

CARY'S CHAIN STORE MASSACRE

by

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## CHARACTERS

Cary Miller -- 20s, insecure youngster

Hal Regan -- 50s, blowhard

Beatrice Church -- 20s, bitter bookstore employee

**SCENE 1**

Queens, 2009.

Living room of the run down one bedroom of Cary Miller, 20s. A couch and a reading chair. Doors to bedroom, kitchen and stairwell.

Take-out containers cover every surface. Boxes marked REGAN'S BOOKS are everywhere. Cary sits amidst all of it, and rolls a joint. Badly. It takes a while. He drops some weed.

CARY

Damn it!

He picks it up and starts again. He lights his unwieldy creation and takes a long drag. Coughs. Another. Coughs. He starts to masturbate. Porn sounds from an iPhone, held close to his face. Just when he's getting comfortable the door buzzer startles him.

CARY

(into buzzer)

Hello?

The response is incomprehensible.

CARY

Come on up.

Another hit and he puts the joint out with his fingers, burning himself.

CARY

Ow!

Heavy footsteps from the hallway. Heavy breathing from outside the door. A knock. Cary peers through the peephole.

CARY

(whispering)

Oh God. No. No no no.

Frenzied, he throws clothes and books into a shopping bag. The banging intensifies.

CARY  
No one is home!

REGAN (O.S.)  
Open the blasted door.

CARY  
No! Absolutely not.

REGAN (O.S.)  
I'll tear it down.

The door shudders as Regan throws himself against it.

REGAN  
Ow!

CARY  
This is a private residence. Your apprentice has gone. He never lived here! He -- how did you find me?! Come back tomorrow, old man. We can talk then.  
(quietly)  
I'll be halfway to the Yukon by sun-up.

The doorknob flies across the room, and Hal Regan enters, coughing violently, a hammer and screwdriver in hand.

CARY  
Get out. Out!  
(beat)  
Are you okay?

Regan gives a thumbs up. Coughs into a handkerchief. Folds it.

REGAN  
Five flights?

CARY  
What?

REGAN  
Get me water.

CARY  
There's glasses in the kitchen, Hal.

REGAN  
So get one for me, fill it with water, and call me Mr. Regan.

He picks up Cary's iPhone.

REGAN

What the hell is this?

CARY

Put that down.

REGAN

A phone. A cellular phone?! And not just any...one of these new ones, I read about on the plane.

CARY

It's the only nice thing I have.

REGAN

If I hand you this abominable instrument, you will sit down and listen to me, in the manner that you agreed to when our apprenticeship began?

Cary nods. Regan shrugs and tosses the phone over his shoulder and out the window.

CARY

YOU BASTARD!

He charges at Regan to fight.

CARY

You husk of a man! How dare you! How dare you come back here! Stand up!

REGAN

On no account.

CARY

I'll fight you!

REGAN

Why?

Regan stands and, without effort, knocks Cary's feet from under him. Cary goes to the kitchen and, from off stage, emits a moan of inhuman frustration. He returns with water.

REGAN

This is brown!

CARY

Choke on it!

Regan sips it, spits it out.

REGAN

Blech!

He keeps drinking.

CARY

You ripped me in half a year ago, and now you walk back in, demanding water like nothing's changed!

REGAN

This is a hovel. You should have cleaned. Where are you going?

CARY

Downstairs to get my phone. You better pray it landed on garbage.

REGAN

I'm sure it's already gone, snatched by one of your neighborhood's bravest urchins. Now sit down -- I've come back to save your life.

CARY

It's not like that any more. I'm stronger now! I've had my fill of your sage wisdom!

REGAN

Really, Cary?

CARY

In your absence I have thrived. I've, I've soared! To new heights!

REGAN

You've forgotten your lessons.

Cary rummages for a sheet of notepaper.

REGAN

What's that? More plans for...what were you going to call it? Millenium Booksellers? Titanic Books? Astrophil and Stella?

CARY

That dream I euthanized.

REGAN

But you were so close! Another year and you could have done it. Remind us of your ingenious floorplans and pricing schemes.

CARY

(overlapping)

Here's ten reasons why you should die! One: You abandoned me!

REGAN  
(overlapping)  
I don't see the point of all this.

CARY  
Two! You encouraged my estrangement from my parents!

REGAN  
Nonentities!

CARY  
Three! You killed our bookstore--

REGAN  
--my bookstore!--

CARY  
--which was the only thing I'd ever loved!

REGAN  
Don't speak of it.

CARY  
But that's just me! You have perpetrated many crimes, Hal!

REGAN  
I am a model citizen.

CARY  
Four! You hate orphans!

REGAN  
They're unclean.

CARY  
Five! You don't give to beggars!

Regan scoffs.

CARY  
Six! Ugly clothes! Seven! You smash things you don't like!  
Eight! You like to tell a story that ends with you stuffing  
your fist down a dog's throat!

REGAN  
It was nipping at me!

CARY  
Nine! You drool at meals!

REGAN  
What's ten?

CARY  
I never thought of the tenth.

REGAN  
No follow through.

CARY  
No! Never until now! Ten! You came back. You should die for coming back!

REGAN  
Fine. Are you finished?

CARY  
Yes. Now leave.  
(pause)  
You're not leaving.

REGAN  
And are you going to kill me?

CARY  
What? No.

REGAN  
Good. There are many things I have to tell you--

CARY  
--I thought you were dead.

REGAN  
I learned so much on my travels--

CARY  
--I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD!

REGAN  
Must you yell?

CARY  
I woke up one morning, the store was condemned and I was ON THE STREET. I can't live like that! I'm a bookworm! I can't have you here. This is upsetting me.

REGAN  
Strange. I assumed you would feel it too.

CARY  
Feel what?

REGAN

The city -- VIBRATING under my every footstep! New York missed me, and she has taken me in her arms like a mother welcoming a forgotten child. From the Battery to Inwood, the streets sing the return of Hal Regan.

CARY

Nothing sings here. This is Queens.

REGAN

And what are you doing this far out, then? I was embarrassed to tell the driver your address.

CARY

I told you, I'm broke! I can barely pay my phone bill.

REGAN

Aren't you working?

CARY

A laundromat. I don't want to talk about it.

REGAN

But I apprenticed you. I took you in and taught you everything I knew. For six years, Cary!

CARY

And then you left.

REGAN

Six years of seven. That was the agreement.

CARY

You broke that deal.

REGAN

And yet you remain in my debt!

(softer)

I'm just asking for a place to stay.

CARY

Really?

REGAN

There was no one else I could go to. Now sit down. I have a lot to say. Good God, what a sty.

CARY

How long have you been back?

REGAN

Since yesterday. It was late -- I didn't want to disturb you. I went for a stroll, enjoying the touch of asphalt for the first time in months. I lived in Manhattan from birth.

CARY

St. Vincent's, September 30, 1955. 4:55 PM.

REGAN

Just as James Dean went through the windshield. And God, since that glorious day, the city has changed.

CARY

I know. I grew up here too.

REGAN

Not here. You were raised in the city. You live in Queens. Places like this never change. They fester. But Manhattan! On returning, I saw it like it was freshly cast, direct and hot from the heavenly mold.

(beat)

It's nice to be home.

CARY

You can stay here tonight if you have to. If that's what this is about.

REGAN

Oh, I'll be here for at least a month. As long as it takes to reestablish myself.

CARY

We can talk about that tomorrow.

REGAN

Playing adult doesn't suit you. You're twenty-three. Act it.

CARY

I'm twenty-four.

REGAN

We're going to have to do something about you, Cary. I believe that living in filth has upset your psyche.

CARY

The filth belongs to you.

(indicating boxes)

Here's receipts, May 72 to July 74. This one's full of broken wood handled stamps. This one, exhausted rolls of Scotch tape. In this one, over a hundred copies of the March 4, 1987 Village Voice.

REGAN

They interviewed me.

CARY

The pages so faded I can hardly read your name.

REGAN

If it's shit, then why keep it?

CARY

Because even dead you terrified me.

REGAN

Then we won't have to start from scratch. Now get yourself a glass of water. You look thirsty.

After a moment, Cary does as suggested.

REGAN

I'm still your mentor, and our agreement stands. The final year of your apprenticeship begins tonight. Great things are afoot.

CARY

What is wrong with you?

REGAN

You're the one in trouble.

CARY

I'm fine!

