

After The Tone
A Metanightmare

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by Dan Katz

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

KYLE
MARIA
DREAMER
DIRK
RUPERT
TWO MEN IN LINE

(A bare stage. KYLE and MARIA, two young adults, are sitting on the floor, facing each other. MARIA's hands are in KYLE's, and it is apparent from their voices and facial expressions that they have been having a long, difficult conversation. They are silent for some time before KYLE speaks.)

KYLE: This is a mistake.

MARIA: I don't know. You may be right. But either way it's something I have to do.

KYLE: Not if you know it might be a mistake. When you realize something is a mistake, you don't do it.

MARIA: Not necessarily. Sometimes--

KYLE: You know, kind of the same way that if you love somebody and they love you, you don't spontaneously break up with--

MARIA: Kyle, listen! Sometimes there are exceptions.

KYLE: I don't believe that. Love doesn't have exceptions.

MARIA: And how do you know that this is love?

KYLE: I know.

MARIA: Well, I don't. I thought I did. It may be. I'm just not sure about anything anymore. And until I am, I can't keep pretending everything's okay and that I understand how I feel.

KYLE: So your way of figuring out how you feel is by throwing me away.

MARIA: I am not throwing you away! Jesus, Kyle, do you have to make this so dramatic?

KYLE: Yes, I do! This is a major change for me, Maria. Maybe you've been preparing yourself for this moment, but for some reason I was under the impression that things were going well. Of course, I was also under the impression that we were in love, but clearly--

MARIA: Can you get through a single sentence without using the word "love"?

KYLE: Why should I have to?

MARIA: Because I don't think it means the same thing to you that it does to me. *(This hits KYLE hard.)* I do love you, Kyle, but I love you in my own way. I don't think it's the same way you love me, I don't think it's what you want... and I don't think it's what we need to make this work. At least not the way things are right now. *(Silence.)* I'm sorry. *(She moves to place her hand on his shoulder; he instinctively shrugs it off. She is clearly offended.)* Right. Okay then. *(KYLE stares silently; MARIA rises and exits.)*

KYLE: *(After a moment.)* Maria. *(No answer.)* Maria? *(A door slams.)* Maria!?

(There is a louder door slam and an abrupt change of lighting as the stage goes black and a second smaller area is lit, which contains a bed and a nightstand, on which there a bottle of bourbon, a broken clock, and a cordless telephone/answering machine. There is a stereo in the room not far away. The young man in the bed (who will be referred to as the DREAMER) has awakened suddenly from his nightmare and sits up, breathing heavily. He takes a moment to assess his surroundings then regards the phone tentatively. Reluctantly but compulsively, he picks it up and dials.)

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(an electronic nonhuman voice)* Please leave a message after the tone. *(Tone.)*

DREAMER: Hi, Maria, it's me. It's about-- *(He looks at the clock.)* Right. No clock. Sorry. Anyway, I'm just hanging around; tried to go to bed, but I couldn't get to sleep. I kept—I keep thinking of you. *(Pause.)* I know I've said it a thousand times, but... I love you. And I miss you. I just don't want you to forget that. Just... if you change your mind about things... and you might somewhere down the road... please just tell me. It probably won't be too late. I can't imagine it ever being too late. *(Sigh.)* Just call me if you need anything, or if you feel like talking about things. I love you. I don't know what else there is to say. Have a good night.

(He hangs up the phone, lies down and attempts to go back to sleep. The lights fade down on the DREAMER's room, and up on a kitchen center stage. A young couple are making out on the counter. This continues for a moment and then the girl pulls away. We can now recognize her as MARIA; the male is DIRK, who is notably bigger than KYLE.)

MARIA: Dirk, we can't do this. It's not right.

DIRK: Oh, for the love of... What's wrong about it?

MARIA: Nothing specific. It's just--

DIRK: All right. We're going to take a little test. Question one. Are you single now?

MARIA: Yes. Definitely.

DIRK: Question two. Do you want to fuck me?

MARIA: I'd like to think there's a little more than--

DIRK: Actually, this is a short answer question.

