

HELLO AND...GOODBYE!

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This is not a play about the politics of social issues. It is a portrait of a relationship. Except for the very end, this entire two-character work takes place over the telephone.

*"Where we have been brings us to where we are.
If we cannot feel, if we cannot touch, say Hello and then Goodbye!"
—Selena Zachai
(from *The City Below*)*

The time... the 1980's
The place... New York City

Scene 1.

(It's 2am. The lights fade in to reveal the right half of the stage -- DANNY's studio apartment. Piles of clothes, books, and other items outline the walls of the room. A table and chairs are in the center, and a small couch is at the right. DANNY is standing, frozen, on top of the table. He's about 28 years old, thin, with sharply defined features. His skin is ruddy and blemished. He's dressed in a basketball jersey and jogging pants, and he's barefoot. After a moment, he begins to snap his fingers.)

DANNY: A-one... a-two... a-three and a-four!

(On his fourth count there is a burst of heavy-metal rock music. DANNY prances around the table playing an imaginary guitar, and singing at the top of his voice. He struts and boogies and works up a sweat. He plays his imaginary guitar above his head, behind his back, and even between his legs in a series of graphic gestures that provokes a fit of laughter. Suddenly, he sits down hard on the table, exhausted. Then he lies back, spread-eagled. The music continues. He stretches over the edge of table, reaches under it, pulls out a half-empty bottle of wine, takes a long drink. He rolls over to the other side, bridges his body to the back of the couch and pulls up a telephone set. He punches in a number. We can barely hear the call on the set's speaker. It rings a number of times while he engineers another drink from the bottle.)

DANNY: Oh... shit!

(He disconnects the call and punches in another one. After a few rings, the call is connected to an answering machine. The music is so loud that he can't hear what's happening. He stretches further to try to hear the message, and falls off the table. He tries to stand up, but he's too unsteady to make it. So he crawls along the floor to the cd player and turns the volume down. Just at that point, we hear a loud tone from the speakerphone.)

DANNY: *(yelling)* FORGET IT! *(He crawls back to the phone set and punches in another number. After a few rings, a voice answers.)*

DANNY: Is it me or is it memorex?

VOICE: Who is ... Danny? Is that you?

DANNY: Hi Mark... whatchya doin'?

VOICE: What's the matter?

DANNY: Nothing's the matter... I just wanted to talk to you.

VOICE: Danny... it's 2 o'clock in the morning.

DANNY: So what? We used to do a lot of things at 2 o'clock in the morning.

(There is an awkward silence.)

VOICE: Danny, you can't keep doing this ... calling people in the middle of the night.

DANNY: Mark... how come you don't call me any more?

VOICE: We just talked this morning.

DANNY: But I called you.

VOICE: We had a long talk a couple of days ago.

DANNY: And I called you.

VOICE: Danny... *(takes a deep breath)* I've got to get up in the morning. I've got a big day...

DANNY: So go in a little tired, you'll look sexy *(He giggles to himself.)* Don't you ever want to call me again, Mark?

VOICE: I don't want to talk about it now. *(DANNY slams the phone down.)*

DANNY: Go fuck yourself!... which you probably do!

(He punches in another call. After a few rings a VOICE announces the time. He punches in another call. An answering machine picks up. He disconnects. He struggles to his feet, slaps his face in an attempt to shake the grogginess, then takes a series of deep breaths. He reaches for the wine bottle, swigs a drink, punches in another number on the phone. Again, an answering machine pick sup. Suddenly, the message is interrupted by a loud VOICE)

VOICE: Who's calling?

DANNY: Hi... Jeff.

VOICE: Who?

DANNY: No it's me, Danny.

VOICE: What? Danny? What's the matter, are you all right?

DANNY: I'm fine, great.

VOICE: Then what's the matter?

DANNY: I just thought I'd say hello.

VOICE: You what? Do you know what time it is?

(Another voice is heard in the background. There is a muffled argument and a lot of rustling sounds coming through the speaker at the phone set. Then a woman's VOICE comes through.)

VOICE: Danny? Is that you?

DANNY: Hi Amy, how's everything?

VOICE: Are you all right?

DANNY: I'm fine... I'm all right, how's everything with you?

VOICE: Danny, it's so late. You woke us up.

DANNY: I just wanted to talk to you... you are my dearest, dearest friends, right?

VOICE: That's right... but it's not a good time to talk. Why don't you call me some time tomorrow and we'll have a good talk. Okay? Goodnight, Danny.

(He scrambles to the couch and grabs the cordless handset from the phone. The speaker is no longer heard.)

DANNY: Wait... Amy, don't hang up. Can't we just talk a little bit now? I mean... yes, I know, but it's not that late, I just want to ask you... no, there's nothing wrong, I mean... can I come over and see you... just for a little while? All right, so... can you come over here. I know, but... wait a minute... Amy?... listen, I wanted ask you something... listen... don't you ever want to see me again, I mean, I know what Jeff says, but are you afraid to see me, I mean to touch me... to... shake my hand, okay, okay. All right good night!
(He's about to hang up.) Amy? Wait! Amy?

(He leans against the couch and slams the phone on to the base. His face screws up tight as he bites his lower lip hard. Then he shakes his head from side to side as if answering a question that keeps repeating in his head. Finally, he grabs the cordless phone again and punches in a number.)

DANNY: *(His voice is quiet and hesitant.)* Hi. Yeah... I'm sorry, I know... did you get my card?... my note, my card... oh, yeah, I forgot, I thought I sent another one... no, I don't!... because I can't get you in the daytime... *(anger begins to rise in his face)* so what difference does that make, you're my brother... so what?... how come whenever I call you... no, I don't want anything... look, I didn't call to... **DON'T HANG UP!**

(He takes the phone off his ear and looks at it.)

DANNY: Please.

(He sets the phone down on the base, walks over to the cd player, and turns the music up slightly. He seems to have cleared his head but his energy has dropped. He begins to turn slowly in dance-like circles. It's obvious that he's trying not to let himself go into tears. He moves to the phone and punches in a number. After a few rings, a voice announces the weather. He stops turning, cancels the call, and punches in a another number.)

