

MERE CENSORS

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MONROE, ABIGAIL, STEEL, and IAN are in their early-to-mid twenties. MONROE and ABIGAIL are female. STEEL and IAN are male.

IAN and STEEL have thin black network cables looped around their midriffs, partially binding them. These are bands of honor, awarded only to Barons. Like foot-binding or manicured fingernails, the ritual entanglement denotes a certain freedom from obligation—not that IAN or STEEL avail themselves of the idleness they are permitted. The director and costume designer should seek a workable balance between the symbolic gesture and the actor's free movement. STEEL has four loops. IAN has five.

Lights up on a seedy motel room, subtly awry. A dirty window shares a wall with the only door. A single bed claims the middle of the room. An oil painting (poorly executed) hangs over the head-board. A potted cactus is in the corner. No door separates the bathroom/toilet from the rest of the room. The curtains are drawn. Framed pictures of people meaningful to IAN line the top of the night table beside the bed; this is the only human touch in the room.

An strangely futuristic ancient television faces the cactus and bed. A thin black cable runs from the TV into the wall near the head of the bed. A telephone sits on the floor, obsolete. Its black cord also trails off into the wall by the headboard. The telephone is distinctly odd.

It is noon-time. IAN is sitting on the bed. He has been doing this for a few minutes or hours. Not even IAN knows which it has been. The effect is that of an unsmiling Buddha ensconced on the wrinkled sheets, though IAN is underweight for the rôle. His mind is far away. We observe the tableau for a silent moment.

[Voices outside: a man and a woman. The MAN counts off room numbers.]

MAN: Number ten. This is it.

[A whack on the door, then it opens wide. The MAN is carrying a bulky metal labeling/stamping gizmo used to claim network wiring rights. We can see the red splotch where he has just marked the door. His name, STEEL, is distinctive in his mark. The letters are surrounded with an intricate design, like Victorian gingerbread. STEEL notices IAN on the bed, and stops short.]

[MONROE peers into the room behind STEEL. She wears fashionably tinted glasses. She doesn't react to seeing IAN.]

STEEL: Fancy finding you here.

IAN: Hello, Steel.

STEEL: *[Gesturing to his stamping machine; is about to mark the nearest wall.]* Hope you don't mind.

IAN: Prior claim.

[IAN moves aside the painting above the bed, revealing his own stamp. Again, the mark is blood red, and IAN's name is prominent in the design. The mark drips slightly.]

STEEL: Oh. Well.

[He stamps the near wall.]

[Shrugs.] It's my job.

[Stamps another wall.]

IAN: The connection's going to come through this wall. *[He taps the wall with his stamp on it.]*

STEEL: Why take a chance? *[Stamps the remaining unmarked wall.]*

IAN: *[Resigned. He's had this argument before.]* You don't earn revenue from unused claims.

STEEL: Look, just because you say the network connection's going to come through *[Pointing.] there...* doesn't mean I have to agree, okay?

IAN: Sure. However you like.

[STEEL breaks out a collection of smaller stamps.]

I claimed this area years ago, Steel.

STEEL: Get her bags, will you?

[IAN looks chagrined, gets MONROE's bags and leads her into the room. MONROE seems withdrawn. Meanwhile, STEEL is compulsively rubber-stamping every last knick-knack in the room: TV, TV remote, bars of soap.]

IAN: I was like that once, too.

STEEL: Just remember who's older, okay?

IAN: *[A slight pause.]* I've been in the business longer.

STEEL: Manifest destiny, Ian. Just staking my claim.

[STEEL looks at MONROE.]

[A chilly silence.]

MONROE: *[Abruptly breaking the silence.]* Steel just closed a big deal.

IAN: Congratulations.

STEEL: Yeah, thanks.

[A pause.]

MONROE: A big transcontinental.

STEEL: A network stringing from Maine to Oregon. Straight shot across. Wiring rights to everything intersecting.

IAN: Sounds like a deal.

STEEL: I got it for a song. Didn't I, Monroe?

MONROE: For a song.

STEEL: Anonymous seller. Don't know why the crazy coot was so keen to get rid of it. Almost giving it away.

IAN: I don't think he wanted it anymore.