MARIA: Well, I think I do...

DIRK: Great. Test over, you pass, it's on. *(He kisses her again, and she cooperates for a noticeable length of time before pulling away again.)*

MARIA: No, I ca-- Dirk! Stop. It's only been three days. This isn't fair to Kyle.

DIRK: You know, it's really romantic the way you fill these interludes by talking about your ex-boyfriend.

MARIA: Right. Almost as romantic as the phrase "it's on."

DIRK: I made my point.

MARIA: Well, I'm sorry. He's still important to me, and whether you like it or not, he's still a part of my life. Just because things didn't work out between us doesn't mean I'm going to up and forget about him.

DIRK: I'm going to say this one more time, Maria. Move on. Let go. That guy is draining the life out of you.

MARIA: Yeah, maybe he is. But I still care about him, and I don't want to hurt him. And trust me, this would more than hurt him. This would probably kill him.

DIRK: It might kill him if he knew. But he doesn't need to know, and you don't need to worry. Just relax and have some fun for a change.

KYLE: *(enters suddenly, goes to fridge without noticing them)* Dirk, do you have to leave your worst CDs in the stereo? It'd be nice to come home to something other than Garth Broo-- *(He turns and sees DIRK and MARIA.)* Son of a bitch.

DIRK: I thought you had lacrosse.

KYLE: Funny. I thought you weren't an asshole.

DIRK: Easy, Kyle. Not in front of the lady.

KYLE: In front of the lady, my ass! This is my kitchen!

DIRK: Uh, excuse me. Our kitchen. I'm not paying half the rent out of the goodness of my heart.

KYLE: Right, well, Dirk, that's not really the real issue here, is it? I'd say the real issue is that you and my ex-girlfriend, three days removed I should point out, are screwing on a counter that I own some share of, whether it's half or--

MARIA: Whoa, whoa, whoa! Slow down, Kyle. Nobody is screwing anybody at the moment. Everyone is fully clothed. Stop jumping to conclusions.

KYLE: This is fabulous. I'm being cheated on in my own apartment and everybody is debating semantics with me.

MARIA: Kyle, we broke up! No matter what I'm doing, I couldn't possibly be cheating on you.

KYLE: Not technically, but there are certain social boundaries you just stay away from. Out of common decency.

DIRK: That has got to be the stupidest--

KYLE: Dirk, I'm on the brink of homicide right now. Stay the fuck out of this.

MARIA: Kyle, if you could just calm down for five seconds, maybe we can sit and talk about this like rational adults.

KYLE: Oh, I see. You want to try communicating.

MARIA: Yes. I would.

KYLE: If you want my opinion, you've done plenty of communication already, Maria. You've communicated beyond a shadow of a doubt that you don't give a shit about me.

MARIA: That is totally untrue. You mean a lot to me.

KYLE: Clearly not enough to stop screwing around with Dirk.

MARIA: Does it look like I'm screwing around with Dirk right now?

DIRK: *(bitterly)* It sure doesn't feel like it.

MARIA: Dirk, don't push it.

KYLE: No, not right this second, but I'm sure it'll happen again. You'll probably be smart enough not to try it here again, but there's always your place. Or his car... hell, you might just fuck him in the back of a movie theater if you have to.

MARIA: Kyle!

KYLE: *(cruel and condescending)* I am confident that you'll find a way. When it comes to fucking me over, I have total faith in you.

(MARIA is appalled. She stares KYLE in the eye and vengefully seizes DIRK and begins kissing him again. Enraged, KYLE grabs DIRK by the hair and slams him face first into the refrigerator. At the point of impact, lights change abruptly to the bedroom again and the DREAMER sits up staring at his hands in disbelief. He composes himself and dials the phone once again.)