VOICE: Crisis hotline...

DANNY: Hello...

VOICE: Hi... How are you doing, tonight?

DANNY: The same as last night... and tomorrow night.

VOICE: How are you feeling?

DANNY: How are *you* feeling?

VOICE: Oh I feel good.... we finally got some good weather today... Listen, I take it you're there alone. Do you need any help? Is there some one I can call for you?

(DANNY bursts out laughing and disconnects the call. He punches in another call, a voice announces the time. He grabs the wine bottle and takes a long drink, punches in another call.)

VOICE: Hello... what is it?

DANNY: Hi Steve... it's Danny.

(There Is silence on the other end. Then the voice disconnects. He hovers over the phone, urgently punching in numbers.)

VOICE: Hello?

DANNY: Hello...

VOICE: Hello? Who is this ?

DANNY: It's me.

VOICE: Danny? Is that you?

DANNY: It's me!

VOICE: Oh I'm glad you called, I couldn't sleep,

DANNY: I'm drunk!

VOICE: You shouldn't drink, you're not supposed to drink with all that medication. Such a rotten day today, I had to stay in bed. And then you know what, I saw on the news that they're going to test that new drug... they're going to start the trials in a couple of weeks. And I applied for it, so maybe I'll get selected, maybe... isn't that great?

(DANNY disconnects the call. He takes another long drink, then quickly punches in a number. A voice announces the time. He starts prancing to the music in an effort to energize himself. He punches in another number)

VOICE: 911 - Police!

DANNY: Hi, would you tell me something. Do you have to be a citizen to make a citizen's arrest?

VOICE: What? Hey, listen buddy...

DANNY: I'm sorry, I'm sorry... no offense... yet!

(Giggles to himself, cancels the call, punches in another number.)

VOICE: This is information, what city please?

DANNY: What'ya got available?

(Giggles louder, cancels the call, punches in another)

VOICE: Crisis hotline!

DANNY: Hi... it's me again!

VOICE: I was hoping you'd call back

DANNY: Can I ask you something?

VOICE: Sure.

DANNY: Do you have AIDS?

VOICE: No... but there are people on the staff who...

DANNY: I do!

VOICE: Oh... and what do you think...

DANNY: You know what?

VOICE: What?

DANNY: It's okay!

(He laughs to himself and disconnects the call. He grabs the cordless handset and punches in a number.)

DANNY: Hi... Mark.

(There is a long silence with no answer on the other end. Danny cancels the call and puts the handset back on the base. He finishes the last of the wine. Suddenly, his phone rings. He's startled! After a few rings, he taps the answer button.)

VOICE: Danny?... Why did you hang up on me? That was very rude. Are you listening to me? Danny?

(DANNY pauses for a moment, then disconnects the call. He quickly punches in some numbers. A voice announces the time. He punches in another call.)

VOICE: Good evening, I'm sorry, good morning, this is your AT&T international operator. How may I help you?

DANNY: *(dances around the room)* Operator... I'd like to talk to New Delhi information.

VOICE: Excuse me sir?

DANNY: I'd like you to connect me to information in New Delhi India.

VOICE: Well if you're trying to find a specific number, sir, I can get that for you.

DANNY: *(moves closer to the phone)* No, I'd like to talk to New Delhi myself.

VOICE: I'm sorry sir but we have to handle it for you.

DANNY: How come?

VOICE: That's the way we're set up.

DANNY: I just wanted to ask them a question.

VOICE: I can do that for you sir.

DANNY: You mean with all this modern technology and I can't talk to India all by my itzy bitzy self?

VOICE: *(laughing)* I'm afraid we're not quite there yet.

DANNY: Okay... then I'll ask you! Seen any good movies lately?

VOICE: Excuse me?

DANNY: Who do you think is going to win the Oscar this year?

VOICE: I'm sorry sir... If you want to place a call or look for a number, I'd be glad to...

DANNY: It's okay. I just wanted to talk to... It's okay. *(He cancels the call)* It's okay.

(His body begins to shake, his face tightens, and for the first time, tears flow. He locks his hands on top of his head.)

It's okay, it's okay! It's okay!

(He sinks to the floor as the lights fade.)

Scene 2.

(It's morning. The lights fade in and paint the room in warm sunlight. DANNY is draped upside down on the couch, sleeping. He's still wearing the basketball jersey without the pants, just a pair of underwear briefs and high white socks. The phone rings. he doesn't stir. It continues to ring until it finally forces him awake. He sputters and mumbles and finds the phone on the floor. With an exaggerated effort, he reaches out and taps the speaker button.)

VOICE: Danny? Are you there? It's Amy.

DANNY: *(slurring his words)* I don't th-ink I can th-ink-about-what you-are-saying.

VOICE: Are you there? Danny?

DANNY: *(blinking his eyes and yawning)* I'm here, I'm here.

VOICE: Hope you're feeling better. *(She waits for a response—there is none, so she speaks quickly.)* I'm sorry about last night but you know how Jeff is, especially when you wake him up. I don't know why he insists on picking up the phone at that hour, that's what we got an answering machine for, but you know Jeff. Anyhow, I really did want to talk to you but it was so late, and I was so tired and Jeff was being such a schmuck and... well, so I thought we could talk now. Danny?

DANNY: *(groggily)* I can't... need to sleep.

VOICE: Oh, I see. Well, I'm going to be out the rest of the day, so, maybe we can have a nice talk tomorrow or over the weekend. How about that?

DANNY: Fine.

VOICE: And we can gossip and have a good time, okay?

DANNY: Fine.

VOICE: Okay.

(He disconnects, and rolls over on to the flat of the couch. The phone rings.)

DANNY: Jesus H. Christ! *(He punches the speaker button)*

VOICE: Hello.

DANNY: Hello!

VOICE: This is Mr. David with Bestway Credit Services. We have a bill here for \$312 from Macy's that's almost a year past due... is this Danny? *(no answer)* We need you to send a check or money order for the full amount of \$312 plus interest and handling charges within 48 hours to our offices in order to prevent any further legal action...