STEEL: Why not? It's the best damn deal in the country. Everyone's dying for net access. Right, Monroe?

MONROE: Dying.

STEEL: Rural communities are the last untapped market. They'll pay anything for access.

IAN: It's a good deal, Steel.

STEEL: You better believe it. *[Pause. Squints.]* Why do you say that?

IAN: I was selling cheap.

STEEL: You?

IAN: Yeah.

STEEL: What's wrong with it? What did I just get stuck with?

IAN: Nothing. It's a good line.

STEEL: Why did you sell it, then? You knew I'd buy it. It's good for a loop or two at least.

IAN: I didn't want it anymore, Steel. That's all.

STEEL: That doesn't make a lick of sense, Ian. I inked the deal this morning; I can't back out now. Tell me.

IAN: I just didn't want it anymore.

STEEL: *[Frustrated.]* Snark!

IAN: There are things more important than cable, Steel.

MONROE: What?

IAN: Things.

STEEL: *[Sarcastic.]* Things.

IAN: *[Looking him straight in the eye.]* Things.

[The room responds to STEEL as he grows angry. The walls smolder an angry red. Steam vents from beneath the bed. MONROE pulls her feet under her and curls in the center of the bed. The TV screen glows menacingly.]

STEEL: Being network Baron isn't enough for you? A claim on everything east of the Mississippi, not enough?

IAN: Don't do this, Steel.

STEEL: How many loops do you have now? Five?

IAN: I'm not competing.

STEEL: Not as long as you're winning. You're on my turf here, Ian.

IAN: My claim.

STEEL: Screw your claim.

[STEEL advances towards IAN. MONROE is curled in a ball, trying to ignore what is happening.]

IAN: It's the loops. Take them, then.

[IAN tries to free himself from his ornamental loops, but becomes entangled.]

STEEL: I intend to.

[STEEL smashes his fist through the plaster wall, withdraws a blade from the interior of the wall.]

IAN: I'm not going anywhere, Steel.

[IAN smashes his hand into the wall, but it bounces off without effect. He tries again, and a third time. He takes a deep breath and finally succeeds in smashing through the wall, bloodying his knuckles.]

[From the fetal position, MONROE screams. The room quiets. The lighting becomes normal. It is one o'clock in the afternoon.]

[STEEL breathes deeply. He replaces the blade. IAN removes his hand from the wall. The fight has never occurred.]

STEEL: This is unworkable.

The motel manager has given us room number ten. *You* are in room number ten. One of us can not be here.

IAN: I have room number ten.

STEEL: I will take room number eleven.

IAN: It doesn't exist, Steel.

STEEL: Room number nine, then. I will find the management. And complain. *[He is at the door.]* What idiot programmer coded this system? Two people should not be assigned the same room. Ever.

IAN: Room ten is the only unit left.

STEEL: Resource contention. That's insane.

[Deep breath.]

I will speak to the management.

[He breezes out.]

[A breath. IAN and MONROE are alone. A silence.]

IAN: Monroe.

[She lifts her head to meet IAN's gaze.]

I apologize.

[Silence. She does not look away.]

That wasn't entirely an accident.

MONROE: I didn't think it would be.

[A questioning look from IAN.]

Not you. *[She smiles.]*

IAN: No, I guess not. *[He relaxes a little bit.]*

I can't help it. I have to plan out everything.

[She nods, smiling.]

Plan everything, control nothing.

You got my message?

MONROE: I did.

IAN: And you came.

MONROE: Seems so.

IAN: Thank you.

MONROE: You're my friend.

[A beat.]

IAN: I hope it wasn't too much trouble getting here.

MONROE: Steel's pretty accommodating.

[Breath.]

IAN: It's been a while for us, hasn't it?

MONROE: *[Starting to speak at the same time.]* He gets things done, I mean.

[A moment's pause.]

IAN: Do you think he... *[Trails off.]*

MONROE: I don't think about it.

IAN: Why else would he come with you?

MONROE: I don't know.

IAN: I do.

MONROE: I just don't want to think about it.

IAN: Where did you meet him?

MONROE: Oh, somewhere.

IAN: Do you love him?