REGAN

Are you? You live in a sixth floor pit, in a backwater neighborhood infested with Chinamen and thieves. Sit down and breathe, child. When you came to me seven years ago, you were lost in a haze of adolescence. But with my guidance you emerged stronger. You became a man. Where has that man gone?

(beat)

One more year, Cary. Now come. Let's work.

Cary reaches for the flask and Regan holds onto it.

REGAN

For men only. First let's run the dates.

CARY

Not that humiliation.

REGAN

You haven't forgotten them?

CARY

I doubt it.

REGAN

When was Hal Regan born?

CARY

I told you that earlier.

REGAN

Again. When was Hal Regan born?

CARY

(fast, as if by rote)

St. Vincent's, September 30, 1955. 4:55 PM.

REGAN & CARY

Just as James Dean went through the windshield.

REGAN

When was Hal Regan's first kiss?

CARY

March 10, 1970, inside of a movie theater on Fiftieth Street--

REGAN

--the Beacon--

CARY

--during the first film of a triple feature.

REGAN

And when his first orgasm at the hands of another?

CARY

No!

REGAN

Don't you know it?

CARY

Of course I know it.

REGAN

Then tell me.

CARY

March 10, 1970, during the final film of the same triple feature. Cromwell, Alec Guinness, directed by Ken Hughes.

REGAN

When did Hal Regan first dream of Regan's books?

CARY

July 4, 1979.

REGAN

And when did he open it?

CARY  
January 1, 1980.

REGAN  
And what can we assume from that?

CARY  
Really?

REGAN  
What can we assume?

CARY  
That Hal Regan is capable and determined.

REGAN  
When did Regan's Books begin its decline?

CARY  
Sales peaked on May 4, 1993.

REGAN  
What else happened in 1993?

CARY  
Barnes and Noble opened the first cafe inside a chain bookstore.

REGAN  
Is there a connection?

CARY  
Could be...

REGAN  
Is there a connection?

CARY  
Yes!

REGAN  
Good warm up! Where are your sheets? I want to fix the sofa.

Cary gets sheets. Regan fixes the sofa into a bed.

REGAN  
What I've just done to your phone is a first lesson, a reminder that possessions come and go. Are you still reading?

CARY  
Of course.

REGAN

What? Magazines, I suppose? The newspaper?

CARY

What's wrong with that? You're not making sense.

REGAN

I have a plan.

CARY

My phone, Mr. Regan. What about my phone?

REGAN

Doesn't matter. We'll get you a new one.

CARY

How? With what money? You're poorer than I am. You didn't spend the night wandering the city. You stink like a crust punk, and there's a tag on your coat from the Bowery Mission. Did you think I didn't notice? Or did you miss it yourself?

REGAN

I don't need your help.

CARY

But you need my sofa.

REGAN

Oh no. The sofa's for you.

CARY

You are not sleeping in my bed.

REGAN

But I'm the eldest.

CARY

Stay here for now. On the couch. But leave tomorrow.

REGAN

No!

CARY

Then now!

REGAN

There's a plan... the grandest thing I or anyone else has ever conceived of.

CARY

Not again! Since I quit high school, your bookstore -- I'm not letting you get my hopes up anymore.

REGAN

I have fifty thousand dollars.

CARY

What?

REGAN

For you. A...a kind of graduation gift, I've been saving since you first came to me. Seed money for Miller's Books. The rest I squandered, but I never touched your fifty grand.

CARY

You never told me about this.

REGAN

You can forgive an aging man for savoring a surprise.

CARY

What's the plan?

REGAN

Have you ever killed someone, Cary?

CARY

Oh my God.

REGAN

I haven't either. But as I understand, it's good for the blood.

CARY

You've come back to kill me, haven't you?

REGAN

I can't kill you. The plan needs you.

CARY

Then who, Mr Regan?

REGAN

The boy I remember had a hatred of evil. It wasn't so long ago that an article in the newspaper could make your fists shake with righteousness. You are surely one of the greatest letter to the editor writers of our time.

CARY

I don't write letters any more. Either tell me what's on your mind or roll over and let me go to sleep.

REGAN

There is a great evil on Union Square, Cary.

CARY

What do you mean?

REGAN

We walked past it many times. It is the head of the park and the head of a snake that has swallowed everything you and I hold dear.

CARY

The big Barnes and Noble.

REGAN

A five story cancerous protrusion, an outlet store with a literary theme. It is a MONSTER, with books on display just to legitimize the mass vending of coffee and Moleskines. You won't argue with this?

CARY

No.

REGAN

You hate them?

CARY

I do.

REGAN

More than you hate pepperoni?

CARY

Yes.

REGAN

More than you hate me?

CARY

(beat)

Yes.

REGAN

So it's how you hate riding the subway?

CARY

More. It's much worse.

REGAN

Really? Why?

CARY

Sure, the train is like putting a toe into the first circle of hell. It's dark and stinks and there are so many ugly people on it, but you know the worst part? Those fucking Barnes and Noble ads! Those pithy chunks of Whitman or Angelou, a little message saying, "Don't worry peon, we just made your shit life one stanza better." At least the train doesn't try to be your friend. Barnes and Noble -- Christ.

REGAN

Go on. This is interesting.

CARY

(slow at first)

Where to begin? It's like a carnival, not a store. You come in and they've got some pathetic pile of flesh to greet you, and twenty more myrmidons who can't even answer questions through their false smiles. And you need questions answered, because the place is impossible to navigate. I mean, what's the most important thing in a bookstore? Literature, right? Wrong! Bookstores are for selling calendars of puppies and unicorns. They're also good places to buy croissants, headphones or sudoku puzzles. If you want anything more egg-headed than that, just take the escalators up to the fourth floor, where you can enjoy the stares of your fellow shoppers, and wallow in shame at your perverse desire for something as masturbatory as a novel! Jesus. Fuck. This gets me so worked up.

REGAN

No! Don't sit down! This is what you care about, Miller -- this is your crusade! How do you feel?

CARY

I'm angry.

REGAN

Grip that tightly, and don't release! The worm I found on that sofa is not you -- you are a man, a creature of power.

CARY

I am a man! I told you.

REGAN

Yes. Now tell me about your bookstore!

CARY

I was going to name it Molly's.

REGAN

After your mother.

CARY

My mother was Sarah. Molly was my hamster.

REGAN

And the store itself. Just like Regan's?

CARY

Of course.

REGAN

No windows. The customers shuffling in near darkness.

CARY

Nine sections.

REGAN

For each of Regan's principal type of book. Nothing popular, nothing fun, every volume in its right place.

CARY

Except for the back nook.

REGAN

No nook. Just nine sections, the register raised above them, so we can keep an eye on the bastards. A taser to ward off shoplifters. Two chairs, well worn for comfort, and a kettle in the back to keep our nerves from fraying during long shifts. You love your tea.

CARY

Impossible now.

REGAN

But don't blame me. Blame the big box mongoloids, and the water-heads who keep them in profit. I asked earlier if you had ever killed.

CARY

I'm not killing--

REGAN

--you won't have to. Not men. What is there on the fourth floor of Barnes and Noble?

CARY

Bibles, poetry, biographies, fiction.

REGAN

Everything that matters on the fourth floor, and sixty feet below?

CARY

The basement?

REGAN

Worn concrete supports. It wouldn't take much dynamite, packed properly to--

Cary cackles.

REGAN

Do you not think I'm serious?

CARY

Serious maybe, but you're a fool, Hal.

REGAN

Watch your tongue.

CARY

It's true!

REGAN

With your help, Cary, I can turn that patch of Seventeenth street into a five hundred foot column of fire.

CARY

You barely made it up my stairs.

REGAN

I remember your sketches for the signs: "Millennium Booksellers," in discreet sans serif font. Not like you, the san serif, but it looked nice enough.

CARY

Let's go to sleep.

REGAN

Fifty thousand. It's not a lot, but even with your poor business sense, I think you could make a go of it.

CARY

You're talking nonsense.

REGAN

Of course, you were always one to draw rather than do anything. While I sweated for that store, you sat, read and complained.

CARY

I loved that store.

REGAN

And you'd love your own too. If you just had the courage to take it!

Cary turns and walks towards the kitchen.

Regan slides his arm down Cary's coffee table, knocking everything onto the floor.

REGAN

Sit down and discuss this!

CARY

No.

Cary exits to kitchen. Regan places his handkerchief in the pile on the floor.

CARY (O.S.)

I knew there was a reason I bought plastic cups.

Cary returns and picks up the mess.

CARY

Ugh! What is this!