DANNY: *(snickering)* Call me back in two years! *(He disconnects. He tries to get comfortable by throwing his feet over the back of the couch. The phone rings.)*

DANNY: Shit... shit... shit... shit! *(he slams the speaker button.)* Yes !

VOICE: Hi... my name is Sondra!

(The lights fade in to reveal the left side of the stage—SANDRA's bedroom. A small, mirrored dressing table, some large plants and a floor lamp outline the walls of the room. A bed and nightstand are in the center. SANDRA is in her early 30's, medium height, and a little more full-figured than she would like. She's dressed in a bathrobe and sitting on the edge of the bed.)

On stage, the two rooms are separated by a corridor of shadows.)

SANDRA: I'm calling from the Friends-to-Friends outreach project, and I was given your name to contact because...

(She hesitates not knowing how to continue. Since her phone has a long cord, she picks it up and begins to walk around the room.)

You see, I was asked... was told it would be a good idea to call you and talk to you, to kind of talk to each other about some problems. You see...

DANNY: Hey, look, I didn't get much sleep last night and I can't think straight... and I don't need any counseling today. So would you do me a favor? Would you call back and leave your number on my machine? Okay? Okay! *(he disconnects and drapes himself again over the couch.)*

(SANDRA is stunned. She slams the receiver down angrily and continues pacing around the room.)

SANDRA: *(to herself)* I don't believe this ! I call that... that little sonofabitch and he hangs up in my face. What am I doing? I don't need this ! How is this going to help anything? What were they thinking of? What do they think I am? Don't they know what I feel like? I feel rotten! I feel ... *(she goes to the dressing table, takes a cigarette and lights it.)* I should go out! I don't want to go out! I should call that little bastard back. That's what I should do.

(She does.)

(DANNY 's phone rings. He doesn't stir. Finally his answering machine picks up.)

MACHINE: Hellooo... It's me! And if it's the right me, it's the wrong time. So leave a message at the tone, and the right me will call you back.

SANDRA: This is Sondra! I just talked to you. And I'm not calling you back to give you my damn number. I'm not a damn counselor. Some people at the project thought it would be a good idea to call you and I thought... I thought you were rude, really, and obnoxiously rude. I had a pretty good reason to call you!

(DANNY slowly sits up.)

SANDRA: I've got some things to talk about and I thought we could help. I thought we could sha... *(angrily)* well it doesn't make any difference now. Goodbye! My number is 626-9240. *(she hangs up, sits at the dressing table looking in the mirror and finishing her cigarette.)*

(DANNY sits with a wry smile on his face. He reaches over, hits the play button on his machine. SANDRA's message is repeated. He scrambles under the couch for a pen and paper but the message ends.)

Wait a minute, wait a minute!

(He rewinds part of the message tape and plays it again. At the end he writes down the phone number.)

DANNY: 6269240. Lucky lottery number.

(SANDRA touches her face, sticks out her tongue, examines it in the mirror. Then she begins to brush her hair. DANNY picks up his phone, punches in a number. SANDRA's phone rings.)

SANDRA: Hello.

DANNY: Hi... this is Danny... you just called me... left a message?

SANDRA: *(coldly)* Yes?

DANNY: Is this Sandra?

SANDRA: Sondra! You pronounce my name, Sondra!

DANNY: How do you spell it?

SANDRA: With an "a".

DANNY: Okay... sahn-dra... With an "a"...

SANDRA: What do you want?

DANNY: I'm returning your call. You called me!

SANDRA: Well I don't have any more time, so call me back tomorrow.

(She hangs up, reaches for the hair brush, then throws it down and lights another cigarette. DANNY is miffed. He stands up on the couch, adjusts his briefs, and pulls his jersey down to cover them.)

DANNY: How about that? The bitch doesn't have any time. She fucking wakes me up and doesn't have any more time. What the fuck did I call her for?

(He jumps off the couch and paces around the room. SANDRA gets up and also begins to pace.)

DANNY: God I'm tired. I should take my pills. I don't want to take them! I should call her back. That's what I should do!

(He does.)

(SANDRA's phone rings. She rushes to the dressing table and turns on her answering machine. It's not her voice on the message.)

MACHINE: Hello and thank you for calling. No one is available to answer your call at the moment. But your call is important to us. So at the tone, please leave a message and we will return your call as soon as possible. Thank you.

DANNY: Hey listen... sa-ah-andra! I may be rude and obnoxious, but you're rude-er and obnoxious-er.

(She stands staring at her answering machine, her face tightening.)

DANNY: So say what you have to say and get it over with! I know you're standing there listening to this!

(She quickly turns away.)

DANNY: Okay... Fine! Call me when you find your tongue. Try looking in the mirror and wiggling your lips. Now there's a sexy thought.

(He snickers and hangs up. She takes a strong drag on the cigarette, coughs, and mashes it hard into an ashtray.)

SANDRA: *(angrily to herself)* I'm going to call them at the project and tell them that I don't need this .. I don't want this .

(She touches in a number on the phone. DANNY yawns and stretches. He sits for a moment on the back of the couch rubbing his face, then walks out of the room. SANDRA stops the call before it begins to ring.)

SANDRA: No, I can't do that. I have to give it a try. *(closes her eyes)* I have to do something!

(After a moment, she punches in a number. DANNY 's phone rings. He comes back into the room walking with his knees together.)

DANNY: Damn... *(hits the speakerphone)* Hello...

SANDRA: *(hesitates, takes a deep breath)* This is Sondra. . . again.

DANNY: *(smiling)* Hi.

SANDRA: Hello.

DANNY: *(after a moment)* Nice sunny day isn't it?

SANDRA: *(disarmed)* Yes it is .

DANNY: So what did you want to talk about?

SANDRA: All right... as I mentioned...

DANNY: Before you were so rudely and obnoxiously interrupted, right?

SANDRA: *(smiling)* Right!... as I was saying, I'm with the Friends-to-Friends project and I was given your name to contact. They told me that...

DANNY: Are you a volunteer or do you get paid to do this ?

SANDRA: (*sharply*) Will you let me talk!

DANNY: Hey listen do you mind if I do a couple of things while we talk? You caught me right in the middle of...

SANDRA: Of what?