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(an electronic nonhuman voice)* Please leave a message after the tone. *(Tone.)*

DREAMER: Maria, it's me again. Sorry to call twice in one night... There was something I wanted to say before that I couldn't. I know it's not really any of my business, but... you'd tell me if you were with somebody else, right? I mean, you probably think it would upset me-- well, it would upset me-- but I'd rather it hear from you than somebody else. And if I don't know whether you're going to tell me, I'll probably just keep assuming the worst. Yes, I'm paranoid, but you know that. If you could just promise to keep me posted-- I know I'm in no position to be asking you for anything, but-- if you could do that, it would mean a lot to me. *(Pause.)* I miss you. Take care. Bye. *(Pause again, then quickly.)* I love you. *(Hangs up quickly and stares at the phone.)* She knows that. You just told her that. You always tell her that.

(He sighs to himself, gets back in bed, and presses his pillow over his head. Again, the bedroom fades down and lights come up center on the interior of an elevator. KYLE is standing inside, facing the audience, riding upward. In a moment, the elevator stops, opens, and MARIA gets on.)

MARIA: Oh, Kyle. Hey.

(KYLE gives a not particularly subtle glare and turns away from her. MARIA sighs and faces the audience waiting for her floor. After the awkward moment has settled in, the elevator comes to a loud and abrupt halt, knocking KYLE and MARIA off their feet. They rise, continuing to avoid eye contact, and realize their situation. KYLE makes the first attempt.)

KYLE: Well. That kinda sucks.

MARIA: *(aloof)* Yeah. *(Another awkward pause.)*

KYLE: So... how are things?

MARIA: Oh, suddenly you're willing to talk to me?

KYLE: I thought we might be stuck here for a while...

MARIA: Right. I'll have to remember that it takes mechanical failure for you to become remotely mature. *(KYLE stares, a bit hurt.)* Sorry. I've built up a lot of pent-up frustration.

KYLE: I don't see what you're so frustrated about.

MARIA: That's fairly typical of you, isn't it?

KYLE: Ouch.

MARIA: If the shoe fits. *(She looks away. Pause.)*

KYLE: You know... Don't take this the wrong way. But whatever happened to you caring about me?

MARIA: I don't know, really. I've tried pretty hard, but it gets tougher each time I run into you and you glare at me like I've killed your parents. It's really not fair.

KYLE: I wouldn't call you screwing Dirk in my own apartment particularly fair.

MARIA: What are you talking about?

KYLE: Okay, maybe not screwing, but whatever you were doing.

MARIA: Kyle, you don't even live in an apartment.

KYLE: What kind of-- *(he thinks about this)* You're right. I don't.

MARIA: Have these suspicious delusions become a regular thing with you now? Or maybe we're just running out of air and it's going to your head?

KYLE: I don't get it. I could have sworn that I saw you... *(he steps on a large tile in the floor that gives way. He nearly falls but jumps backward, and the sound of the tile breaking on the bottom floor indicates that it's a looong way down.)* Oh my God.

MARIA: *(punching the emergency call button frantically)* Hello? Hello?

KYLE: *(very shaken)* I... wow.

MARIA: Nobody's answering. Where the hell is maintenance? We've got to get out of here.

KYLE: *(recovering)* I really don't think this is safe.

MARIA: No kidding. *(taking his hand)* Are you all right?

KYLE: I'll be okay. I'm just a little shaken.

MARIA: God. I'm glad you're-- I was scared-- *(She suddenly embraces him. This takes KYLE by surprise, but then he hugs her back. It is refreshingly intimate for him.)* Kyle, listen, I'm sorry. I was probably too hard on you. But I don't want things to be this way.

KYLE: It's okay.

MARIA: It's just been so--

KYLE: It's all right. I know exactly how you feel. *(No, he doesn't, because he tries to kiss her, which she is not expecting. She pulls away and goes sprawling through the hole in the floor. KYLE manages to dive and grab her hand.)*

MARIA: *(screaming)* Help!

KYLE: I've got you! Just hold on. *(as he struggles to pull her up)* I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cross any boundaries. I misunderstood what you were saying.

MARIA: Forget about it, just help me! Please!

KYLE: I'm trying. *(continuing to pull)* Maria, do you still love me?

MARIA: What?!

KYLE: Do you still love me?

MARIA: This is not the time to be discussing this, Kyle!!

KYLE: Please, I just need to know. It's killing me.