MONROE: *[Laughs.]* What a question!

IAN: Do you?

MONROE: *[A sad laugh.]* I don't know how.

IAN: What does that mean?

[A long pause.]

Never mind.

MONROE: It's been such a long time. Since I let myself... fall in love. And every day it seems that much further away. A dim memory. Like the world before wires. Until. Until I'm not sure I can do it anymore. Uncable myself. Let go completely.

IAN: Never?

MONROE: There's always something I hold back. Protection. Something. My heart doesn't leap into my throat anymore. I mean, I used to fall in love. It felt like a joyride on a charging hippopotamus. I remember... *[She trails off.]*

IAN: And not anymore.

MONROE: I'm too scared. Or I try to hard to make it happen. I don't know.

IAN: It just doesn't happen.

MONROE: No. *[She looks away.]*

IAN: Not for anyone?

[Silence. She doesn't answer.]

I...

[A long pause.]

I don't know.

[He looks at MONROE.]

[The photographs on the night table leap to the floor by themselves. IAN tries to catch them, tries to replace them on the table, but they elude his grasp and cascade to the floor as quickly as he picks them up: falling frames and broken glass.]

[IAN looks down sadly on the pile of crystal shards. He pulls a faded color photograph from the mess and gazes at it for a time. He sighs. Hands the photo to MONROE.]

IAN: I don't know what's wrong. Things are getting away from me.

I just can't control it anymore. Can't control any of it.

If I could have just one thing. Just one. . .

I think it would be to have some input. Some say in how it was all going to turn out. So I would make a difference.

MONROE: I'd wish for love.

[IAN muses on this.]

MONROE: *[Breaking the silence.]* Why are you selling your cable?

IAN: Oh. *[Laughs.]* The continental thing? I don't know.

MONROE: Tell me.

IAN: I'm selling all of it.

MONROE: *[Surprised.]* Why?

IAN: It's going to sound silly.

[MONROE listens.]

I'm making a sculpture.

MONROE: What?

IAN: A sculpture. From all the miles of cabling I've laid. Look.

[IAN rummages under the bed, retrieves a small model of his design. Twisted loops of black cable arc majestically. In a tangle of thin threads, we see the chaos of global interconnection, and, somehow, the futility of it all. The sculpture is not entirely ridiculous. MONROE suppresses a smile and somehow sees IAN's vision.]

IAN: It's just an idea I had. I woke up in the middle of the night and just *saw* it. Clearly. All the cable I've laid; all the desperate lonely people jamming their fingers in its ends trying to *touch* each other. They stroke metal and plastic. Never people. Cold hardness. There's something between them. Blocking. Something beyond the electronic. Beyond the physical, even. Something spiritual. A great wall of separation, laced through with my cable.

Somehow... I have a way to *do* something about it. My sculpture, I mean. Does that make sense? Not fix or change things—but say them, at least. Show people. Maybe someone will listen. I don't know.

It's all too new. I just can't go on anymore the way I did. I'm getting out. It's not... me, somehow.

MONROE: I understand.

IAN: Do you?

MONROE: Yes. I think I do.

IAN: No one else does.

MONROE: [*Defusing. Laughing.*] Oh, come on. You're just not trying hard enough.

IAN: [*Deliberately brightening the mood.*] I think it's the clothes. [*A raised eyebrow from MONROE.*] Clothes make the man, right?

MONROE: If you say so.

IAN: You have no trouble, right? Lend me your jacket. [*She gives her jacket to IAN. He models it.*] See? The picture of fashion.

[*IAN strolls up to the cactus, and takes an arm, gently.*]

Sir Cactus? May I have this dance?

MONROE: [*Sir Cactus' voice.*] Why, certainly!

[*IAN dances a few steps awkwardly with the cactus.*]

IAN: Oh! Sir Cactus! You stepped on my foot!

MONROE: I rather think you stepped on his.

IAN: [*Abashed.*] Quite probably.

MONROE: Here. Watch.

IAN: Gentle with Sir Cactus. He bites.