DANNY: Of taking a pee!

(She jams the phone against her chest in shock.)

SANDRA: (*to herself*) For godssake... I don't believe this ! How can I talk to someone like him? This is a bad idea. I need to...

DANNY: Hey, is there someone else there or are there two of you?

SANDRA: Look if you have to... pee... why don't you just do it. I'll wait.

DANNY: No it's okay... I'll hold it!

SANDRA: (*to herself*) This is impossible! (*she sits on the edge of the bed, stiffens her back and continues the call*) All right... I'm from... where I told you I'm from. And they suggested that I call you...

DANNY: Why?

SANDRA: Because I need to... You know, this isn't easy for me. I'm very uncomfortable. I've never had much contact with you people.

DANNY: You people? Who people?

SANDRA: You know.. People like you.

DANNY: Oh, people like me?

SANDRA: Yes, you know... Gay persons.

DANNY: Oh... Gay persons. Well, that's me!

SANDRA: (*to herself*) I don't know how to talk to him.

DANNY: Listen, I'm getting very tired...

SANDRA: Oh... I 'm sorry...

DANNY: ...of this conversation!

SANDRA: Why are you so rude?

DANNY: Because I can't hold it any more.

(He hangs up. She slams the phone down. He waddles out of the room with his knees together. She begins to pace. Her phone rings. She freezes, debating whether to answer or not. Finally she does.)

SANDRA: I don't think we ought to continue this, this is ridiculous. Oh, I'm sorry. I thought it was someone else. Who? Who? No... I think you've got the wrong number. That's okay.

(DANNY comes back into his room. He plops down on the couch picks up the phone and punches in a number. SANDRA's phone rings.)

SANDRA: Hello?

DANNY: So you have problems with Gay persons!

SANDRA: *(caught off guard)* Uh... no... well not problems exactly... it's just that... well I don't know very much about... you... people. *(she cradles the phone)* What's the matter with me? I'm such an idiot!

DANNY: *(cradles his phone)* Man, she's such an idiot!

SANDRA: *(to him)* Anyway, that's a fact... and it just makes things a little awkward.

DANNY: I guess so.

SANDRA: *(adamantly)* I mean, I just don't know anything about being Gay!

DANNY: Well I don't know anything about being straight!

SANDRA: That's ridiculous! Everyone is straight unless...

DANNY: I've been Gay all my life.

SANDRA: All... your life?

DANNY: Yeah... well, ever since I was 10, when I first started play... looking at myself.

SANDRA: Since you were 10?

DANNY: Sure, all my life. How long have you been straight?

SANDRA: *(awkwardly)* Oh, I don't know. All my life...I guess.

DANNY: There, see? We've got a lot in common. We're both very consistent people.

SANDRA: You mean.. You've never.. Do you like women?

DANNY: Sure, but I like men more. Don't you?

SANDRA: Don't I what?

DANNY: Don't you like men more?

SANDRA: Of course!

DANNY: There, see? Look how much we got in common. *(jumps up)* Hey you're making me self-conscious. I'm standing here talking to you about all this private stuff and I don't have any pants on. I'm embarrassed!

(She throws the phone on the bed as if it gave her an electric shock. He rummages around the couch, comes up with his jogging pants and puts them on.)

DANNY: There, that's better. I feel decent. *(he giggles to himself, then notices that the other end of the line is quiet.)* Hello? Hellooo...!

(She quickly picks up her phone.)

SANDRA: I'm sorry.

DANNY: Let's see... where were we?... talking about how different we were.

SANDRA: Not really... I suppose.

DANNY: So, you never did say why you called.

SANDRA: You never gave me a chance.

DANNY: Talk... I'll listen.

SANDRA: Okay... *(takes a deep breath)* the Friends project suggested I call you. They told me about your problem...

DANNY: My problem?

SANDRA: Your illness. They said that...

DANNY: My illness. I don't want to talk about my... illness!

SANDRA: I understand.

DANNY: I thought you weren't a counselor?

SANDRA: I'm not a goddamned counselor! *She begins pacing. She becomes angry and frustrated and hurt.* I'm trying to tell you who I am and you won't listen. I'm trying to tell you why I called and you don't give me a chance to talk. You're crazy... and you're making me crazy!

DANNY: *(with a sarcastic smile)* You're getting awfully personal, aren't you?

SANDRA: Damn you, this is a very personal call.

DANNY: I don't take personal calls in the morning.

SANDRA: What are you talking about?

DANNY: I don't know, what are you talking about?

SANDRA: I'm just trying to be friendly, I just...

DANNY: Oh, yeah... friends-to-friends, right?

SANDRA: Why are you so hostile?

DANNY: I don't think I'm hostile or unfriendly. I think I'm sweet! You're the one who's all pissy about everything.

SANDRA: (*whining*) I knew this was a bad idea, I knew I wouldn't get anywhere.

DANNY: (*flippantly*) Then hang up!

SANDRA: I can't!

DANNY: Why?

SANDRA: You're such a goddamn smartass. You don't even care...

DANNY: (*angrily*) Then go away!

SANDRA: I can't!

DANNY: Why?

SANDRA: (*with tears and anger*) Because I need to try this... because I don't know how to deal with it... because I had hoped to find out... because I need to talk to somebody... to you... because...

DANNY: (*sharply*) Because... because... because what?

SANDRA: Because I am like you! Because I have AIDS... too!

(They both stand silently, staring straight ahead, as the lights fade out.)

Scene 3.

(It's late in the afternoon. The lights reveal both rooms on stage with the shadowed space in between. SANDRA is lying face down on the bed. She's dressed in jeans and a loose shirt. Soft "easy-listening" music comes from the radio on her nightstand. DANNY is sitting on the floor propped up against the back of the couch, struggling to open a bottle of wine. The plaintive voice of a country-western singer comes from the cd player on his table. SANDRA turns over on her back and puts her hands behind her head. DANNY finally gets the cork out of the bottle.