He unfolds the handkerchief -- it's bloody. Regan takes it back.

CARY

Is that yours?

REGAN

Don't you recognize it?

CARY

That's blood, isn't it.

REGAN

Perhaps.

CARY

Hal. Are you all right?

REGAN

I could use some sleep.

CARY

You have to tell me what's going on.

REGAN

Pancreatic cancer, and bad. When I left last year it wasn't to find funding for the store, but to seek treatment in the South Pacific, an experiment that failed much more quickly than Regan's Books. Don't look so sorry! This is a happy tale, for it was there I had the vision. Late at night, shivering in my sweat-soaked cot, I wandered into the jungle. I know not how long I staggered, but finally I emerged onto a glade. There, in the grass, I saw the number, written in six foot letters of flame. Zero fourteen eleven point eight two three four two.

CARY

An ISBN number.

REGAN

You're a sharp boy, Cary. It took me some time in the Manila library's card catalogue before I matched it to a title. That was when I realized our path.

He coughs.

REGAN

Incidentally, I am in great pain.

CARY

You don't look it.

REGAN

Thanks. I didn't want to tell you. I had hoped you would remember your idol as he was.

CARY

I can get you to a doctor.

REGAN

I should be dead already. The man at Sinai was quite firm. This last prank on the big box store, Cary, it's all I need before I die.

CARY

I'm not blowing anything up!

REGAN

You are. We are, together. You were the last person who ever had fondness for me. My ex wife doesn't speak to me, all my friends are dead or have jobs. You owe me this.

(pause)

I just want to die with my sword in my hand.

CARY

I'm afraid.

REGAN

So am I.

CARY

Tell me your plan.

REGAN

It's quite simple. Gasoline and tape, mostly. But to explain it properly, I'll need to buy a book.

## SCENE 2

The first floor of the Union Square Barnes and Noble. It is a fearsome place. Displays of notebooks, cookbooks, DVDs and fantasy best sellers.

An information desk sits underneath the escalator, next to the door to the basement, isolated from the rest of the store.

In dark sunglasses, Regan flips through Us Weekly, waiting.

Beatrice Church occupies the information desk. She plays the knife game -- stabbing back and forth in between each finger -- with a Bic pen. Stabs herself.

BEATRICE

OW!

REGAN

Shut up!

She starts playing again. Stops.

BEATRICE

Are you looking for anything, sir?

REGAN

Ha!

BEATRICE

Ha!

REGAN

Excuse me?

BEATRICE

I'm sorry. I thought we were laughing.

REGAN

Just me.

BEATRICE

We're taught to accompany the customers on their journey through the store, including laughter. So can I help you find anything?

He lowers the magazine, goes to her.

REGAN

What could you possibly help me find?

BEATRICE

My computer tells me where books are.

REGAN

But you don't know yourself?

BEATRICE

Au contraire, sir. I'm fully capable.

REGAN

Hmm.

BEATRICE

Biographies, for instance, are on the fourth floor. Maps are on the third, and novelty books about sex are in a cute nook just over there.

REGAN

Wonderful. You're as smart as a poster.

BEATRICE

Of course, if you're content with US Weekly...

REGAN

I could find nothing less reprehensible!

BEATRICE

There's no point going to a bookstore and fuming because you've got nothing to read.

REGAN

You say biographies are on four?

BEATRICE

Yes.

REGAN

Ben Franklin, Teddy Roosevelt, Joseph Goebbels?

BEATRICE

And that's just for starters!

REGAN

Then could you take me up to the fourth floor? I'd like you to jump out a window!

BEATRICE

That was uncalled for, sir.  
(under her breath)  
I should slap you, motherfucker.

REGAN

But you won't.

He stalks back to his magazine. After a moment Cary returns.

REGAN

It seems you're not the only bitch here.

CARY

The book wasn't on four.

REGAN

Did you look in the back?

CARY

It was all Sudoku and bibles. We need to leave.

REGAN

Not until we find it!

CARY

I can feel the walls closing in. The odor of candles is affecting my breathing. There was a sign upstairs that said, "We thank you for not sitting on the floors." What kind of bookstore doesn't want you to sit on the floors?

REGAN

There I sympathize. Disgusting loiterers, hippies all -- content to lounge and read but never buy. I'd have installed spikes if I could have, and warded off their thick rumps like so many pendulous pigeons. But curse this infernal labyrinth!

CARY

I saw some very nice magazines on the third floor. Maybe we could get some magazines...

Regan pelts his US Weekly. Beatrice shelves it, eavesdrops.

REGAN

Damn their magazines! I came here to tear this place apart!

BEATRICE

(barely a question)

You need help, sir?

REGAN

We're fine! We're fine, just go drown in a lake or something.

CARY

Why don't we just ask for it? Look. They have information at the information desk.

REGAN

Why not go ahead and tie the hangman's neckerchief ourselves?! This is a secret organization, boy! Secret!

CARY

I'd bet she knows where the book is.

REGAN

I spoke to her. She couldn't help us find anything more intellectual than a slobbering mechanic with a ten inch prick.

CARY

I want to talk to her.

REGAN

When did the Diorite close?

CARY

Six months ago. Max made a fool of himself sobbing outside the front gate.

REGAN

Of course those fools at Fifth Street didn't have it, but Max was a good man. Or Tiny Harper, he always sold all that revolutionary stuff, but his stock's been watered down.

CARY

We didn't try Prince Street.

REGAN

It's no good, not since Charlie got weird from that lead poisoning.

(beat)

Christ. They're all gone, aren't they?

CARY

We could try the ElectroSearch kiosk.

REGAN

Nope. My pen-knife and I have already disabled it.

CARY

I'm going to go ask the girl.

REGAN

Get stuffed! I won't have my disciple communing with monsters. I'll find it myself. Perhaps it's somewhere beyond the cafe... you wait here!

He exits.

BEATRICE

Come here!

CARY

I didn't do anything! Who are you? What do you want...Becky?

BEATRICE

What's your name?

CARY  
Rolf.

BEATRICE  
That's a lie.

CARY  
So vat?

BEATRICE  
You and that man. You're up to something.

CARY  
Ve are tourists. From Germany.

BEATRICE  
Germans don't skulk. He was rude to me.

CARY  
I'm sorry. He's not great with people.

BEATRICE  
I was rude back.

CARY  
Really?

BEATRICE  
It's just frustrating. Because we work very hard to be The Model Employee -- always smiling, never doubtful, full of helpfulness -- and men like him, well, they take our effort and just just shit all over it! But I shouldn't have called him a motherfucker.

CARY  
(fearful)  
Ohhh.

BEATRICE  
Would he tell? I can't have another complaint. Oh God. If I get fired my iguanas will starve. And then I'll starve. And then I'll have to start thinking about eating the iguanas.

CARY  
It's okay! It's okay! He won't tell. He doesn't like to talk to people.

BEATRICE  
Because you're up to something! What is it?

CARY  
Nothing!

BEATRICE  
Tell me!

CARY  
It's a secret!

BEATRICE  
You need a book. And you're afraid to ask a clerk for it,  
because of secrets. Why not the ElectroSearch?

CARY  
My mentor disbelieves in electronics.

BEATRICE  
A cult.

CARY  
It's not religious. It's literary.

BEATRICE  
Oh. Well I can check for you! I've always wanted to be part  
of a conspiracy.

CARY  
If I say you'll get me in trouble.

BEATRICE  
If I don't help you, I'll get in trouble. You don't trust me.

CARY  
I trust no one.

BEATRICE  
Calm down. I'm a friend. What's your name?

CARY  
Cary. My name's Cary. You're Becky.

BEATRICE  
We can trade secrets.

She hitches up her sleeve.

CARY  
You have a tattoo!

BEATRICE  
SHH!

CARY  
Of a... what is that?

BEATRICE  
I could get fired just for showing you this.

CARY  
Is it a blob? A storm cloud?

BEATRICE  
It's a pit bull.

CARY  
This is a terrible tattoo.

BEATRICE  
Nevermind that! The point is, my life is my own. I just can't let them know that.

CARY  
Are they watching?

BEATRICE  
Cameras everywhere. But no microphones. Now. What book do you need for your big bad crusade?

CARY  
It's called Blowing Up Barnes & Noble.

BEATRICE  
What?!

CARY  
(louder)  
Blowing Up Barnes--

BEATRICE  
SHH!

CARY  
What's the matter?

BEATRICE  
You should leave.

CARY  
No!