MARIA: For Christ's sake, Kyle, would you just drop it??

(Instinctively he lets go of her. She screams, falling. He leaps to the hole and watches her.)

KYLE: MARIA!!!

(Sudden blackout, lights up on the DREAMER, who falls out of bed, hits the ground, and screams, waking up. When he realizes where he is, he breathes a sigh of relief, but he is still shaken. Once again, he compulsively dials the phone.)

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(an electronic nonhuman voice)* Please leave a message after the tone. *(Tone.)*

DREAMER: It's me, I know, I'm sorry. I just need to talk to somebody right now, even if it's just a machine. Maybe I should buy a microrecorder. Or a kitten. Or something... It's so much harder to fall asleep when you know you're just going to wake up by yourself... But I guess you know that. Well, I hope you know that. I guess I shouldn't make presumptions. *(Pause.)* I don't know... Do you want to get dinner Thursday? Just give me a chance. I know the party was ugly, but this wouldn't be like that. I freaked out because I was afraid it was the last time I'd see you... That's probably why I'm freaking out now; because I'm afraid you'll never want to see me again... It would make me feel a lot better if I knew that wasn't true. If it isn't true. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry. Just let me know. I'll stop calling. I love-- *(He pulls the phone away from his head, takes a moment, then returns it.)* You mean a lot to me. Good night.

(He hangs up and goes back to bed. Lights come up on a room dominated by the presence of a large door with a podium in front of it, the sort a maitre d' would stand behind. There are a number of men standing in a line that starts offstage and leads to the podium. One of them is wearing a coat and hat that obscuring his face. They stare at the door silently. KYLE appears from between two of the people in line, disoriented.)

KYLE: Maria? Maria? *(he staggers for a moment and remembers his last dream)* Jesus... I killed her. Didn't I? *(he approaches one of the people in line)* Excuse me. Do you know Maria Greenwood?

NUMBER 1: *(emotionless)* I am standing in line.

KYLE: Yes... I can see that. Does the name Maria Greenwood mean anything to you?

NUMBER 1: I am standing in line.

KYLE: You know what? I'm not going to talk to you any more. *(He moves to the person behind NUMBER 1)* Excuse me. Do you know a Maria Greenwood?

NUMBER 2: *(similarly)* I am standing in line.

KYLE: Thanks. That's much more useful. *(indicating NUMBER 1)* Did you know he's standing in line too?

NUMBER 2: Yes. He's in front of me.

NUMBER 1: *(without turning)* That's true.

KYLE: Well, you must be proud of yourselves. The first two people in a line of what, five? *(He looks at how far the line extends offstage for the first time.)* Or six... million... What are all these people doing here??

NUMBER 1 & NUMBER 2: They're behind us.

KYLE: Oh, for Christ's sake... *(He heads for the door and is blocked by a tuxedo-clad RUPERT, who rises from behind the podium. He is restrained, arrogant, and possibly British.)*

RUPERT: May I help you with something, sir?

KYLE: I'm fine. *(He attempts to walk by and RUPERT blocks him again.)*

RUPERT: *(icily)* I said, may I help you, sir.

KYLE: It's okay. I'm just going to see what's behind that door.

RUPERT: I'm afraid I can't allow that, sir. This is a private engagement.

KYLE: Look. I have had a long night. *(looks around)* Or day. Or whatever the hell this is. I am very stressed out right now, and the only information anybody is willing to give me is their relative location to each other.

RUPERT: I'm sorry, sir. Ms. Greenwood was very specific in her instructions.

KYLE: What? Greenwood... Oh my God. I'm sorry. I didn't realize. *(confidentially)* Er... Aren't these people dressed a little oddly for a funeral?

RUPERT: Yes. I'm sure they would be.

KYLE: Would be? *(confused)* This isn't a funeral?

RUPERT: Not to my knowledge, sir.

KYLE: Um... you wouldn't happen to know whether a Maria Greenwood passed away recently?

RUPERT: If you are referring to the Maria Greenwood I spoke with half an hour ago, then the young lady is either alive or experiencing a post-death ability to walk and talk. Now, sir, this is quickly becoming tiresome... If you'll excuse me, I have an orgy to run.