He picks up a small shot glass, pours some wine into it and drinks. SANDRA reaches over and picks up a cigarette from the nightstand, lights it, takes a long drag and coughs. DANNY gets up, bottle and glass in hand, and walks around the room. He stops, sits on the edge of the couch, tucks the bottle under his arm, picks up the phone. He punches in a number and sets the phone between his shoulder and ear. Then he reaches with his foot, taps the cd player and turns the music off. SANDRA's phone rings. She hangs off the edge of the bed and pulls up the phone from the floor. She picks up the handset, reaches over, taps the radio and turns off the music.

SANDRA: Hello?

DANNY: Hi... It's me, Da...

SANDRA: Hello.

DANNY: Hi.

(They both hesitate. Then she sits up with a rush.)

SANDRA: *(speaking quickly)* Listen, I'm sorry! I'm sorry, I came at you like that... all that screaming and yelling. I know how you feel and...

DANNY: *(flatly)* It's okay.

SANDRA: I didn't mean to put it all on you. God knows you've got enough to face without having someone like me come and lay all that sh... stuff on you like that...

DANNY: It's okay.

SANDRA: It's all such a nightmare and I'm trying to cope, just trying to cope. I don't know what to believe, I don't know who to believe. I can't sleep, I can't eat, I can't... *(catches herself)* I'm doing it again. I'm sorry.

DANNY: It's okay.

SANDRA: Are you all right? Is this a bad time? You sound so tired.

DANNY: No... it's just .. that time of day.. The moody time, you know? I'll just keep sipping on my wine... It'll go away.

SANDRA: Are you drinking? I thought you weren't supposed to drink? You're taking AZT too, aren't you?

DANNY: *(he paces)* It's my last vice. A bad habit that makes me feel good. What are your vices?

SANDRA: *(she paces)* What do you mean?

DANNY: What's your last bad habit?

SANDRA: I started smoking. I don't know why. A couple of weeks ago, I just started in. It's terrible, but I need it. It makes me feel calm. It's better than eating... *(she laughs)* that makes me feel fat.

(She takes a cigarette and lights it. He continues to pour himself tiny drinks using the shot glass. As she paces around her room, he stops, sinks cross-legged to the floor with his back up against the couch.)

DANNY: So...

SANDRA: So!

DANNY: So what do you do?

SANDRA: Do what?

DANNY: I mean, you a housewife, you have a job, a career, what do you?

SANDRA: I have a good job... had a good job! I was an assistant, an administrative assistant to a real important executive. We distribute greeting cards and gift paper and ribbons and those kind of products, you know? I loved it... it was a real good job.

DANNY: Any kids?

SANDRA: No.

DANNY: So... *(resigning himself)* so how did you get it?

SANDRA: How did I...? From him, my husband, my ex-husband! I got it from him! He came home, one day that sonofabitch... pardon my French... and he told me he was sick. He told me go get a test. He told me he was HIV positive... I didn't even know what it was. I mean, I heard about it, I saw it on tv. But I didn't know anything. *(She begins to cry)* I walked around for days, I didn't know what to do. I was so ashamed, I was so scared. I couldn't talk to anybody, I... I couldn't believe what was happening. *(She tries to control herself but the memory overwhelms her.)* I finally went and took the test and they told me! And the whole world exploded in my head and outside my head.

DANNY: *(quietly)* How did he get it?

SANDRA: *(screaming)* From screwing around with faggots like you! *(catching herself)* No...oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that, I...

DANNY: *(laughing)* It's all right, I like the word faggot and queer. I even like being a queer faggot! It's very distinguished!

SANDRA: *(embarrassed)* I really am sorry.

DANNY: So you found out that your hubby was bi-sexual?

SANDRA: No, no, that isn't the way it happened. He tried to tell me that he got caught up with some people at his office. They used to party and play around with drugs... and it got serious, and they started using needles and all of that other ugly stuff. He tried to tell me he got it from...

DANNY: A hooker?

SANDRA: No... a secretary!

DANNY: Same difference.

SANDRA: I don't know what to believe... I don't really care anymore. *(she takes a deep breath.)* So... what do you do?

DANNY: What do I do?.. Nothing! I don't do nothing. I used to be in desktop publishing.

SANDRA: What?

DANNY: You know, computer graphics? I was a graphic artist. But it got to be too much, the pressure, too tired... couldn't keep it going. So I quit. They were going to fire me anyhow. Especially with... well, you know.

(He gets up and begins to walk around the room. She sits at the dressing table and stares into the mirror.)

So, I decided I was going to paint... I was going to do one great big painting that would say everything I had to say about... everything. Huge... you know what I mean?

SANDRA: Uh-huh.

DANNY: So I took this job at night. It was a copy place, you know... xeroxing. Specialized in law firms. It was a crazy place. All kinds of crazy people worked there.. Fat, homely people and street people... crazies... *(snickering)* like me! The owners were real white bread... liberals from the sixties...went into business and went straight, as straight as can be. You know what I mean? All talk and no passion?

SANDRA: Uh-huh.

DANNY: It was all right. As a matter of fact it was kind of interesting reading all those documents, all those cases.. This one suing that one, this one cheating that one. Like one big rolling soap opera. Until finally it got to me. There I was on the outside looking in, reading about all these people making money, losing money, loving, hating. And I was on the outside just watching... waiting. Then, one night, we got a job in from a medical center. It was a cancer study and we had to copy the patients' records. Every thing... every little thing.

(He becomes tense, starts drinking again from the bottle.)

There they were... helpless... with all the pain and the a fear .. and the bullshit! All those dying people spread out on sheets of paper, and the doctors writing about them... cold... the way a mechanic writes about your car. It was too much for me. I quit. Besides, I was starting to fade anyhow.

SANDRA: *(still at the mirror)* When does it begin to hurt?

DANNY: What?

SANDRA: *(Her voice drones)* I mean... when do you feel something? When do you start to look different?

DANNY: *(with mock bravado)* Hey... you should see me, I've got a permanent sunburn, red all over. And the blotches... they're like tattoos! I'm not the pretty thing I used to be, but I sure look intriguing!

SANDRA: *(touching her face)* Does it hurt when you touch them?

DANNY: *(dropping the sarcasm)* Hey look... I'm not a specimen for you to examine. I'm not some case history you can...