BEATRICE  
(loudly)  
I don't think we have that one, sir!

CARY  
I told you the title -- you have to help me find it. I could make a complaint.

BEATRICE  
Why do we even sell that?

CARY

Don't you sell everything?

BEATRICE

You really want to...to blow it up?

CARY

Apparently.

BEATRICE

But why?

CARY

Why not?

BEATRICE

I mean, I've had thoughts of bringing a pistol to work and shooting the place up a little bit, just for stress. Plugging my shift manager and my coworkers and a few of those fat ugly people who hang out in stationary. But arson! It's a big step.

CARY

It's not arson. It's demolition.

BEATRICE

Ooh.

CARY

Mr. Regan considers the store quite an evil. The vilest, vilest evil.

BEATRICE

Regan. How do I know that name?

CARY

He and I used to run a bookstore. Right near here. You must have heard of it -- Regan's Books.

BEATRICE

Oh. Oh...that store. I had tried to block it out. My shoes stuck to the floors, I could never find what I wanted, and the stench...like a forgotten tin of rotting anchovies.

CARY

You didn't know it like I did.

BEATRICE

Is he making you do this?

CARY

No! I do what, I'm his apprentice, sure, but I chose that. I mean, high school was a waste of time, wasn't it?

BEATRICE

I had fun in high school, but I'm from Ohio.

CARY

I was miserable. I lived at home with my parents, who are idiots, and went to school five days a week, too sleepy to learn anything. Mr. Regan convinced me to take up an apprenticeship.

BEATRICE

And now this...

CARY

Mentor. He's my mentor.

BEATRICE

Thinks you should blow up the store.

CARY

When you say it it sounds silly.

BEATRICE

Why B&N? Did they do something to him? Crush his store out of business?

CARY

No. Well, yes, they did, but that's not it. He's just angry. He says calls your stores cancerous protrusions.

BEATRICE

He sounds very angry indeed.

CARY

Indeed.

BEATRICE

Are you so angry?

CARY

I used to be... lately it all seems like bluster.

BEATRICE

(beat)

I'm angry.

CARY

Oh?

BEATRICE

Furious. Livid, even.

CARY

Did I do something wrong?

BEATRICE

My name is Beatrice, not Becky. They make me wear a nametag that says "Becky," because Beatrice is too pretentious.

CARY

I think it's a lovely name!

BEATRICE

Of course it is!

She thinks for a moment.

BEATRICE

Imagine the destruction. The carnage! The sex nook would go sky high. Gary -- my manager -- would be obliterated. And his stupid toupee and his stupid yucky moustache, too. All gone. And the break room! The break room and the coffeemaker in the break room, destroyed. It's the worst coffeemaker in the world, Cary. You can't imagine. The carafe is plastic, and the heating element is too strong, so if the pot's on for more than three minutes it starts to melt, perfuming the air with cancer. There's never enough filters, and somebody -- I'd shank him if I knew who -- is always making coffee without them. It's been three years since I've had a cup of coffee that didn't have grounds in it and didn't taste like hot melted death.

CARY

(terrified)

Why not make coffee at home?

BEATRICE

I'll do it. I'll find your book.

She starts to check. He stops her.

CARY

Please don't. It's a bad idea.

BEATRICE

No. It's very, very cool.

CARY

Is it? I'm bad at cool.

BEATRICE

What could be cooler than a real life revolutionary? I grew up in Dayton, Cary, dreaming of a day like this. Dreaming of a man like you.

CARY

You really--

Regan returns. He swats at Cary's head for the next few lines.

REGAN

What did I tell you about talking to civilians?

CARY

Mr. Regan! Mr. Regan!

REGAN

What, dimwit? How can you defend yourself? What did you say?!

(to Beatrice)

My charge has delusions of blowing up a building. Did he say anything?

BEATRICE

He mentioned explosives.

REGAN

The poor young man is deranged. It was all a beautiful lie, and it's finished now.

CARY

You didn't find it.

REGAN

No. This place is worse than my nightmares recalled.

(to Beatrice)

I hope you are pleased to have crushed the final dream of a broken man.

BEATRICE

You're looking for Blowing Up Barnes and Noble?

REGAN

(swatting Cary)

You simp! You told!

BEATRICE

Mr. Regan -- I'm on your side.

REGAN

What?

BEATRICE

Your store! What a wonderful place. I loved the odor, the darkness -- your brilliant organizational scheme. I think you should blow up whatever you like. You can trust me.

CARY

She has a tattoo!

REGAN

Then yes, that is our book. And I fear I shall never find it.

BEATRICE

Blowing Up Barnes and Noble by Tindall Finnegan?

REGAN

The same!

BEATRICE

We don't have it.

REGAN

Then all is lost.

BEATRICE

Have you thought about interlibrary loan?

REGAN

I'm no pauper.

CARY

Do you have any books about blowing up comparable buildings?

REGAN

Quiet, both of you.

CARY

Do we even need it? I figure we get enough explosives, tape a lot of dynamite around and hit the plunger, we could blow up the Chrysler Building.

BEATRICE

Cary! That's brilliant!

REGAN

You don't know what you're talking about.

CARY

Implosions are hard. Explosions are simple. I mean...right, Beatrice?

BEATRICE

This is an old building. It could come down for a hard sneeze.

CARY

You don't need to give up yet.

REGAN

(to Cary)

Stop jabbering, you filthy, slippery twat! I want you to take me back to Queens so I can die.

CARY

STOP RIGHT THERE! You're not quitting that easy.

REGAN  
But that's how I like to quit.

CARY  
She can be our book.

REGAN  
Explain.

CARY  
You know the layout of the basement?

BEATRICE  
I do!

CARY  
How to turn off the cameras? Which pylons to blow and when?

BEATRICE  
I could figure it out. I know more than any Tindall Finnegan.

REGAN  
We can't trust her.

BEATRICE  
(setting it on the counter)  
I have a key to the front door.

CARY  
A five hundred foot column of fire...

REGAN  
Would you ask payment?

BEATRICE  
How much did the book cost?

REGAN  
Twenty four ninety five.

BEATRICE  
That'll be enough. Plus tax.

Regan takes the key, and his face is  
bright again.

REGAN  
Wonderfully! Everything is going wonderfully!

He exits. Before Cary follows:

CARY  
Are you free Wednesday? We could... plot.

She nods, and he exits. Beatrice goes back to work.

**SCENE 3**

Cary's apartment. As messy as before, maybe with a few more broken items scattered about.

They hunch over the table, working on the plans.

BEATRICE

I snuck downstairs yesterday while fat Wally the guard was on lunch. With a piece of measuring tape I once lifted from a Chinatown lingerie shop, I got measurements for all the basement columns. These four are the biggest--

CARY

--Northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest--

BEATRICE

--so we should rig primary charges there. The northeast column's the same as the others, but it's behind the HV/AC unit.

CARY

So if we put an extra explosive pack there--

BEATRICE

--It might spread into the air ducts! Spit flame straight up into the cafe -- melt all those collectable mugs shaped like the heads of noted authors. I hate them. They stare.

CARY

Good work, soldier.

BEATRICE

Do you have that money for me?

CARY

What?

BEATRICE

The twenty-five bucks. I spent my last sawbuck on dumplings.

CARY

Oh! No, um, shoot.

BEATRICE

It's okay.

CARY

I could have paid for your dumplings.

BEATRICE

It's okay. I need it soon, though. My iguanas grow frail.

CARY

Can we take a break?

BEATRICE

Sure. So...have you ever done anything like this before?

CARY

Sure, yeah, of course! Why? Do I seem green?

BEATRICE

What's the craziest thing you ever did?

CARY

Well...you won't tell anyone?

BEATRICE

Not if it's a good story.

CARY

Six or seven years ago, in the stickiest stretch of a superglue summer, Regan's Books came under assault.

BEATRICE

Oh?

CARY

Book vendors. Up all down our block, selling ragged copies of claptrap pilfered from the pockets of unsuspecting NYU students. At all hours they were chewing tobacco, cursing, belting bawdy ballads. They urinated freely!

BEATRICE

So Super Hal and Cary the Wonder-Reader struck back?

CARY

With impunity. We went to Chinatown, to a black market fireworks vendor that Hal once sold hashish, and stocked up.

BEATRICE

With what? What happened?

CARY

The next morning, when the cabal of misfits returned to hawk their garbage, we unleashed bottle rockets, Roman candles, and a hail of deadly Saturn missiles.