[*MONROE smiles. She takes the cactus (gently, fingers between the thorns, as IAN did), and demonstrates a simple bronze waltz. The cactus bites.*]

MONROE: Ouch. *[She puts her finger in her mouth.]*

[IAN takes off MONROE's jacket and puts it on the cactus. He removes her tinted glasses and outfits the cactus with them. He assumes the stance for the first step of the waltz, then looks back at MONROE.]

IAN: *[Looking intently.]* Your eyes. I don't remember. . .

[MONROE looks away. Reclaims her glasses and hides her eyes.]

MONROE: *[A forced laugh.]* Glasses hide my. . . self. Somehow.

[To cover her embarrassment, she produces a frilly hat from her belongings and outfits IAN with it. He stands there awkwardly. A moment of hesitation. He puts his hand to the hat.]

IAN: A year ago I started getting these calls.

Some guy. He. . .

He thought I was cute, I guess. I don't remember how he got my number. He was older. I'm listed in all the directories. My number's on every wire I've laid.

He started calling me. Regularly. Once, twice a week. Maybe more. I wasn't in much.

He liked cowboys. Barons. We expansionists. Watched us. Tried to. . . copy us, I guess. We were men. Boys.

At first the calls were innocent. He'd talk of his pets. Salamanders, beetles, hippopotami of various types. A purple rhinoceros.

He was a bore. But I listened. Polite. Always polite. I'd grunt from time to time so he knew I was listening, and try to do other things. But he became a regular intruder on the cables to my home.

[IAN slowly removes the hat.]

As time passed he grew. . . rude. Needy. He would want things.

I was polite. How could I not be polite? The thin black line would wrap itself around me as I tried not to listen. It would twist around my neck. Strangling me as I tried to disappear. I couldn't hang up.

He was amusing himself at the other end of the cable, tormenting me, and I couldn't insult him. Couldn't hang up.

I'm not sure it would have helped.

Why couldn't I bear to...?

[The question floats unanswered.]

He fucking *crucified* me.

[IAN looks up. He hands the hat back to MONROE, silently.]

[Neither knows what to say.]

IAN: What's taking Steel so long?

MONROE: I don't know.

[Another awkward pause.]

[Offering a piece of her private self.] I dream sometimes.

[IAN looks up to listen.]

I try to picture my future. What I'll be doing in ten years. Five.

It comes and goes.

IAN: You can see it?

MONROE: Not details.

I dream that I am free. Someplace far from here.

IAN: Changing the world.

MONROE: I guess. I don't know how.

IAN: Adventure's in the discovery.

MONROE: *Doing* something. Look at me here. *Sitting*. I dream of...

IAN: *[Interrupting.]* Moving doesn't help. I've stamped hundreds of thousands of walls all over this hemisphere without leaving a mark on a single thing.

MONROE: I want to make a mark.

IAN: Then what are you sitting here for?

MONROE: What do you mean?

IAN: You're not happy.

MONROE: I am. I have friends.

IAN: How can Steel stand it? Doesn't he know he's running in place?

MONROE: You gotta live, Ian.

IAN: That's not living.

MONROE: No, listen. You asked me why I was sitting here.

IAN: Why don't you just go?

MONROE: Life isn't like that. You can't leave everything to chase daydreams.

IAN: I can.

MONROE: Steel knows that.

IAN: Just cut the cables and go.

MONROE: *I* know it.

IAN: Do it.

MONROE: Maybe for you. Maybe you can.

IAN: And you can't?

[Silence.]

What would you do, if you could do anything?

[Pause.]

MONROE: I don't know.

IAN: You want to be free.

MONROE: See the world. Do something different.

IAN: Leave with me.

MONROE: *[Laughing it off.]* What?

IAN: Come with me. We'll go somewhere. I can make my way anywhere.

MONROE: I don't know what I'd...

IAN: You can find out when we get there.

MONROE: It doesn't make sense.

[Pause.]

IAN: Can you see your future?

MONROE: *[Looks.]* Yes. I can see me.

[A breath.]

But nothing around. Just me.

IAN: Floating.

[She nods.]

MONROE: No strings.

IAN: *[With resignation.]* You'll go back.

MONROE: *[Changing topic.]* When I was little, I used to treasure eyelashes. My daddy told me they were good luck; that when one fell out I could make a wish, blow the lash away, and the wish would come true. He'd tell me a story. About a pirate captain on the south seas.