KYLE: I'm just glad she's-- a WHAT?

RUPERT: Ms. Greenwood's orgy. The young lady seems to be quite popular, so we should really get started soon.

KYLE: Whoa, whoa, whoa... Where is she? I need to talk to her.

RUPERT: *(rolling his eyes)* I will give you a hint. She is behind a large rectangular thing that rhymes with door. Which you are not passing through unless you stand in that line. Which you are not going to do until I see if you are on this list. Is that clear, *sir*?

KYLE: *(frustrated sigh)* Kyle Bartlett.

RUPERT: *(perking up)* Ahhh... You are on the list.

KYLE: Well, I should hope so...

RUPERT: I'm going to have to ask you to leave. Immediately.

KYLE: What? You said I was on the list.

RUPERT: Yes, sir. In fact you are the list. I was specifically told to keep Kyle Bartlett out of this room. Apart from that, the event is open to the public.

KYLE: You've got to be kidding me. Did she say why?

RUPERT: *(searching through papers)* Something about an elevator, I believe.

KYLE: So that did happen?

RUPERT: *(finding the appropriate instruction)* Yes, here it is. Apparently you said something about your confidence in her ability to fuck you over. In an elevator.

KYLE: No, that wasn't in the elevator. That was in my apartment. Except I don't have an apartment. So it must have been... um...

RUPERT: Mmm-hmm. Would you mind confronting your demons elsewhere?

(Aggravated, KYLE storms away from the podium and runs straight into the man in the hat and coat. He turns and is revealed to be a smiling DIRK.)

DIRK: Hey, Kyle! What are you doing here?

KYLE: Dirk?!? Tell me you are not here to have sex with Maria.

DIRK: Whoa! Small world! You know Maria too?

(This drives KYLE over the edge. He gives DIRK a hard punch to the chest, but DIRK is unscathed. His smile turns to a frown, and he gives KYLE a good shot right in the nose; at the moment of impact, the center stage goes dark and the bedroom is lit. The DREAMER is awake again, now registering more frustrated confusion than fear. He looks at the phone, and then decides not to call. He grabs the bourbon and considers drinking, but decides not to. He decides to make the phone call instead.)

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(an electronic nonhuman voice)* Please leave a message after the tone. *(Tone.)*

DREAMER: I don't mean to complain, would it take that much effort to actually record a message on your machine? I feel like I every time I want to talk to you, I end up chatting with RoboCop... Of course, maybe that wouldn't be a problem if I didn't keep calling you in the middle of the night. But it would be nice to hear your voice. *(Sigh.)* God, I don't even know how many times I've called you tonight. Definitely enough to make a total ass of myself. I've sort of lost track of the whole evening at this point. Maybe I've been drinking. I don't know for sure, which is kind of creepy in itself. *(He thinks for a moment, grabs the bourbon and takes a swig.)* Okay, now I have officially been drinking. Certainty is achieved. Terrific. Anyway. I'm going to hang up now before I tell you I love you again. Good night.

(He hangs up, realizes what he just said, slaps himself across the forehead, and falls into bed. Lights down on the DREAMER's bedroom, and lights up on an identical bedroom center stage. KYLE is asleep in bed, lying next to MARIA. KYLE rolls over and puts his arm around MARIA, making a noise of peaceful satisfaction. A beat later, he registers her presence and snaps awake, waking her in the process.)

MARIA: *(half-asleep)* What? What?

KYLE: *(panicked)* What are you doing here?

MARIA: I was sleeping about fifteen seconds ago. Is something wrong?

KYLE: We broke up. Why are you in bed with me?

MARIA: Broke up?

KYLE: Didn't we?

MARIA: I think I would have remembered that.

KYLE: Look, this isn't funny.

MARIA: No, it's not, it's just weird. You wake me up in the middle of the night and-- did you have a bad dream or something?

KYLE: No, I-- wait. Yes, I did. A bunch of them, I think. But I thought we--

MARIA: Sweetie, can we talk about this in the morning? I have to be up at seven and I'd like to get some sleep.