SANDRA: *(in a low monotone)* Why won't you tell me?

DANNY: *(angrily)* Forget it! If you want it first hand, go to some touchy-feely group therapy session. You'll get all you can suck up.

SANDRA: What about your hair?

DANNY: I said FORGET IT!

(He disconnects and throws the phone down on the couch. He mumbles to himself as he walks in a circle around the couch. The abrupt hang-up jars SANDRA out of her daze. She quickly grabs the phone and taps in a number. DANNY's phone rings. He lets it ring for a moment, then scoops it up. His mumbling erupts into a loud voice.)

DANNY: It's the guilt! That's what hurts, that's what makes you sick. They shoot you up with guilt until all you want to do is die. They make you feel you're being punished for something, you know?

SANDRA: *(quietly)* That's right... that's right.

DANNY: For what? What did I do? I loved someone, my lover, my man. We were good together, we were happy. We could of been that way the rest of our lives... maybe. He didn't want to hurt me... he didn't want to hurt himself. But all those fucking politicians in Washington, those chicken-lipped assholes with their dried-up lives, they make it look like suicide. They write their checks for some research and then go out on their golf courses and cluck and spit because this is a good way to get rid of a nasty problem.

SANDRA: *(with amazement)* That's what it is, isn't it? *(sits on the bed)* That's what the feeling is!

DANNY: Even the do-goods at the clinic, and the church people...oh, the church people with their pity and their latex gloves... and the ministers, they whisper in your ear: you're being punished, but god forgives you!

SANDRA: *(dreamily)* It's true... isn't it?

(He jumps up on the table, the anger rising in his face.)

DANNY: Hey look... don't you know? It doesn't kill you... it doesn't kill you. It rapes you! It strips you naked and opens all the doors and yells... come on in guys and fuck his brains out!

SANDRA: *(wincing)* Stop...

DANNY: And it sticks it to you... in your mouth, in your eyes and right up your...

SANDRA: *(moaning)* Stop!

DANNY: It's rape, honey, it's rape. And they tell you that somehow it's your fault, you deserved it, you brought it on yourself!

SANDRA: STOP IT!... please.

(DANNY is exhausted. He stumbles off the table and sprawls on the couch. He lifts the wine bottle to drink, but can't. He takes the phone and lays it across his face. SANDRA listens to the echoes of her voice as she rocks back and forth.)

SANDRA: I know it's true... what you're saying is true. I just realized that, I just felt it. There hasn't been anything else. Oh, some side effects from the drug they give me, you know? But nothing else... just that rotten feeling, that doubt! *(she begins to pace.)* I remember when I finally had the guts to face it, to tell people... my mother, she almost

dropped dead. She cried harder than I ever did. But then she started to look at me so funny.. So strange. It was like I was a little girl again and she had caught me doing something bad. And my girlfriends... they were nice and tried to be comforting, but they started to fade away... like in a dream, you know, when you reach for someone and they keep backing off because they don't want you to touch them. I understood it, I thought well, they're afraid of catching... they're just afraid! That's why I left work, my job, I loved it so much... but they made me feel so... guilty about myself, so lousy. *(she stops moving)* You're right.. that's what's happening, isn't it? *(she realizes that he has been very quiet on the other end.)* Danny? Are you still there?

DANNY: *(after a moment)* Yeah.

(She walks to the dresser, takes a cigarette and lights it. She moves to the bed, lies down, drapes the phone at the side of her head.)

(A long moment of silence passes.)

SANDRA: What's it like to be Gay?

DANNY: *(laughing)* You asked me that before. What's it like to be straight?

SANDRA: You're such a smart-ass. I told you I don't know, I never thought about it.

DANNY: It's good. It's beautiful. It's been hard sometimes... my parents, they don't talk to me. They always thought I was possessed by a demon, that I was going right to hell. And my brother... the stupid fuck... he's a cop, you know. He beats his wife and slaps his kids around and tells me that I'm disturbed.

(He sits up)

What's it like? It's like being black! No, no that's wrong. Black people always now where they stand, they can't hide.

It's more like... like being Jewish! That's it... it's like being Jewish. You can pass whenever you want to, but when they know who you are, it all changes.

SANDRA: What are you talking about? My father was Jewish.

DANNY: So what does that make you?

SANDRA: I never felt like that.

DANNY: You're such a piece of white bread!

SANDRA: And you're such a stuck up snot!

DANNY: You think I'm stuck up? You think I'm a snot? Look who thinks her shit don't smell!

SANDRA: *(getting flushed)* What's the matter with you? You know, you have a very dirty... a very limited vocabulary.

DANNY: Well I'm truly too sorry. And what's the matter with you? Too uptight to express yourself?

SANDRA: I don't need to use four-letter words all the time.

DANNY: Yeah I noticed. You grunt a lot, little two-letter grunts.

SANDRA: (*flustered*) How old are you?

DANNY: How old are you?

SANDRA: I asked you first.

DANNY: Old enough! And while we're at it, how tall are you?

SANDRA: Why?

DANNY: I bet you're short and fat.

SANDRA: I am not!

DANNY: Are you pretty?

SANDRA: I think so!

DANNY: You don't sound like it.

SANDRA: Neither do you.

DANNY: Oh yeah?

SANDRA: Yeah!

DANNY: Well I bet you I'm prettier than you are.

SANDRA: Oh yeah?

DANNY: Yeah!

(A stiff silent moment goes by.)

SANDRA: Did you ever... dress up? You know, makeup, women's clothes?

DANNY: Sure...I love dressing up. Don't you?

SANDRA: Of course. All little girls...

DANNY: Don't you like dressing up in men's clothes?

SANDRA: Of course not! I'm not into that kind of thing.

DANNY: Wait a minute. What are you wearing now?

SANDRA: Now? I got on a pair of jeans and a big shirt...

DANNY: There you go, see? You love it!

SANDRA: Oh bullsh...! Everybody dresses like that. It's okay.

DANNY: That's right. It's okay, it's acceptable. So what's the difference? Hey... I love being what I am. It's what I want to be.

SANDRA: I don't believe that! I don't believe you ever wanted to go through what you... You know, your brother's right, you are disturbed!