The pirate's name was Rif. He had black hair, a black beard, and eyes to match. He was feared in every port there was. Even his crew was afraid; sailors said that there was not a person alive Rif loved. They were almost right.

In a tiny port on a forgotten island lived the only woman Rif's heart knew. The only portal into his crusty sea-stained soul. But she lived in a part of the world where the winds always blew wrong, and Captain Rif always found the breeze against him when he tried to return.

[MONROE pulls out an eyelash and looks at it on her fingertip.]

Eyelashes on my fingertips were Rif's pirate ships. I'd make a wish, blow to fill Rif's sails and send him back. Back to the keeper of his heart.

[She blows the lash away.]

Sail away, Rif. Sail away home.

Be free.

IAN: You made a wish?

MONROE: *[Looks up at him.]* Of course. *[Smiles.]*

[IAN sits on the bed beside MONROE.]

You sit like you're afraid to touch me.

[A beat.]

IAN: *[Standing impulsively.]* Dance with me.

MONROE: There's no music.

IAN: We can sing. *[He smiles.]*

[She gets up, hesitantly. IAN seems about to say something, decides not to. MONROE steps forward, reaches for IAN.]

[As soon as they touch, sirens go off. The television turns itself on. An announcement.]

ANNOUNCER: For your protection:

Fighting has been reported in room ten of Sparrow's Gulch Motel, West.

The proper authorities have been notified.

Please do not attempt to leave.

[An informal aside.]

Really, I don't know what you are thinking. Your skins, the tips of your fingers, are the most germ-laden surfaces in this motel. Sinks, linens, even our walls are bleached and disinfected daily for your health and convenience. But your hands! Frankly, as far as we're concerned, what you do in your own homes is your own business. But here, in this PUBLIC SPACE, such actions are completely uncalled for. You disgust me. Smearing parasites on everything you touch without the least regard.

[The informality ends.]

It may seem that the charge of “fighting” does not match the actual crime. The management reminds you that the specific filing is but a legal formality. Videotape of this afternoon’s events may be subpoenaed from the front desk to aid your defense—or the prosecution.

You will refrain from leaving further blemish upon the property of this motel. A health department official is being sent to investigate. As education is part of her mission, she will also handle any further questions you may have.

Thank you.

[The television shows silent static. IAN and MONROE stand frozen, un-touching. IAN’s fingers twitch.]

[After a moment, the announcer and television spring to life again.]

ANNOUNCER: *[Chatty.]* Perhaps you would like some background on the policies Sparrow Gulch West and its sovereign government have implemented for your freedom and safety.

I hardly need repeat the danger of Touch. The social catastrophes resultant from this simple action necessitate strict regulation of such seeming innocence. Society as a whole cannot survive the uncontrollable; lust-inciting Touch provokes deviations of all magnitudes. It is easily verified that sex crimes and perversions cannot occur without their implicit Touches; similarly, regulated Touch and the consequent reduction of impulsive unplanned relationships have caused an actual measurable reduction in teenage pregnancy, broken families, and the associated societal traumas.

There are those who think that an afternoon-rented motel room is an implicit permit for the disallowed. These people are wrong. In general, your conduct this afternoon has been admirable, although our intelligence department has not yet completed a thorough dialogue analysis. However, Society’s good demands your continued diligence. The anomalies of this afternoon must not be repeated.

Thank you.

[The ANNOUNCER is gone. A test pattern appears. The on-screen seal reads: “Do not awaken love / before it so desires.” The motto spreads into the room as the pattern fades.]

[The television switches off.]

MONROE: *[Without moving.]* What place is this?

IAN: *[Also frozen.]* I . . . don't know.

It's changed from my remembrance.

MONROE: Steel knows this place.

He calls it Antipode.

[A soft knock on the door.]

IAN: I wonder if its rules apply to him.

[A second knock, a little stronger.]

MONROE: Can you do anything?

IAN: No. Nothing.

[Third knock, insistent and loud.]