BEATRICE  
(impressed)  
Was anyone hurt?

CARY  
One of the vendors lost his eye, but all the books were okay.

BEATRICE  
Fantastic!

CARY  
Maybe it sounds childish, but--

BEATRICE  
(feigning stomach pain)  
Ugh!

CARY  
Are you okay?!

BEATRICE  
I feel like I ate a brick.

CARY  
I can make some tea. Settle your belly.

BEATRICE  
Stay a minute. Rub my stomach.

She takes his stiff hand and puts it on  
her stomach, then leans on his  
shoulder.

BEATRICE  
Relax some of your muscles.

CARY  
Sorry.

BEATRICE  
Soup dumplings are the funniest thing. I always burn my  
mouth.

CARY  
It looks okay to me.

BEATRICE  
I didn't know they had Chinese food outside of Manhattan.

CARY  
Well they have Chinese people here.

BEATRICE  
Oh. This really isn't such a bad neighborhood.

CARY

The Unisphere may be garish, but in person it has a surprising effect.

She kisses him, then laughs.

CARY

What?!

BEATRICE

No! No, it's nothing. It's just -- that was calamitous.

CARY

Stop laughing!

BEATRICE

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Let's, okay, I'm not a pro, but maybe I can coach. Relax your lips.

They try again. They keep trying.

BEATRICE

Nicer, isn't it?

CARY

Mmmrf.

BEATRICE

Sure. Now, try making them soft...then hard...then soft...then hard. And then you can...

She glides his hand up her chest. He breaks the kiss.

CARY

Nope. Nope. I'm gonna make that tea.

He exits to kitchen.

BEATRICE

Cary. Come back out here.

He returns.

BEATRICE

What's up your ass?

CARY

Nothing! I like kissing! I just can't right now.

BEATRICE

You're sweating. What's wrong? You can tell Beatrice.

CARY

It's the money.

BEATRICE

I can wait a few hours.

(beat)

What the fuck are you hiding from me? Tell me Cary.

She swats him.

BEATRICE

Tell me. Come on.

(swatting harder)

I won't be mad.

CARY

Mr. Regan's got some money saved...he's paying me for this.

BEATRICE

What?

CARY

He hasn't paid me yet--

BEATRICE

How much is it?

CARY

Fifty thousand dollars.

BEATRICE

And you let me beg for twenty five bucks?!

CARY

But we can share it! Split it, even. You deserve it. You're very cute.

BEATRICE

Don't gimme that. I'm not taking your money. Of course not.

CARY

No?

BEATRICE

If he's got fifty, there's more. Probably a lot more.

CARY

Shit. Can we go back to kissing?

BEATRICE

Finder's fee. Ten percent. That filthy old man's going to give me ten percent.

CARY

Please...don't ask him for that. Just take half of mine!

BEATRICE

Why are you protecting him? You're such a toady.

CARY

Am not!

BEATRICE

That's a toady thing to say. You're giving up twenty five thousand just to avoid a fight?

CARY

It's...Jesus. Okay. He isn't just doing this for fun. Mr. Regan, Hal -- I shouldn't tell you this -- he has cancer. He was gone for a long time trying to cure it and it didn't work out. In the Philippines.

BEATRICE

(laughing)

You believe that?

CARY

I...of course. The Philippines!

BEATRICE

Have you seen his chart? Talked to an oncologist? He moves around pretty good for a terminal case.

CARY

He's a robust specimen.

BEATRICE

If he were sick, he would look it. You're sweet, but you're a dupe. He's gonna skip out with the money. With our money!

CARY

Don't talk about him like that. I know how he seems, but there's good in there somewhere.

BEATRICE

My aunt Nelly -- a kind of lizard woman -- had real bad throat cancer when I was a kid. It didn't kill her -- she ended up with one of those voice boxes -- but until it decided to leave her alone, she was in bad shape. Withered, frail, vacant. None of the energy necessary to play Hal.

CARY

Just draw! Please. You're confusing me.

He goes to sit, first tearing the sheets off the sofa. He has trouble folding them, and she yanks them away.

BEATRICE

Oh for God's sake. Here!

CARY

He never used to stink like this.

BEATRICE

Just look at your apartment. It's a Hal Regan storage center. Those boxes pay rent?

CARY

They don't bother me.

BEATRICE

You need to--

CARY

--Hey! Look at this!

He gets up and runs to one of the boxes, opens it and, not finding what he wants, goes to another one.

CARY

It's not all junk.

He comes back with a book.

CARY

Look -- Treasure Island. 1911, illustrations by NC Wyeth. I salvaged it just before the wreckers came.

BEATRICE

Pirate stories?

CARY

(with gusto)

Here, page 216. "One more step, Mr. Hands, and I'll blow your brains out. Dead men don't bite, you know." Those browns. They don't use that kind of color any more.

He gets more books.

CARY

I've got others. There's a really pretty Modern Library Sherlock Holmes, and a collected Roald Dahl with pictures the size of your arm.

BEATRICE

But why give them half your apartment?

CARY

They're beautiful.

BEATRICE

Yeah? So are sunsets -- they happen every day.

CARY

Not from that window. Listen. He doesn't enter into it. I just love the smell of books. That's why, when things quit working with my parents, I started going to his shop. It was stuffy, and hot, and he ran his customers like West Point cadets. But there was a little nook in the back where he kept the used paperbacks, the pocket sized ones, mass market, and there was just too much turnaround to keep that little room in any kind of order. It was a mess. He hated it. But I would go there after school, and on weekends, and perch on this little stool and smell those books, and read those books, and that was the first time I was ever happy being alone. I'm going to own my own store, and it won't be like his, dark, impeccably ordered, with a platform to lord over the customers. It's going to be light, and messy, and people will be able to come there to be alone.

BEATRICE

How much is that first edition worth?

CARY

I wouldn't ever price it.

BEATRICE

A week of groceries? A month's rent?

CARY

Much higher.

BEATRICE

Could you buy a car with it? Make the down payment on a condo? After Regan skipped out on you, how long could you have eaten on that one book.

CARY

You don't understand--

The buzzer rings.

CARY

Hello?

The response is gibberish.

CARY

Come on up.

BEATRICE

You're not a revolutionary. You're a sap. I don't care about bookstores. I loathe them, and I loathe books, even ones with pretty pictures.

BEATRICE

I am here because the stupid green shirt I have to wear itches like crazy and my boss won't let me wear a tank top underneath it because he likes to look at my tits. I am here for vengeance, and I want to get paid for it.

CARY

Wyeth painted those pictures on canvasses ten feet tall. That's bigger than Washington Crossing the Delaware.

Cary answers the door. Regan enters, awkwardly carrying gasoline and a crate.

CARY

Need a hand?

REGAN

What? No. It's fine. You're not strong enough.

CARY

What's in there?

REGAN

Just some petrol, a little dynamite.

He drops his load. Loudly.

CARY

Yah! Oh, God!

REGAN

Oh, it's fine. The detonator's in my pocket.

He feels. It's not.

CARY

(fearful)

Tea?

REGAN

I need no stimulants. Where is my plan?

Regan rushes to the table and hungrily inspects the pages, making notes.

REGAN

Oh of course. Yes, yes -- simply diabolical!

BEATRICE

How's your health, Hal?

REGAN

Let's not discuss it.

Cary puts away his first editions.

BEATRICE

Cary told me about going to the Philippines for treatment.

REGAN

Did he? It was a futile effort.

BEATRICE

What did they do? I've always thought about getting cancer and I'd love to know what it's like.

CARY

He's trying to work.

BEATRICE

I'm not joking. I really am curious about you. As a person.

REGAN

Yes, well, the native practices were as ancient and mystical as they were ineffective. I spent weeks naked save for a patchwork of poultices, eyes rolling backwards from the itch, distracted from the pain only by the madness I felt creeping in from my periphery. I would have died in that state had I not been rescued by the number.

BEATRICE

The number?

CARY

Yes. The number.

BEATRICE

And what was the name of the doctor--

CARY

Do you like the plans, Mr. Regan? She and I worked very hard.

REGAN

The plans? Oh my, Beatrice, you are a marvel.

BEATRICE

I'm just happy to be helpful.

REGAN

Helpful? Fourteen pages on the titan of Seventeenth Street. The minutiae of the security systems, lain out like an astrologer's key to the heavens. To disable the alarms from floor four to sub basement two? A five number sequence, altered each day according to the algorithm provided. You aren't helpful -- you're a miracle.

