

ACT I

AT RISE: Joey Padowaski is sleeping on the sofa bed. He is suddenly roused by audible voices coming from outside his window. He gets out of bed wearing only his T-shirt and boxers and crosses to the downright window and peers out.

JOEY

Shit! There are more of them out there.

(JOEY begins to pace back and forth.)

JOEY (CONT'D)

This is crazy... How in the hell am I going to get out of this? Shit! Shit! Shit!

(NEIL appears out of the downright shadows and watches Joey go back and forth for a moment.)

NEIL

Will you stop pacing like a caged animal?

(JOEY is jolted by the sudden awareness of NEIL.)

JOEY

Good Lord!

NEIL

You're making me nauseous.

JOEY

Isn't there supposed to be some sudden chill or mist that precedes your entrance into a room?

NEIL

That is so cliché.

JOEY

Don't you have a mausoleum to visit, funeral to attend, isn't there some house in need of a haunting?

NEIL

I don't like this anymore than you do.

(JOEY grabs a pair of pants off the recliner and puts them on.)

JOEY

Oh, you...you're reveling in every pernicious moment. *(Beat)* Will you look at me? You're not even real! Just an annoying voice inside my head. You're a figment of my imagination, a piece of undigested pepperoni pizza. That's all.

NEIL

Why couldn't I have been a choice cut of filet mignon?

(JOEY continues his pacing.)

JOEY

There are so many of them. Where are they all coming from?

NEIL

Go on. Ignore me. See if I care. I'll just stand over here. Quiet. Out of the way.

(JOEY stops and confronts NEIL.)

JOEY

You don't belong here!

NEIL

Don't you think I don't know that.

JOEY

Then why don't you leave?

NEIL

Because I don't know where to go, and even if I did, I wouldn't know how to get there.

(JOEY closes the convertible bed and puts the cushions back in place.)

JOEY

Well, you can't stay here.

NEIL

I don't think we have a choice.

JOEY

Maybe you don't have options, but I do.

NEIL

Really?

JOEY

Yeah.

NEIL
What?

JOEY
Wilma at Second Avenue Witch Craft.

NEIL
Ahhh...good old Wilma.

JOEY
She says she could do a spiritual cleans on the apartment.

NEIL
Ahh... a colonic for spiritual slug. *(Beat)* Just hope she's sober when she does it. Might get her potions crossed. She could end up opening up the gates of hell. *(Beat)* Listen man, let work on this together. You've got a problem; I've got a dilemma. Two heads or better than one. Even if one is a dead head.

JOEY
Still with the bad jokes.

NEIL
I thought it was clever. You've no sense of humor. What do you say?

JOEY
NO!

NEIL
If you went out there and talked to them maybe they'd...

JOEY
That would be like throwing kerosene on smoldering embers.

NEIL
Communication is the key to resolution.

JOEY
I'm not being sucked into their fucked up, sordid lives.

NEIL
Couldn't be any worse than yours.

JOEY
Oh, just go away, will you? Shoo! I'm tired and confused; I haven't had a good night sleep in days. I'm probably going to get fired from my job for not showing up. *(Beat)* There must be a halfway station where people like you can wait, some kind of lounge area for the recently departed.

(NEIL gives JOEY an incredulous look.)

JOEY

Don't you have a spiritual guide...dead relatives to give you the low down on the afterlife?

NEIL

This is it man. You an I in a life and death dance.

JOEY

Find another dance partner.

NEIL

Hey, ask yourself what forces have brought us together in life and death.

JOEY

I give up. What?

NEIL

Fate!

JOEY

Fate?

NEIL

The inevitable events predestined...

JOEY

I know what-- This is bullshit!

NEIL

It doesn't matter why I'm here; I'm here, and we're in this together.

JOEY

There is no we here, no brotherhood of losers, no solidarity of freaks, just me, the crowd downstairs and my closest friend--total insanity.

(JOEY crosses to the kitchen and starts a pot of coffee. NEIL is drawn upstage by the smell.)

NEIL

What are you going to do run?

JOEY

Yeah, I'll run, if I have to.