[MONROE breaks her frozen posture, goes to the door and opens it halfway. ABIGAIL is outside. MONROE stands in the doorway and IAN is off to the side. ABIGAIL cannot see IAN.]

ABIGAIL: I've been sent . . .

[MONROE raises an inquisitive eyebrow.]

Someone's been fighting?

MONROE: Not here.

ABIGAIL: *[Nods.]* This is room ten?

MONROE: There may be another.

ABIGAIL: No. This is the only one.

MONROE: Another motel?

ABIGAIL: The only one.

You aren't who I expected to find.

MONROE: There are two of us.

ABIGAIL: Two? Just two?

IAN: *[Stepping into the doorway to be seen.]* Steel left to settle business with the front desk.

[ABIGAIL registers the presence of IAN, its meaning, and nods. She is lost in thought and stands in the doorway growing sad. A silent moment.]

IAN: *[Understanding.]* Come on in.

[MONROE moves out of the way and ABIGAIL enters the room.]

ABIGAIL: *[To MONROE.]* I'm sorry. I'm Abigail.

MONROE: Nice to meet you.

ABIGAIL: *[Trying to make a joke, but looking like she's about to cry.]* Doesn't look like fighting here to me.

MONROE: *[MONROE lowers her glasses.]* What's the matter, hon?

ABIGAIL: *[To IAN.]* You're one of them.

IAN: Who?

ABIGAIL: A Baron.

IAN: Used to be.

ABIGAIL: The loops.

IAN: I guess still am.

ABIGAIL: *[Pointing to the walls.]* Are these all your marks?

IAN: Some of them.

ABIGAIL: *[Noticing the names.]* Steel. *[Reading the mark over the bed.]* You're Ian.

IAN: Yes.

ABIGAIL: Jesus. I already feel stupid.

MONROE: Gail?

ABIGAIL: Abigail. Don't call me Gail.

I feel like a fucking amateur. I was top of my class, led the Emerson Techno-Progressives, and as soon as you cowboys enter the room, I feel like some horse about to be branded.

[Angry.] I don't want to cry.

IAN: He left you.

[MONROE gives IAN a puzzled glance.]

ABIGAIL: And what do you care! Do you always have to play puppet-master, pulling the strings? Can't anything be mine alone? Private?

MONROE: What's going on here, Ian?

ABIGAIL: It doesn't matter. I just...

I just thought I'd amount to something.

MONROE: And you don't think...

ABIGAIL: No! I'm shit. I'm assistant to the under-secretary to the manager of a one-room motel in the barrens of Sparrow Gulch West. I went to a technical college. I was valedictorian. But I'm not network-certified. So I'm shit.

[To IAN.] And it's all your fault. What's so great about your stamps and cables anyway? Some of us don't *want* access. Some of us were quite happy before, thank you so very much.

And now I'm probably going to get fired from this job, too, because I'm taking too long in here. They'll know. I can't help it. I can't help waiting here.

IAN: You love him that much.

ABIGAIL: How do you fucking *know* all that?! Yes, I love him. What's it to you? He's a fucking Baron, too. In love with his machines. He doesn't know I exist. He doesn't even stay in touch, because I refuse to use one of these. *[She holds up the telephone. Yanks it. The cord stays anchored in the wall.]*

I don't have one of these. My home's not wired. I hope it never is, you fucking prigs. Then where will your stamps get you?

Stay away from me with those stamps. Stay away. I'm not about to be claimed by anyone. Except him. But he doesn't want me.

I write him letters. Do you even get those anymore, out in cybershit? Do you even know what a letter is? Not email. Not some fucking stream of electrons. I'm talking about something real. Something you can touch, feel. Hold in your hand. Hold in your hand and know that someone else touched that same piece of paper. Share contact. Not be tickled by some anonymous pool of electrons that last composed some redneck's photo of his dial-up whore.

[Throws the telephone at IAN; it jerks short, caught by its cord. IAN doesn't know how to react.]

I don't want to cry. Why do you make me feel so stupid?

I don't want to. . .

He used to love me. He really did.

But now he's tied up in his cable. He doesn't even remember that the real world exists, except as something to put a stamp on.