KYLE: All right... Can I put on some music? I just need something to distract myself... my head's messing with itself pretty badly tonight.

MARIA: *(sighs)* Keep it low. And nothing depressing.

(KYLE flips on the radio to the sound of a newscaster, the voice of RUPERT.)

RUPERT'S VOICE: -- sequestered to a bomb shelter in a desperate effort for survival, but the immense size of the meteor relative to earth suggests that such actions are futile. If you're just joining us, a giant meteor is hurtling swiftly --

(KYLE turns the radio off suddenly. MARIA has woken with a start, and both of them are stunned for completely different reasons.)

MARIA: Oh my God. *(She exits and is heard offstage)* Oh my God!!! *(she returns)* It's--

KYLE: Another dream.

MARIA: --bigger than the fucking moon! You can see it out the-- *(she processes his comment)* What?

KYLE: This is another dream. I've been having these all night. In most of them you'd dumped me. In this one things seem to be going okay, except we're going to die. This is typical.

MARIA: What the fuck are you talking about? This is real! There is a giant flaming meteor visible through our bedroom window!

KYLE: *(nods)* I have a pretty vivid imagination. Probably saw Armageddon too many times.

MARIA: *(panicked)* Hey! Snap out of it! We are both going to die, and all you can do is wax existential?

KYLE: Maria, I know you're not going to believe me, but it has taken me a while to latch onto a concept of reality tonight, but I finally have it figured out, and everything's going to be okay.

MARIA: Concept of reality??? Look, I don't know what kind of fucked up dreams you've been having, but you are awake now! Reality is this. This is reality. And the reality is that--

KYLE: It seems real to you because you're a character in my dream.

MARIA: You know, this is just like you. Everything is about your perspective. Our entire relationship is in terms of you.

KYLE: Whoa! Hold on a minute.... Where is this coming from? You constantly tell me how thoughtful I am! What about all the things I do for you that make you happy? The flowers when you come home, the champagne, the poetry...

MARIA: You do plenty of things for me as long as you know you're going to get some kind of a reaction in return. Everything has to come back to you. Anything I do on my own has to be in terms of being your girlfriend. Anything we do together has to fit into your life long before it fits into mine.

KYLE: I can't believe you're breaking up with me in two dreams in one night.

MARIA: All I need right now is you trivializing my existence. You've been doing it for months. I am not just an incidental factor of your life.

KYLE: You're just a figment of my imagination. I'm not going to listen to this.

MARIA: Please. Just sit for a second. *(She takes KYLE's hand and sits on the bed with him, holding his hands much the way they did in the first scene.)* You've done things wrong. I've done things wrong. I can see that. But there's a giant flaming rock outside our window that is telling me that none of it's going to matter in about two minutes. Maybe you're right. Maybe this is a dream; hell, maybe it's my dream, who knows. But it feels real to me, and the fact that I'm going to die feels real, and if I really am going to die, right now I just want to hold somebody I care about and be held back. So please, just humor me for a few moments. It might be all we have.

(KYLE and MARIA stare into each other eyes and suddenly embrace desperately, as if either of them could be pulled away at any moment. This is a moment of sadness and happiness for them at the same time, and KYLE has finally accepted this fate as "real.")

KYLE: I love you, Maria.

MARIA: I love you too, Dirk.

(Blackout and lights up on the DREAMER, who emits a very shrill scream at this development. This time he goes directly to the phone with no hesitation.)