DANNY: *(angrily)* Hey look, Sandy...

SANDRA: *(sharply)* Don't call me that!

DANNY: *(jumps to his feet)* Sah-ndra! You want to know what it's like? It's like being a woman! Sure, we're two of a kind.

SANDRA: *(sitting up)* What?

DANNY: That's right, honey!

SANDRA: *(angrily)* And don't call me that either! It sounds like you're sticking your tongue in my ear. I hate it!

DANNY: See? Two of a kind... we've both been in the closet. We both have to paint our faces so that people won't ignore us. We're both disposable. They tell dirty jokes about us...

SANDRA: I don't buy that, not for a minute. I'm not like you... not for a minute!

DANNY: Oh yeah? We're both minorities, second class...

SANDRA: *(her voice rises)* Women are not a minority! Where have you been? Women are right up front... strong...

DANNY: Yeah? With your stockings and your babies and your little red lips.

SANDRA: *(yelling louder)* That's right! The natural way, with love. Something you'll never have!

DANNY: *(yelling louder)* You mean lying on your back, huffing and puffing?

SANDRA: Go f...

DANNY: Why can't you say it? Go ahead!

SANDRA: Go fuck yourself!

DANNY: That's right, HONEY, Go fuck yourself!

(They both hang up. They both stand for a moment, seething. Then they both pick up their phones and punch in numbers. They both hang up.)

BOTH: It's busy!

DANNY: I bet she's calling her girlfriends!

SANDRA: I bet he's calling his boyfriends!

(They both pick up their phones and punch in numbers. They both hang up.)

BOTH: It's busy!

DANNY: I don't need this !

SANDRA: I don't need this !

(They both pick up their phones and punch in numbers. They both hang up.)

BOTH: It's goddamn busy!

DANNY: Forget it!

(He throws his phone on the table. She grabs her phone and quickly punches in a number. DANNY's phone rings. He looks at it, then grabs it and turns it on.)

SANDRA: You're right, it's the guilt.

(DANNY throws his phone in the air and his arms up after it in a gesture of exasperation. He catches it, lays it on the table, sits down and puts his head on the phone with a silly expression on his face.)

SANDRA: I know that... now. And I don't want to feel that anymore. I don't want to feel what you feel... all that hate and meanness. I want to feel love again.. I want to love and be loved.

DANNY: Good luck!

(She walks to the edge of her room and stands, facing DANNY's direction, as if she could see through the walls.)

SANDRA: Don't you want to hold on to that feeling? Don't you remember... you loved someone... alot, you said.

DANNY: *(his voice droning)* Yeah... and I watched him die, just like I'm watching me... and you.

SANDRA: *(softly)* Maybe we are the same, after all. Maybe we have a lot to share. This thing is so ugly... it makes everyone who touches it, ugly! Maybe we can help each other get rid of that... find just a small bit of sweetness in all of this.

DANNY: *(sitting up)* Maybe we should turn everything upside down. Maybe we should get freaky and have sex, you and me. Maybe the viruses will kill each other off! *(he laughs)*

SANDRA: *(her face tightens with anger)* Aaaach... just like a man. That's what you are, a man! And you're all alike... Gay, straight... you can't ever let it go, you can't ever give it up. No, no, no, we're not the same. Women want to live, give life, love life... and all you bastards want to do is fight and hurt. All you want to do is take that sword between your legs and get one last souvenir. *(she refuses to cry.)* All you want to do is kill!

(He gets up and walks to the edge of his room, facing in her direction.)

DANNY: Hey, you know what? You're wrong! It's not the guilt... or the love or hate. It's the death! We're dying... don't you know it? I know it... I'm dying a little more each day.

SANDRA: (*painfully*) I don't want to hear it.

DANNY: I sit on the toilet, there's blood in the water. I brush my teeth, there's blood in the sink. I beg them, please, stop the bleeding... my life is pouring out of me.

SANDRA: (*moaning*) No more.

DANNY: I can't cry because it hurts. It hurts when I laugh, when I breathe.

SANDRA: No more.

DANNY: And all anyone can ever say is, I'm sorry. It's so final, so absolutely final!

SANDRA: I can't listen to you.

DANNY: I can't talk to you.

SANDRA: No more.

DANNY: No more.

(They both hang up, and stand, staring at the walls as the lights fade out.)

Scene 4.

(It's 2am. The lights reveal both rooms with the shadowed area in between.)

DANNY is in his jersey, underwear briefs and white socks. There is a new, half-full bottle of wine on the table. He's sitting cross-legged next to it, shaking and banging on the cd player. And he's quite drunk. SANDRA walks into her room. She's wearing an open shirt with bra and panties underneath. She walks to the dressing-table mirror and stands there, looking at herself.)

DANNY: It's a fraud. These things are supposed to last forever... no scratches no static. Instead all it does is wup, wup, wup, wup, wup. Goddamn Chinese cd, must be made in the U.S.

(Suddenly, the music blasts out of the machine. DANNY almost falls off the table. He quickly lowers the volume. He manages to get up on his feet, but he's wobbly. He tries to dance and just crumbles to his knees.)

(SANDRA takes off her shirt and leans closer to the mirror. She examines her neck and her shoulders. Then she puts the shirt on and begins to touch her face. DANNY stretches out and leans over the edge of the table in an effort to reach the telephone. He can't do it. So he punches in an imaginary call in the air.)

DANNY: Hello Mark... don't wake up. I just want to tell you that you're beautiful. *(he giggles drunkenly)* I wonder if I should call New Delhi... hee-hee-hee... no, London. I should call the palace. *(he waves his finger in the air.)* Hello Liz? How are you? Getting

much? I bet! Look, Liz, I got a problem. Help me out baby. I'm following your advice, but I'm getting too thin. I mean, how anorexic can you get!

(SANDRA moves to the bed, puts on her robe, picks up the phone, punches in a number.)

(DANNY's phone rings. The ring startles him, and this time, he falls off the table. He finds the handset and turns it on.)

SANDRA: *(after a moment)* Hi.

DANNY: Hi.

SANDRA: Are you all right?