What's going to happen to us, cowboy? When the whole world is wired. What happens to the Indians? Do we get anything at all? Or are you just going to shove us onto smaller and smaller reservations until we're no longer in your way? Maybe we'll get casinos. No, not that. I already know where we're going to end up.

In a whorehouse. A huge fucking flophouse in the middle of the Arizona desert. The only occupation left where physical contact's worth a damn. Where virtual reality can't cut it.

Not that you cowboys haven't been trying.

I don't want. . .

He used to kiss me. *[Bitter.]* Now he sends me punctuation marks that are supposed to mean the same thing.

He never could give backrubs, though. Not to save his life. *[Laughing through her tears.]*

I loved him for that.

[IAN wants to reach out, hold ABIGAIL, comfort her, but is trapped. The prohibition on touch and his own identity as a Baron confound him. The fates cackle.]

MONROE: *[Soothingly.]* It's all right.

ABIGAIL: I don't want to talk about it.

IAN: *[Uncertain.]* I...

ABIGAIL: *[Lashing out. Tears streaming down her face.]* I just don't want to hear about it from you. Okay? You think you know, but you've got no clue who I am. No clue.

[To MONROE.] I'm not who I seem.

[The television clicks on, begins to warm up. A building hum. An announcement is coming.]

[ABIGAIL is infuriated. She grabs the cable leading to the TV, yanks on it until it breaks loose, taking a large piece of the wall with it. The TV goes dead. A siren immediately begins to wail. The phone begins to ring.]

[With deliberate calmness, IAN repeats the gesture with the phone. A second siren joins the first as the phone cable rips free.]

[IAN, ABIGAIL, and MONROE share a look. IAN holds the remains of the telephone in his hands.]

[STEEL opens the door, imperious, summoned by the sirens. He is carrying two stamps obviously meant for the forehead. As soon as he arrives in the doorway, the sirens cease. IAN lets the phone drop. MONROE replaces her tinted glasses.]

STEEL: Quite a party I missed.

ABIGAIL: Steel.

STEEL: *[To room.]* I settled things with management. We're done here.

IAN: You're leaving?

STEEL: Certainly. Nothing left to stamp in this two-bit town.
Come on, Monroe.

MONROE: The sun's setting, Steel. It's almost night.

STEEL: Good time to leave. There's only one room in this motel, Monroe.

MONROE: I thought we might go for a swim. In the pool. Before we left.

STEEL: The water's toxic, Monroe. This isn't Kansas.

[STEEL has completely ignored ABIGAIL. IAN is standing near her; he silently links pinkies with her. ABIGAIL allows him. She does not cry.]

[The gesture is unnoticed.]

MONROE: I don't want to leave yet, Steel.

STEEL: Say your goodbyes, gang.

IAN: Monroe.

[She turns to look at him.]

I...

STEEL: Come on, Ian. If you've got something to say, say it.

IAN: *[To MONROE alone. The others do not exist.]* I love you.

[A long and awkward pause.]

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.

STEEL: Anything else you need to say? Can we leave now?

MONROE: *[Ignoring STEEL.]* You've been saying that all evening.

IAN: I have.

MONROE: Is it true?

[A silence.]

STEEL: I'm crying here. I know this may seem unusual to you all, but I've got a real life to lead, appointments to keep, places to go. I don't have all day. Does anyone else have anything concrete that needs doing, or are you going to waste more of my time with talk?

IAN: Hold on, Steel. Just let me say what I need to, and then both of them will leave with you.

STEEL: I don't understand you at all, Ian. Used to be that you'd have plans and pressures, too. Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to cramp your style. I just don't get it.

IAN: I'm chasing impracticality these days, Steel.
[Looking at MONROE.] We share that dream.

STEEL: I don't know what you're saying. Monroe. Tell me the first thing you think of when I say cable.

MONROE: You, Steel.

STEEL: Love.

MONROE: Snake.

STEEL: Marriage.

MONROE: Trapped.

STEEL: Should I go on?
Steel.

MONROE: Control.

STEEL: Ian.

MONROE: *[Looks at him.]* So impractical.

STEEL: Men.

MONROE: *[Laughs.]* Dogs.

STEEL: The future.

[No response.]

We have to go.

[MONROE nods.]