BEATRICE

And twenty-four ninety-five, you don't think a miracle could charge more?

CARY

Not now!

REGAN

Shut up Cary. For this work you're worth double. Fifty dollars even.

CARY

I think that's fair.

BEATRICE

I don't know. How about ten percent of what Cary gets?

REGAN

(grim)  
You told her?

CARY

She's tricky!

REGAN

I suppose that, to quote the apologetic honeymooner, it just slipped out.

CARY

I'll pay her out of what you were saving for me. Let's talk about something else.

BEATRICE

I'll come with, get my fingerprints everywhere, help you carry all that big heavy dynamite. I earn my pay.

REGAN

And if I don't have the money?

BEATRICE

You can get it.

REGAN

And if I don't pay, you'll tattle.

BEATRICE

Why not?

REGAN

Fine. How much?

BEATRICE

Five grand.

REGAN

Okay.

CARY

That's it?

REGAN

I'll get it. My ex-wife left some jewelry in our safe-deposit box. Should hock nicely. It's fine.

BEATRICE

It's fine.

REGAN

We could use the extra arm, since Cary's not much for lifting. You'll be handy, Becky.

CARY

Beatrice.

BEATRICE

Five thousand bucks. I can feel the hairs on the back of my neck.

REGAN

That, child, is the glancing blow of fate. Now Cary -- why don't you fetch a celebratory bottle?

CARY

We're not done yet.

REGAN

No?

CARY

We still need to figure out when to do it.

REGAN

We're ready -- why not go tonight? The night watch is off at midnight; it could be rigged by two. The store would be in flames at lunchtime.

CARY

Lunchtime?

REGAN

Why not? Put them off their digestion while we're at it.

BEATRICE

Naw, that's no good.

CARY

You promised me no one would die.

REGAN

No one of importance.

BEATRICE

Blow up who you like, but tomorrow's no good.

CARY

You said night time. After the night shift leaves, before the first custodians show up. Night time.

REGAN

Oh, piffle.

CARY

I don't want bloody hands!

REGAN

Fine. Thursday at 4 AM, then.

BEATRICE

Not Thursday either.

REGAN

What's wrong now?

BEATRICE

I have work Thursday. Do it Friday morning.

REGAN

But the anticipation is killing me.

BEATRICE

Thought that was cancer.

CARY

We've waited this long.

REGAN

Fine, Friday it is. Six AM, just before dawn illumines the grey, we will color the city with a column of fire the size of the Flatiron building.

CARY

Just so long as nobody gets hurt.

REGAN

They'll hurt, all right. As my inferno erupts skyward, the twits running this city will sit up in their sleep, brows sweaty with the sensation that a piece of their souls has just been chipped away.

BEATRICE

Okay. Is there anything else?

REGAN

Quiet. Patience. Let us savor this moment of possibility.

Regan and Cary savor.

REGAN

Now. Who wants to go buy champagne?

CARY

There's nowhere to buy champagne around here.

REGAN

Then wine, Cary.

CARY

The liquor store's closed.

BEATRICE

I saw a bodega open by the station.

REGAN

Cary knows the neighborhood. Go find something to drink.

CARY

Okay. I'll be back.

Cary exits. Hal goes to the kitchen.

BEATRICE

Working with you I think I can see why Cary is the way he is.

REGAN (O.S.)

If you think he's a mess now...

BEATRICE

He used to be worse?

REGAN (O.S.)

When he came to me he was an earthquake of indecision. Now he just quivers.

BEATRICE

Like Jell-O.

He returns with two mugs of tea. Sits beside her. Very close.

REGAN

Are there books in the basement?

BEATRICE

Yes.

REGAN

Many?

BEATRICE

It's our only on site storage, so yeah.

REGAN

In cardboard boxes? Not crates?

BEATRICE

Not crates. The Model Employee is not trained to use a crow bar.

REGAN

It's a shame. Cardboard never burns the way one wishes.

He whispers something. She snorts, uncomfortable.

REGAN

You know I don't joke. You're too good for Cary. He's a limp noodle.

BEATRICE

He's your friend. You have few.

REGAN

You've a beautiful mouth. Your teeth are like little marshmallow cubes.

BEATRICE

Stop it.

REGAN

You wouldn't regret it.

She stands up.

REGAN

Won't you oblige a dying old man? It's been a long time.

He grabs her wrist.

BEATRICE

Fuck off.

REGAN

I could lay you so right you'd pray for a snapped spine to lessen the sensation. I'm already paying you for the work -- consider it a tip!

She gathers her stuff. He doesn't watch. She stuffs a few handfuls of TNT into her bag.

BEATRICE

Tell your charge I said goodbye.

REGAN

Boys like Cary don't know the first thing about a good meaty fuck. I'm a professional.

She leaves. Chuckling, Hal goes back to work. Cary enters.

REGAN

Back so soon?

CARY

The bodega was closed, but I remembered I've got a bottle of wine product in the fridge. I was saving it. Why did Beatrice leave?

REGAN

Long train ride home.

CARY

She looked angry on the stairs.

REGAN

What did she tell you?

CARY

She said she had to get back to take her cat out of the oven.

REGAN

That's it, then.

CARY

Fickle woman.

REGAN

Oh? I was just starting to like her.

CARY

Don't bother. She has misplaced priorities. This is a grand operation and, and one a bookhater like that doesn't deserve a part in!

REGAN

Oh well. Now, clean this stuff up and I'll open the wine product.

CARY

It's your mess.

REGAN

It's our mess, which means it's your mess. So clean it up.

Regan goes to the kitchen.

CARY

Jesus -- do we need this much dynamite?

REGAN (O.S.)

There's crates more. They're shipping me the rest.

He returns, holding a bottle. Unscrews the cap and drinks.

REGAN

We could do the one in Tribeca next.

CARY

They track dynamite sales, you know.

REGAN

Of course they do. It's a volatile substance.

CARY

Why don't we just use gasoline? Soak the stacks and light a match. If we cut the sprinklers before--

REGAN

--be quiet. I didn't come back for any petty arson. I'm not seventeen.

CARY

You've been sloppy.

REGAN

So we get arrested! What's the matter with that? It's what happens when you commit crimes. Now come have a drink.

CARY

We're going to jail, aren't we? Mammoth cops will find us, and make me wear itchy clothes and sleep in an itchy bed. The real criminals will pick on me, and call me four eyes and make me sit at my own table in the prison mess -- it will be just like high school except it will never end! Oh God. Oh God. I'm going to have an attack!

He has an attack. Regan shakes him by the hair, but Cary doesn't calm down.

REGAN

This is what I've been trying to show you. I offer a chance to live brightly, with greater glory than most men ever even snatch at, and there's no sense worrying about what happens after. This will be our masterpiece.

CARY  
(to himself)

Doom.

REGAN  
Or perhaps it doesn't matter at all.

CARY  
Don't say that.

REGAN  
I can feel the corrupted cells wrapping around my organs like a fat woman's fists gripping an overstuffed empanada.

CARY  
Don't talk like that.

REGAN  
That's the other part you've been trying not to think about, isn't it? Perhaps I'm guilty of that too. Worrying about the load bearing capacity of those four basement pillars, rather than the weight my broken body can hold. It doesn't matter.

CARY  
It does.

REGAN  
It doesn't. Let's go to sleep.

They get ready for bed. Just before Cary turns in, he takes one last look at the plans. He scratches something out, and writes.

REGAN  
Don't touch those.

CARY  
I was just changing the time--

REGAN  
--those are final.

CARY  
Sure, but it still has the detonator's going off at noon. Just to be sure--

REGAN  
--it's fine--

CARY  
--No, it says noon--

REGAN

--that's correct.

CARY

What happened to the fires of dawn?

REGAN

I decided I want everyone to see.

CARY

Let them see the wreckage.

REGAN

No. I want New York to see it happen, for the city to pause with half a roast beef sandwich hanging out of her mouth and watch, rapt.

CARY

Everyone will be in the building!

REGAN

I also decided I want to kill a lot of people. Let them die along with this mutilated body.

CARY

I told you before, we're not killing anyone!

REGAN

But Cary. We are.

CARY

Thursday -- my God! Beatrice will be there on Thursday!

REGAN

Conspirators are like bicycle wheels. More than two and you start to look like a fucking toddler.

CARY

I'll call the police! Burning those books is bad enough, but I will never kill.

REGAN

You mean you won't kill a particular thick thighed redhead.