DANNY: *(mocking her)* Are you all right?

SANDRA: *(smiling)* You never quit do you?

DANNY: *(slurring his words)* I'm a very persis... consis... tent person.

SANDRA: Yes you are.

DANNY: Wait a minute, I got to put my pants on.

SANDRA: No... it's okay.

DANNY: It certainly is not! We've got to observe some rules around here. It's not decent. Wait a minute.

(He scrambles to his feet and rummages around the couch until he finds his jogging pants. Getting them on is a struggle. He ends up sitting on the floor again with a thud.)

SANDRA: What happened?

DANNY: My legs got in the way.

SANDRA: You sound awfully tired. If you're too tired, I'll call back some other time.

DANNY: No, I'm all right. Don't hang up... please.

(The moment is awkward.)

SANDRA: Can I ask you something?

DANNY: I don't know. Let me think about it.

(She walks to the edge of her room, facing in his direction.)

SANDRA: Seriously.

DANNY: *(giggling)* Okay, if you put it that way. Shoot!

SANDRA: Do you dream much? I mean, when you sleep?

DANNY: I don't sleep much, so I don't know.

SANDRA: I dream a lot. And lately, so many different little dreams, real dreams and memories like photographs in an album. But they're not strange. I like them. I dream about my father, and old boy friends, and my wedding day. And each one has a beginning and a middle and an end, like a little, happy movie. I even dreamt about you tonight.

DANNY: That's hot! You'll leave 'em laughing with that one.

SANDRA: What do you dream about?

DANNY: Me? *(he walks to the edge of his room, facing in her direction. His head is a bit clearer.)* I only dream one dream. . The same one, every time.

SANDRA: Tell me.

DANNY: *(closing his eyes)* I walk along a beach, a beautiful, warm, clean, white beach. Everything is blue and yellow. And the water, the surf, rolls in around me, and past me, and behind me. And you know what? The surf never touches me. My feet never get wet, no matter which way I turn. And I'm alone, always alone. *(pauses for a moment)* Know what it means?

SANDRA: No.

DANNY: Me neither. I just wish that for once I'd get to wherever it is I'm going.

(another awkward moment.)

SANDRA: Danny, I...

DANNY: Another question?

SANDRA: I...

DANNY: Don't be shy. Too late for that.

SANDRA: I have to hang up.

(She does. He stands staring at the phone for a moment, then throws it on the couch.

She starts to walk away, then stops. She picks up the phone and quickly punches in a number. His phone rings. He stares at it for a moment, then answers.)

DANNY: It's me.

SANDRA: It's me. *(She pauses)* I'm sorry.

DANNY: For what?

SANDRA: For not understanding you.

DANNY: There goes the guilt again.

SANDRA: No, really, I tried. But I can't bring myself to accept the way you are, the way you think. You helped me, you helped me alot. When I went to the Friends project they told me it would be a good idea if I connected with someone... like you. That I might be able to help you and you might be able to help me. And you did, you really did. But I come from such a different world, and in my world people are afraid of you. I know that's wrong... I'm afraid of you.

DANNY: I know.

SANDRA: There's such a wall between us, I don't know how to make a connection.

DANNY: Sometimes all you have to do is reach out.

SANDRA: I don't know how to do that!

DANNY: I don't either!

(They stand silently for a moment, facing each other across the shadows.)

SANDRA: *(quietly)* Is there any hope?

DANNY: If hope is a roller coaster racing up and down, then there's hope. *(he laughs to himself)* If hope is a Ferris wheel spinning round and round, then there's hope.

SANDRA: Thank you. *(after a moment)* Good bye, Danny, and god bless you.

DANNY: Good bye... Sa-ah-ndy! *(she smiles)* And... you too!

(They both hang up. She turns and walks out of the room. The lights change. Each room becomes darker, more shadowed. He searches for the bottle under the table, finds it and drinks what's left. She comes back into her room, looks into the mirror, brushes her hair for a moment, and smoothes her face. She takes her phone and punches in a number. His phone rings. He stares at it, then taps the speaker button. There is a moment of silence.)

SANDRA: I'm 32 and 5'4" and I have a good body but I'm a little heavier than I should be and I think I'm pretty good... I think I'm pretty and loving and I think there's hope. I just wanted you to know that.

(He stares at his phone, she stares at hers. After a moment, she carefully hangs up. She turns and walks out of the room. He takes off his jogging pants and flings them at the couch. He turns on the cd player, and begins to dance, turning in slow circles around the room. He moves to the table and picks up the telephone. He dances with it for a moment as he punches in a number. Then he stops, turns off the cd player, and drops into a chair.)

DANNY: Hello... Voicemail? Is this the voice of my kindly but never-there caseworker? This is Dannyboy, your always-there case. Reporting in as usual. And everything is as usual. Ups and downs, a few ups, lots of downs. I'm being a good case, caseworker. I'm taking all my medicine and I'm watching my diet, every drop of it. *(He laughs to himself, sinks deeper into the chair with his head thrown back, and closes his eyes.)* And I want to tell you that I'm going to take a little trip. Don't worry, it's just a walk.

(He becomes drowsy)

I'm going to take a long walk on a beach, my favorite beach. It's very warm and clean... and the water is ... gentle... a long beach... and I can see it... way down at the end... I can see it... a big... beautiful Ferris wheel... turning... turning... never stopping... never!

(His head drops, the phone falls out of his hand... as if he's passed away.)

(There is long change of lights, deepening the shadows in both rooms.)

(After a long pause, the doorbell rings. He doesn't stir. It rings again. He suddenly opens his eyes and lifts his head. It rings again. He drags himself out of the chair and over to the corner of the room. A light comes on in the shadowed area outside. SANDRA stands in front of him in the corridor. He quickly tugs at the bottom of his jersey, pulling it down as far as it will go. She reaches up and touches his face. Then she puts her arms around him. The lights fade out inside both rooms. DANNY closes his eyes and gently rocks back and forth.)

DANNY: *(softly)* A Ferris wheel.

(He slowly brings his arms up and puts them around her. They stand there, holding each other, as the light over them fades away.)

HELLO AND...GOODBYE!