[STEEL looks at her a moment, then leaves. ABIGAIL follows him. STEEL stops just outside the door to take ABIGAIL's hand, then they leave together. MONROE lingers for a moment.]

STEEL: *[From outside.]* Catch up to us, Monroe.

[A brief silence.]

MONROE: I couldn't hurt him.

IAN: Is this what you want to do?

[Silence. She doesn't answer.]

You and I. We pursue impossibilities. Dreams. Unattainable ideals. Creative fire. The hope that someday we'll make a mark.

[Silence. She nods.]

The choices have already been made for us. We have no sway.

[MONROE pulls out an eyelash. Puts it on IAN's finger.]

MONROE: Make a wish.

[She looks at him, then leaves without a backward glance.]

[IAN looks after her, until she has completely disappeared from sight. The door closes unaided after her.]

[IAN closes his eyes. Makes a wish. Looks down to blow the eyelash away.]

[The eyelash has fallen from his fingertip. He gets down on his hands in knees in a frantic search for it. He gives up finally. Rocks back on his heels and stares up to heaven.]

[Music begins of its own accord, filling the room. A waltz.]

[He is drawn to the corner cactus, which is still wearing MONROE's jacket. He grips the cactus tightly, ignoring the thorns, and begins to waltz.]

[As the music continues, he clutches the cactus tighter and tighter, thorns digging into his flesh.]

[The cactus trails a thin black cable.]

[The lights dim.]

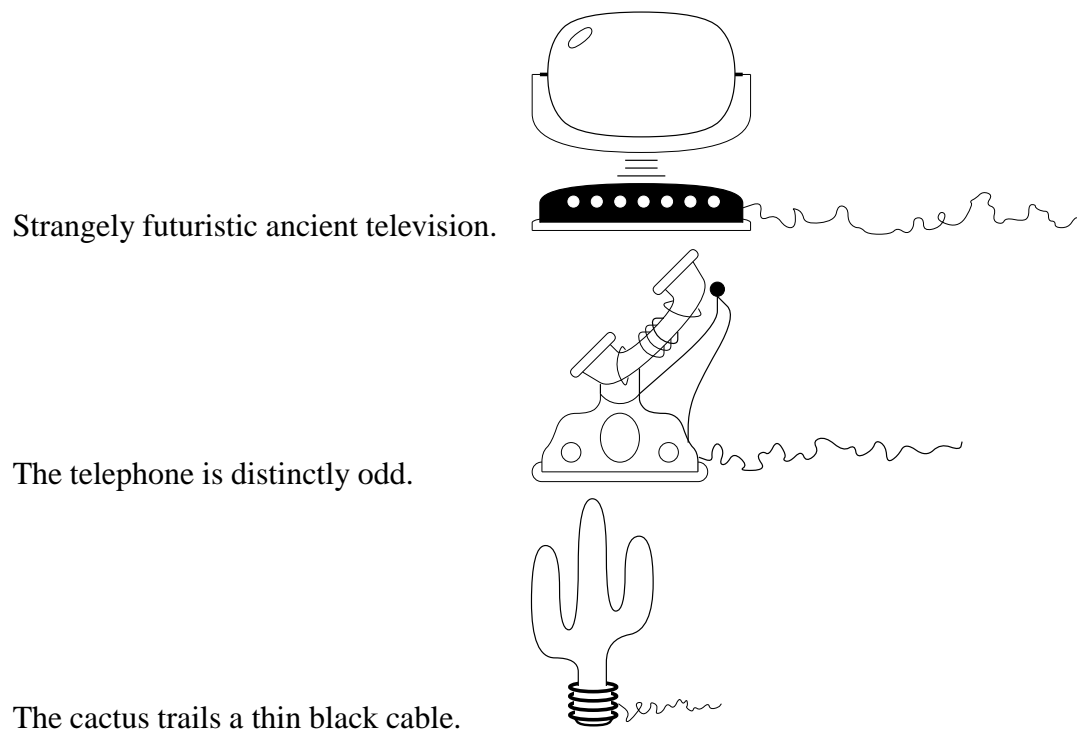


Figure 1: Sketches of items mentioned in the play.