CARY

I won't kill anybody! Perhaps this is a shock, but you and I are different people.

REGAN

When I came back you were barely a person at all.

CARY

No. When you left I was nothing. Since then I'd acquired an iPhone and Chinese take out containers. You laid waste to all that!

REGAN

I've rebuilt you.

CARY

I'm not a murderer.

REGAN

You're a coward.

CARY

No! I'm doing the bravery thing. I'm standing by my convictions.

REGAN

What convictions? Those proud, bold lettered categories of right and wrong you threw aside two weeks ago, drooling at the chance for violence?

CARY

(overlapping)

Don't do this, Hal.

REGAN

Or the commitment to your teacher which you abandoned at the first batted eyelash from that--

CARY

(overlapping)

Be quiet!

REGAN

--from that dime novel tart?!

Cary shoves Regan onto the sofa, where the old man collapses into a coughing fit.

CARY

Is it the money?

REGAN

My concerns are strictly philosophical and explosive.

CARY

Why not kill me too? Keep it all!

REGAN

I don't care about the money.

CARY

You're too selfish, too petty not too. You don't even need it -- you just don't want her to have it.

REGAN

I don't care about it and neither should you. Money's not important.

CARY

It's so easy to...of course.

REGAN

Of course.

CARY

No fifty thousand dollars, no jewelry, and no Molly's Books. You're a pig, Hal.

REGAN

But at least I'm not a fool.

CARY

Stop needling me.

REGAN

You are my charge and I will speak to you how I like.

CARY

Then I quit! Ha!

REGAN

We had an agreement, Miller. Seven years.

CARY

Seven years terminated by your disappearing act.

REGAN

You collapsed in my absence. Without me you have nothing.

CARY

Actually, no. I've never murdered anyone, and I'm pleased about that.

REGAN

You've never done anything at all.

CARY

I have an idea. Let's run dates.

REGAN

Now's not the time for rehearsal.

CARY

No, let's. I'll start. When was Cary Miller born?

REGAN

You have been behaving erratically ever since you met that girl.

CARY

When was Cary Miller born?

REGAN

This is immaterial.

CARY

When was he first made homeless? How did he claw his way back to reality, and by whom was that once again shattered?

REGAN

You're acting like a child.

CARY

Oh, here's a good one! When did he first receive an orgasm at the hands of another?

REGAN

I'm going to bed.

CARY

WHEN?!

REGAN

I'm going to bed now.

CARY

I quit, Hal. You're on the street tomorrow.

REGAN

Take a night to think about what you're doing.

CARY

Don't lecture me.

REGAN

This will be my last one. I want you to consider what this will mean to -- remember all that I've done for you in the past. If you're so proudly above murder, consider the moral implications of casting a cancerous old man into the maw of Queens.

CARY

Quit fooling! I know you don't have cancer.

REGAN

There too you are wrong.

CARY

Stop trying to play my sympathy.

REGAN

Were I healthy, I would never have left in the first place. All would be as was. Whether that would be better, I don't know. The store will be gone by noon on Thursday, and your tramp with it. That is simple fact. I would like for you to come with me, but I can't force you. You're not a teenager any more.

Cary buries his head in his hands.

REGAN

A few dozen sticks of dynamite, a few gallons of gasoline, a few empty lives obliterated, and it could make you whole. Perhaps my lessons have been misguided, but take this one to heart. In their lives, most men have only one or two chances to effect change. Few take them. When you landed in my shop, I was given my first one, and I suppose I failed. This is your first opportunity and my final one. I suggest you think hard before you take it away from us.

He rolls over to sleep.

CARY

I'm not listening any more, Hal.

REGAN

Mr. Regan, if you please. Now get some sleep.

CARY

I'm not through--

REGAN

--Turn out the lights.

Cary flounders about the room. Regan snores softly. Cary goes into his room, then emerges in a brown trench coat. He fills his pockets with dynamite, takes a can of gasoline and Beatrice's plans. He drops the gasoline in the hallway and Hal barely stirs.

Clumsily, Cary duct-tapes dynamite to the four legs of the sofa and joins the sticks with a single fuse, which he runs out to the hallway. He lights it and shuts the door.

After a second, he reopens the door and turns the lights out.

**SCENE 4**

The Barnes and Noble lobby, past midnight. It's dark, but the space is illuminated by a streetlight outside, and a few pale night lights.

The alarm sounds. Cary sprints on stage, tosses his gasoline aside, and keys in the code to make it shut up. He starts to laugh.

He empties the gas can on the displays of calendars, etc. Takes out dynamite to stack, but his hands are too shaky.

CARY

Hoo. Okay.

He takes a joint out of his pocket, lights it and tosses the match.

Nothing explodes.

CARY

That's better.

He walks around, inspecting the stock. A CD catches his eye.

CARY

Ooh! Sounds of the Jazz Age? No!

He pelts it across the room.

CARY

Poor notebooks. You never hurt anybody. Shh. Shh. It's okay. Soon you'll be in a better place. All right. All righty. Time to go downstairs and check out the old basement. Nothing out of the ordinary, just taping up a little dynamite. And that is very, very cool.

He disappears through the basement door.

CARY (O.S.)

OH GOD DAMN IT!

Footsteps on the stopped escalator. The smoldering joint ignites the gasoline. Beatrice enters.

BEATRICE

What the fuck!

Cary enters.

CARY

You! You have to go downstairs and take those charges down.

BEATRICE

Hey Cary. Look at that!

CARY

Oh! A fire!

BEATRICE

Yeah!

CARY

Shit!

BEATRICE

Yeah!

CARY

Uh. Uh. Uh. Here!

He tosses her a stack of calendars.  
They tamp it out.

BEATRICE

Thanks. Why did you put it out?

CARY

It could have set the whole--oh, God damn it. He's right,  
he's right! I'm a non-entity.

BEATRICE

Calm down.

CARY

I can't even properly blow up a building.

BEATRICE

Relax. Relax, just calm down and have some fun.

CARY

What's the point, without him here?

He takes a deep breath.

CARY

I'm doing this.

BEATRICE

Good.

CARY

Which means you've got to go downstairs and take all that shit down.

BEATRICE

Unimpressed by my handiwork?

CARY

You stole it from us.

BEATRICE

You want me to disarm the charges so you can put them back up.

CARY

Yes.

BEATRICE

Do you know how the charges work?

CARY

You, you tape them around and then you stick in the, uh, this thing, and then you run it out--

BEATRICE

I did a professional job down there. Let's leave it. But I like what you've done with the gasoline.

CARY

Don't! Just, don't! I am -- why is everybody always talking down to me? I'm not some stupid fucking kid, okay? I came here to save your life.

BEATRICE

Yeah?

CARY

The store was gonna blow Thursday at noon, like Hal wanted all along. You would have gone up in flames with everybody else. But I came to do it now, so that he wouldn't get to kill you.

BEATRICE

That's very sweet.

CARY

Yes, god damn it, yes it is.

BEATRICE

It's good to see you getting out from the old man's thumb.

CARY

But you, you just went ahead and saved your own life, didn't you?

BEATRICE

And yours.

CARY

He and I -- we had a relationship, one way or another, and it was chugging along fine until you came along. He was going to get his five hundred foot column of fire, and I was going to get him back, at least for a little while. You complicated everything. You ruined everything. And now here I am, here, alone, and Hal is at home with--

BEATRICE

--the police--

CARY

--with that fuse, what?

BEATRICE

I called in a tip. Ratted him out as the crazy old man who had just rigged the innocent chain bookstore for demolition. Said he lived with a sweet, but dimwitted, young boy. They'll catch him at your place, but they'll be too late to stop the store from going up.

CARY

They're going to find him with the dynamite.

BEATRICE

We'll be free -- with fifty five thousand dollars.

CARY

You weren't doing this for the money, were you?

BEATRICE

No.

CARY

There wasn't any money.

BEATRICE

What? Oh for fuck's sake.

CARY

But he did have cancer!

BEATRICE

Finally, some good news!

CARY

At least, I think he did.

BEATRICE

I'll strangle him. When he gets out of jail I'll crush his brittle windpipe.

CARY

Fine. Now leave. I came to do this alone so you wouldn't throw your freedom away for money that wasn't there.

BEATRICE

Christ. Well. The work is its own reward, right? At least you didn't bring Mr. Living Dead. He had begun to get deeply creepy, did you know that? Real scumbag.

CARY

Leave him alone.

BEATRICE

You don't know what you're talking about.