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(an electronic nonhuman voice)* Please leave a message after the tone. *(Tone.)*

DREAMER: Okay, so here's the deal. I think my subconscious has decided that tonight is open season on fucking with me. Now, I know this is going to sound really weird, but... I'm not completely sure about whether we're still dating or not. If we haven't, then you should probably disregard all the messages I left tonight... Well, actually, if we have, you should probably still disregard those messages. In fact, if you could, it would probably be a good idea to forget anything I've said in the last week or so... I don't know, I've just been so desperate to salvage whatever we have or had-- and at this point, I'm really scared that I'm going to lose you completely, and I don't want that to happen. And I hope I mean too much for you to let that happen either. Okay, that's my point. And if I have a friend named Dirk, which I'm not entirely sure if I do, don't sleep with him. Even if he looks like me. Bye. *(Hangs up. Almost immediately.)* What the fuck am I talking about? *(He dials again.)*

ANSWERING MACHINE: *(an electronic nonhuman voice)* Please leave a message after the tone. *(Tone.)*

DREAMER: Just ignore that last message completely. I don't know what the hell is wrong with me. *(He hangs up again. Processes what he has just done.)* Fuck!! *(He opens the nightstand and pulls out a roll of duct tape. He tapes over the keypad of the handset and places it under the bed, takes another swig of bourbon, and goes back to sleep. The bedroom fades, and the center stage is empty and featureless, as in the first scene. DIRK and RUPERT are standing around, searching the wings nervously.)*

DIRK: Do you see him?

RUPERT: Not yet...

DIRK: He'd better get here soon.

RUPERT: He will.

(Somehow KYLE appears from upstage between them, so he is unseen. He stares at DIRK and RUPERT, and looks offstage as well, trying to figure out what they are looking at. Eventually, he decides to speak.)

KYLE: So. *(DIRK and RUPERT jump and spin around to face him.)* What brings you two here? And where exactly are we?

DIRK: Thank God you came. I don't know how much longer we could have waited.

KYLE: *(to himself)* I am never reading Beckett before bed again. *(aloud)* Well, I'm here. What can I do for you?

RUPERT: You've got to wake up. Quickly.

DIRK: Before she gets here. Which will be any minute.

KYLE: Hold on. So you're acknowledging that this is a dream?

DIRK: Yes!

KYLE: Well, that's nice. The voices in my head are no longer in denial.

RUPERT: Please, Kyle. She's coming. Wake up. Have mercy on us.

KYLE: And how do you suppose I do that?

DIRK: You can wake up any time you want to. You have complete control.

KYLE: Ha. Believe me. If I had any control of my dreams, I wouldn't be here.

DIRK: You do, and you have to realize it right now. Please. She'll be here any minute.

KYLE: She? Who's--

(MARIA enters. She is dressed completely differently than in the other scenes, in some sort of latex/leather outfit, halfway between biker chick and comic book supervillain. Her attitude has also changed, as is evident from the devious grin on her face. This Maria's presence dominates the stage, and DIRK and RUPERT are terrified of her, but they do not run. MARIA approaches DIRK.)

MARIA: Dirk, darling. Long time no see. Since the orgy, I think? Or perhaps the meteor shower. I'm so bad with names and faces...

DIRK: Please, Maria. You know I haven't done anything wrong.

MARIA: Of course you haven't. You're a good boy. Not that it matters. *(She holds her hand out and points at DIRK, who is flung off the stage as if propelled by an invisible force. She turns to RUPERT.)* And Rupert. Look at you in that charming tuxedo. So dapper. So refined.

RUPERT: Madam, spare me. I'll give you anything. Anything your heart desires.

MARIA: So airborne. *(She points and he's off.)*

KYLE: That's... um... impressive.

MARIA: *(chuckles)* Isn't it though? Personally, I think my burns have much more style to them. *(She snaps her fingers and DIRK and RUPERT emit bloodcurdling screams from*

offstage.) Not as visually impressive, but they hurt like a bitch. *(KYLE is bracing himself.)* Oh, relax. I have special plans for you, dumpling. And now isn't the time.

KYLE: All right... but... you... who... what are you?

MARIA: Ever the master of vocabulary. I'm the girl of your dreams, silly. No pun intended, of course. But I knew if you kept searching your mind, you'd find me.

KYLE: Okay. I'm officially lost.

MARIA: All those years of forcing yourself to be the tragic victim. So many sob stories. "Oh, she's using me. Oh, she doesn't appreciate me. Oh, she's throwing me away." And you know, I don't think you've ever managed to find anybody in real life who can truly live up to them.

