRY

I know--

RIP

You weren't there. And I'll never know why he did it...who he was...why...And you weren't there.

LARRY

I saw you walk out the door and I didn't follow.

I'm here for you now.

(Larry touches Rip's face. He jerks away)

RIP

Don't touch.

LARRY

I'm going.

(he walks towards the door)

RIP

Larry?

LARRY

Accepted.

RIP

Would I like her?

LARRY

What?

RIP

To look at. Would I like to look at her?

(Larry walks over to him and touches him on the shoulder. Rip pulls away)

Don't touch.

LARRY

Forget it. Goodnight.

(leaves)

(RIP makes his way to the window and stretches his hands out to it)

RIP

Don't touch...don't touch...don't touchdon'ttouchdon'ttouchdon't--

(he brings his hands to his mouth and bites down, to stop from screaming, laughing crying. His body shakes)

JANE(to the audience)

He moves through rooms now with his hands out in front of him, looking like a night walking zombie from a grade B movie. He bumps into things and hesitates before each step -- there are trap doors under his feet that spring open for easy endless falls. He is in a minefield with a helmet pulled over his eyes. He eats mashed potatoes with his fingers and never notices any of the stains on his clothing.

(Rip undresses and gets into bed, painfully feeling each action. Slowly. Jane stands pressed against the wall, waiting, watching.)

JANE

Goodnight.

(Rip is startled, speechless)

JANE(to the audience)

A bed time story.

Once upon a time, there was a prince looking for the perfect woman and a woman praying she was the one. "Glass slippers are old fashioned", he declared, and researched a more modern method of determination. He arrived at her door with an entourage bearing ornate chests -- from the first he extracted four silver dollars and a copy of Life magazine. "The perfect legs", he told her, inserting the silver dollars in the appropriate places, following the diagram carefully. It showed the ideal woman's legs touching in four places, trapping the coins at her thighs, knees, calves and ankles, curving away beautifully to allow gaps of light. But alas, the coins dropped from her knees and disappeared into the flesh of her thighs. From the next chest he pulled a champagne glass and a copy of Cosmo. "The perfect breast!" he cried -- but one overflowed the cup and the other barely fills it. They mark it down on their page labeled "Jane". Measuring

tapes, calipers, scrutiny under bright lights. She smiles. They count birthmarks and check her pubic hair for split ends. The aide with the gimpy leg shows the results to the aide with the buck teeth and a high giggle escapes from them both. The corners of the imperfect woman's mouth stretch towards her eyes. The prince reaches for the results, wet patches showing under the arms of his silver tunic, bending his head close to the paper to squint, his bald spot catches the light and reflects a marvelous rainbow array of colors. My teeth grate against each other -- I can't keep back the tears that are burning in my throat. They dissolve into helpless laughter. And proceed to find the perfect woman right next door. Cadence.