Where to next?
NEIL

I don't know.
JOEY

You're going to run out of places after a while.
NEIL

Not likely.
JOEY

Smells good.
NEIL

What?
JOEY

The coffee...smells good.
NEIL

You can smell?
JOEY

All five sense are present and accounted for and, of course, the sixth sense. (*Beat*) I can see living people.
NEIL

I'll pack a few things and sneak out the back.
JOEY

I wish I could have a taste. Never thought I'd miss something so much.
NEIL

All I want is to make it through another day under the radar.
JOEY

You're dealing with a battle royal, psyche verses reality.
NEIL

Will you shut up!
JOEY

Someone's in need of a hug.
NEIL

(NEIL crosses to JOEY and attempts to give him a hug. JOEY avoids his embrace.)

JOEY

Hey! That's close enough.

NEIL

What's wrong? It's me, your old buddy. You're not afraid of me, are you?

JOEY

Just don't think it's a good idea to be embracing a spirit. I could get all of your...your ectoplasm on me. There could be unforeseen side effects, like...a...I don't know, a rash, disorientation, madness...

NEIL

Impotency.

JOEY

You need to go wherever you belong. I need those people outside to get away from my front door!

VARIOUS VOICES

Joey Padowaski let us see you. My son needs your help. God has sent you.

JOEY

You hear that? What do you say to a fool that wants Joey Padowaski, an auto-mechanic to help her son?

NEIL

Well, ma'am, pull the boy on in. We'll just put him on the rack, check under the hood; fix any broken thingamajigs, change him, lube him up, and he'll be good as new. Pick him up in about an hour.

(NEIL moves over to JOEY'S desks and is about to open a personal journal.)

JOEY

Hey! Get away from my journals!

NEIL

You're so secretive.

JOEY

It's called privacy

NEIL

Secret and private life of Joey Padowaski. The truth revealed.

JOEY

What's that suppose to mean.

What?

NEIL

You know what I'm talking about. Just don't bring it up again.

JOEY

Whatever.

NEIL

You can be so annoying.

JOEY

(NEIL also sees a pile of letters some have been opened and others remain sealed.)

NEIL

You got a lot of old letters here?

JOEY

Will you stop messing with my things?

NEIL

Sorry! Touchy. Touchy.

(JOEY takes a bunch of the letters and casually flips through them.)

JOEY

Letters...letters from people I once knew, faded memories that I should have burned years ago.

(Long pause)

NEIL

You know, communication can be very therapeutic. All that pent up psychosis and emotion...got let it out. Let it go. Free yo'self and the rest will follow. I think if you talk about your dilemma, it could almost be like an...an exorcism.

JOEY

An exorcism, huh? And if I emote, will you go away?

NEIL

(Thinking)

I don't know, man. I wouldn't want to end up in someplace worst than this. Why don't you tell me how the healing thing got started? Maybe you'll have an epiphany.

JOEY

Okay, I'm going to humor you, or me, or the madness that's slowly consuming me. *(Beat)* I almost drowned when I was a child. Think I must have told you about this before. We were on one of our little, disastrous, family outings. Me and my parents were on this row boat on Lake Champagne. I was clowning around, fell in the lake, couldn't swim, and nearly drowned. After that, I discovered I had this ability to heal. I started healing animals in the neighborhood, birds, dog, cats, my friend's cuts, and bruises. They all thought that it was some kind of cool magic trick.

(JOEY pours himself a cup of coffee and sits in the recliner.)

NEIL

(Prompting him)

Eventually you graduated to more formidable challenges.

JOEY

I was eighteen when I healed a paraplegic girl. *(Beat)* Then there was the incident in Seattle with the bike messenger incident. Had to leave Seattle after that. I don't know how the hell that reporter managed to find out my name.

NEIL

There's a pattern developing here.

JOEY

Really?

NEIL

Sure. You heal; you freak; you run. Now alls we have to do is alter the equation.

JOEY

How?

NEIL

By adding a new variable.

JOEY

Such as?

NEIL

You going down into the crowd and dancing the boogaloo in the nude. That would be proof positive that you were out of your mind. *(Beat)* I think we're making some headway. Is that it?

JOEY

What?