KYLE: All right, I get the point. I admit that I have a tendency to exaggerate a little. I'm just a dramatic person. It's in my nature.

MARIA: And clearly what your nature wants for you is me. Why do you think I'm here? Where do you think I come from? I'm nothing like the Maria you dated. But I'm the girl you've always hoped and believed you were going out with. The girl you always wished for, to live up to your masochistic ideals. I can use you all you want, precious. Rest assured, I'll never appreciate you. *(DIRK is staggering on, clearly in pain.)* And when it comes to throwing men away? *(Without looking at DIRK, she points in his direction and he flies offstage again.)* I am the best.

KYLE: You know, after everything I have already dealt with tonight, I still think this is the stupidest thing I've ever heard. I am not a masochist. I don't want to be unhappy.

MARIA: Really? Gee, my mistake. I guess you'll just have to look for another option. *(A phone rings.)* Your phone is ringing.

KYLE: *(checking his pockets)* This is definitely a dream. Like I could ever afford a cell phone.

MARIA: Not here, imbecile.

(She snaps her fingers and the bedroom of the DREAMER lights up. The phone is ringing, but the DREAMER is fast asleep. KYLE and MARIA can see the bedroom from center stage.)

DREAMER'S VOICE: *(recorded)* Hey, this is Kyle. Do your thing after the tone. *(Tone.)*

MARIA'S VOICE: *(recorded, the "rational" MARIA. She sounds nervous.)* Hey, Kyle, it's Maria. I just got in from work; they've got us coding all hours of the night until this project gets done. Anyway, my building lost power earlier, and it seems to have fried my

machine... So I thought I'd see if you'd called. I hope you called. You probably haven't. Listen... I don't want to fight. We both said things we shouldn't have, and I want to put it behind us. I want to forget about all the fighting and just be together again. If it's not too late. I guess... Well, it's your call. Call me back and we'll talk. If you don't want to... then I promise you won't hear from me again. I don't want it to be that way, but if it has to be, I understand. I love you. I'll always love you. *(Hang up and the bedroom blacks out. KYLE takes a moment to digest this.)*

KYLE: She still cares! But-- This is great!

MARIA: *(unfazed)* Isn't it, though.

KYLE: And all those stupid insipid messages I left... Gone. Clean slate. This is the best thing that could have happened! Did you do this? If I didn't know you were pure evil, I'd kiss you.

MARIA: You say that now. And yet you're still not going to take advantage of any of this.

KYLE: What?

MARIA: Behold, Kyle, a red carpet in front of you, leading straight to a relationship that could be stable and productive. The chance to start over that millions of men wish they had. But it's not what you really want. You want the pain. You want the drama. And deep down you know that. So you're going to find a way to throw it away.

KYLE: Not likely.

MARIA: Whatever you say.

KYLE: Trust me on this one. Now, if I could just wake up...

MARIA: *(tired of this)* Kyle, you can wake up whenever you want. You can leave any time you want. You don't because you want to be here.

KYLE: That's bullshit.

MARIA: Fine. We'll do it your way. Just don't say I didn't warn you.

(She snaps her fingers, the stage blacks out, and the bedroom is lit. The DREAMER sits up. He is in a bit of a daze, and takes a moment to collect himself.)

DREAMER: Fucking weird dreams... I don't even remember that one.

(He leans over to pick up the telephone and realizes the handset is missing. Slowly, the memory comes to him and he retrieves it from underneath the bed. Looking at the taped keys, he remembers the messages he's been leaving.)

Stupid goddamn phone!!

(Frustrated, he hits the phone with the handset repeatedly, and finally, for good measure, he hurls it at the wall, clearly breaking it. He sighs.)

I needed that. I really needed that.

(Finally at peace, he returns to bed. The bedroom fades out. From nowhere in particular we hear:)

MARIA'S VOICE: *(same recording from earlier)* Well, it's your call. Call me back and we'll talk. If you don't want to... then I promise you won't hear from me again.

MARIA: *(“evil” MARIA)* And it's true... you won't. But you will hear from me. All the time. *(she chuckles)* Welcome home, darling.

(End.)