CARY

Before I left -- the sofa -- I fixed four sticks of dynamite with a ten minute fuse.

BEATRICE

What?

CARY

It's not like I ever liked the apartment, anyway, but all my books--

BEATRICE

I thought you weren't a murderer.

CARY

But he was--

BEATRICE

--what about your neighbors?

CARY

Holy shit. I didn't even, he makes me so angry... Oh God. Oh Beatrice. I'm a murderer!

She kisses him. Hard.

CARY

Shouldn't we--

She kisses him onto the ground.

CARY

There's gasoline everywhere.

BEATRICE

It's okay! You work at a laundromat.

He stops her.

CARY

I don't want my, the first time to be like this.

BEATRICE

Whoa. Whoa!

A long pause.

CARY

I need to go check on stuff.

He wanders downstairs.

BEATRICE

Jesus Christ. At least he wasn't another faggot.

Regan enters and clamps his hand over Beatrice's mouth. Takes the detonator from her pocket.

REGAN

Your cute little neck isn't strong enough.

With a couple of bungee cords, he binds her hands and secures her to a pole. The effort sends him into a coughing fit.

BEATRICE

Untie me.

REGAN

No.

BEATRICE

Untie me or I'll have your withered balls for stew.

REGAN

You silly little girl. I was halfway down the block when your friends in blue arrived. Hal Regan does not go to jail.

BEATRICE

CARY!

REGAN

Yes, of course. Cary! Come here, Cary!

Cary enters.

REGAN

But don't you two look stupid when you're surprised.

CARY

Mr. Regan.

REGAN

Can't even lay a fuse right, eh? You broke it when you shut the door.

CARY

Let her go, Hal.

REGAN

And what's this burn on the carpet? It's supposed to go all at once!

BEATRICE

You're both fucking insane.

CARY

Let her go.

REGAN

She stays; the building goes. Don't pout -- I could have been much meaner. Could break her fingers, or undo her belt. I bet she'd like that.

Regan pinches Beatrice's thigh. Cary charges, and Regan floors him with a swift punch in the nose.

CARY

Owwwww.

BEATRICE

Pussy! Get up!

CARY

I think he broke it.

REGAN

Nobody runs out on Hal Regan.

BEATRICE

Fight him!

CARY

It won't work, Hal--

REGAN

(pressing Cary's nose)

--that's not my name.

As Cary howls in pain, Regan binds his feet and hands. Cary struggles, but Regan is stronger.

REGAN

No, I don't have time for torture, even if the situation calls for it. I'm a busy man!

CARY

You've got to quit thinking about yourself like, like you're some kind of God. You weren't even a very good shopkeeper.

REGAN

The desperate lies of a broken boy.

BEATRICE

It's true. The shop was horrible.

Regan tries to re-tape her mouth, but she squirms out of the way.

CARY

Destroying us won't alter your wasted life.

Regan blows a raspberry.

REGAN

I'm sure you've made a perfect mess down there.

CARY

Then it's your fault, isn't it? Teacher?

REGAN

You've never heard a single word that's spilled out of my mouth.

CARY

I'm sorry for trying to kill you. Okay? Is that what you wanted to hear?

BEATRICE

I'm sorry too. For everything.

REGAN

I know you're sorry.

CARY

Then let her go!

REGAN

No.

BEATRICE

Aghhh!

REGAN

She'll just go to the police again.

BEATRICE

I will, damn it! You deserve it -- you pathetic, wannabe terrorist.

REGAN

Insults will get you nowhere. All right. Everything is good up here...plenty of gasoline...Ah! The dynamite!

CARY

Wait! Hal, you desiccated old man, hold still. You're not angry at me for trying to blow you up. It's that I failed.

REGAN

Psychoanalysis looks pretty silly when you're hog-tied.

Cary struggles to standing.

CARY

I'm right, aren't I? I can tell, when your eyes flick back and forth like that.

BEATRICE

For once he's quiet.

REGAN

Your own weakness--

CARY

--I think it's what you wanted.

REGAN

I prefer not to be exploded, thank you.

CARY

It's what you've been trying to teach me since I was a kid, right? To finish this apprenticeship I had to kill you. That was the end of your lesson plan.

REGAN

Hm.

CARY

If it's true -- if I've finally understood you -- then you can let us go. You've done your work.

REGAN

But your reasons -- you were doing it for her.

CARY

What do I care about her? She's barely literate.

BEATRICE

Ha.

REGAN

One of your half baked theories about the purity of the written word, then?

CARY

It was for me. Just for me.

REGAN

Well.

CARY

Cut the tape, Hal.

Regan rips the tape holding Beatrice to the pole.

BEATRICE

As much as I want to enjoy this tender moment...

Hands bound, she runs out of the shop. Regan tears Cary's tape off.

CARY

So are you going to kill me?

REGAN

No.

CARY

Then let's go to work.

REGAN

I thought you'd quit.

CARY

I told you -- this is for me.

REGAN

Finally. I have my apprentice back!

Beatrice runs back in.

CARY

You! Get out, we don't need you.

BEATRICE

There are policemen outside.

REGAN

Impossible.

BEATRICE

I imagine they followed your stench all the way from Flushing.

CARY  
How many are there?

BEATRICE  
We are surrounded.

REGAN  
We'll have to sneak out--

BEATRICE  
--Girt. We are girt by police.

CARY  
Hal, check the basement -- there might be a route through the  
sewars.

He exits.

CARY  
If we could get to the roof--

BEATRICE  
--and go where? I think I hear a helicopter.

CARY  
We could leap, from roof to roof.  
(leaping)  
Like this!

BEATRICE  
It's a thirty foot drop to the next building. Your ankles  
would burst.

CARY  
I don't drink enough milk for that.

Regan returns.

REGAN  
Locked.

CARY  
Aren't there any connections to the neighboring buildings, or--  
-

REGAN  
Nothing! Didn't you study the plans?

BEATRICE  
What do we do!

CARY  
Then...then couldn't we fight our way out?

BEATRICE

That's madness!

REGAN

Decide fast -- they're advancing, a dozen of them in riot gear.

Cary tosses Regan a stick of dynamite. Regan nods, and strides offstage.

BEATRICE

We have to surrender.

CARY

This is too important.

REGAN (O.S.)

Step off, Copper! I've got hostages!

Dynamite EXPLODES off stage. Regan returns.

REGAN

That'll keep 'em for a minute.

CARY

Think, okay. Fucking focus. Are there any guns here? Doesn't the manager keep an M-16 on hand in case the teenagers get rowdy?

BEATRICE

The Model Employee is never armed.

CARY

Any bats? Don't you have a sporting goods section?!

REGAN

It'll never work.

BEATRICE

Listen to him.

REGAN

We'd be shot down before we clear the front steps.

BEATRICE

You're not worth that.

REGAN

Then we have to--

CARY

--yes. We've got to blow it.

I'm going out there!

BEATRICE

He stops her.

Go downstairs and check the blasting things. Hal, give 'em another stick to--

CARY

--You're leaving.

REGAN

Yes!

BEATRICE

No. We're staying here, and we're pushing the button. We'll take a handful of the pigs with us!

CARY

Don't be wasteful. You're too good an employee to throw away like that.

REGAN

We're so close!

CARY

Go out as hostages, and I'll turn myself in.

REGAN

Fantastic!

BEATRICE

No! We're doing this.

CARY

Nope. Nope, we're not.

BEATRICE

She exits.

Okay. You got rid of her. Fine. Now what do we do?

CARY

I told you. You leave, and I'll follow. Tell them I'll be out when the two of you are on the subway. Really I appreciate the enthusiasm but if you were thinking clearly you'd remember that suicide is rarely one's best option.

REGAN

But Hal Regan doesn't go to jail.

CARY

REGAN

I'll just surrender. Hands in the air. As far as they know, you've got nothing to do with it.

CARY

They'll tear you apart.

REGAN

I'm old, sick and crazy. They won't hold me long -- it's okay.

CARY

I don't care -- I'm just used to you, that's all.

REGAN

This will all blow over in a few days. I promise. Or don't you trust me any more?

CARY

It's not--

REGAN

--Goodbye, Cary. You've done enough for today.

CARY

Goodbye.

They shake hands. Cary exits.

Regan reshelves the books that have fallen to the floor.

He primes the detonator and palms it. He opens his coat. Underneath is a jacket of dynamite. He checks that it's on solidly, cinches his belt, opens his arms and walks outside.

And then the play is over.