That's it on the healing? NEIL

Yeah. JOEY

You seem hesitant. NEIL

No. JOEY

Yes, I think there's... NEIL

I'm not hiding anything! JOEY

Just being thorough. NEIL

What is this the inquisition? JOEY

(Pause)

You know, that's not a bad idea. NEIL

What's not a bad idea? JOEY

The inquisition. NEIL

What in the hell-- JOEY

At the time of the Inquisition, there were only absolutes. No
indecisiveness about how to handle such matters. NEIL

What matters? JOEY

NEIL

The world was painted in broad strokes of black and white, none of this namby-pamby, middle gray, ambiguous bullshit. The Earth was flat, healing came direct from the hand of God, miracles only accorded under the auspices of the church, and if you farted, no one cared, because everyone smelled bad. In the Dark Ages, you would have simply been taken to a public square, tied to a stake and burned alive. End of story.

JOEY

Well, that makes me feel better.

(Long pause)

JOEY (CONT'D)

There was another one.

NEIL

Yeah?

JOEY

I...I...well, this boy had fallen off his bike and had a few scrapes and bruises.

NEIL

A few scrapes and bruises that's nothing. Nobody cares about a kid falling off his bike and getting a few knots on his nasty little head.

JOEY

It was a bit more serious than that.

NEIL

Yeah? What? What? He broke his nose, he knocked out his front teeth...what?

JOEY

It was motorcycle...

NEIL

Oi vey!

JOEY

...and the guy was thrown and landed in a rather awkward position...

(JOEY gestures indicating that the man had broken his neck.)

NEIL

You didn't.

JOEY

What was I suppose to do?

NEIL

Nothing! Absolutely nothing!

JOEY

The van that hit him didn't even stop.

NEIL

People get run over and left for dead everyday. That's just the way the world works. *(Beat)* Well, that's the way it used to work when I was a reluctant participant. You slow down, take a good look at the blood and gore; you thank God that it's not you lying there mangled and disemboweled on the side of the road and be on your way.

JOEY

I couldn't do that.

NEIL

Couldn't or wouldn't?

JOEY

The man was barely alive!

NEIL

You're not in charge of saving the world, Joey!

JOEY

Then why are people trying to die around me? *(Beat)* I kneeled down, reached out my hands and touched his broken body. After a moment, his eyes flew open; he took one look at me, grabs hold of my neck, and nearly choked me unconscious. *(Mimes squeezing someone's neck)* "Why don't you watch were you're going you stupid son-of-a-bitch!"

NEIL

A man in an accident like that just doesn't get up and walk away.

JOEY

Okay, what if I did have something to do with healing them. What if...what if I do have the power to heal? It's my power, my business. I can use it how I see fit.

NEIL

Joey, Joey, Joey. It's the perception of power not the actual power that rules the minds of men. If people believe you can do something for them, they will pursue you to the end of the earth. *(Beat)* I'm beginning to feel that this is just the tip of a very large iceberg.

(NEIL suspects that JOEY is withholding something.)

NEIL (CONT'D)

Alright, out with it!

JOEY

Okay...okay, my uncle was diagnosed with lymphoma. *(Beat)* It was my mother's little brother; she was devastated.

NEIL

Give me a number...a ballpark figure of how many people you have healed. Five? Ten? Fifteen?

JOEY

Thirty-five...

NEIL

Thirty-five?

JOEY

It's probably closer to forty.

NEIL

Forty? You do realize that there are laws against healing without a license. The AMA could have you put away for the rest of your life...solitary confinement, of course; the authorities couldn't risk you continuing to commit the same crime behind bars, upsetting the order of things, breeding anarchy. *(Beat)* Inmate 752399 has just been shafted through the heart. This is a job for the Healer of Alcatraz.

JOEY

Maybe they're healing themselves. Yeah, maybe my presence is just a catalyst.

NEIL

Maybe I can dance on the head of a pin along with a thousand of my disembodied compatriots. It's a party; it's a disco. *(Beat)* Nice theory, but unfortunately, it wouldn't hold up in a court of law.

JOEY

How in the hell did we get from death and mayhem to law?

NEIL

Not a difficult stretch considering the fact that--

(The intercom buzzer sounds.)

NEIL (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to answer that?