

“HORNY BASTARDS”

A PLAY BY SAM GRABER

SEPTEMBER 2018

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 90 MINUTES

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CHARACTERS (4F, 2M)

MEREDITH, late 20s, female, American, white

HUFF, early 30s, male, Anglo-African, British

/ATOR, female, age open, South African

YIN, late 20s, female, Chinese

ELDRA, older, female, American, white

JP, her husband, older, American, white

TIME

Now and Then.

THE STAGE

The stage is divided into several distinct playing areas, but the areas almost overlap with each other, such that the crossover and proximity give the feeling that the set is amid a civil war with its own identity. The playing areas are filled and illuminated by both real and physical mechanisms of landscape and topology. Dare we call it a diorama?

Towards stage left a doorframe guards a small room. The small room is not defined by walls, but more by what could be an escarpment of steep grade rising to off.

At stage right is a hotel porter’s check-in desk. Buttressing this area are several flatland bushes protecting a palm tree.

Upstage and elevated above the rest of the stage is a fenced area, geometric, and the boundary here is vague.

Our action is not confined to these playing areas as certain scenes may occur before, under and even above the discreet areas. The actors move about the stage as needed, and all stage properties are fluid and moved by actors In Actu as warranted.

SUMMARY

What if rhino poaching came to America? What if it already has? A new play explores the curious relationship between rhino poaching in Africa and the sexual harassment of women in America.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Horny Bastards debuted as a concert read at The Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis, MN, March 2018, as produced by Conservation Beyond Borders, directed by Leah Cooper, and featuring:

Adelin Phelps, MEREDITH; Scot Moore, HUFF; Gabrielle Simone, /ATOR;
Megan Kim Anderson, YIN; Patty Mathews, ELDRA; Adam Whisner, JP.

SCENE 1.

Day. Warm. Sun. Light breeze.

/ATOR leans against the check-in desk, as if waiting.

INVOC/ATOR

Ahh. I see you have come.

I Welcome You!

There, that's it.

What, you want more? You want grand treatment?

Sure, you're paying for it.

Many of you!...have only dreamed of this place!

Perhaps your ancestor came for the mission. Why many came their first time. For fortune! To save 'native impurity' but really for shiny rocks from the ground.

West: sun coast, foreign goods enter maritime port of trade.

East: dusty desert, rain comes not often, never is it cold.

Mountains to north witness prosperity and renewal!, etched among sky, sea and sand.

But in your mind you see it for the animal. You know it for the animal.

You alllllll come for the animal.

Protected in the largest preserve of *this place*.

This place you and the world call...

San Diego, California...

Lights shift as MEREDITH enters.

SCENE 2.

MEREDITH approaches /ATOR, stepping cautious, almost animalistic.

MEREDITH wears drab clothing. Her hair is woven high and tightly wound. She has a shoulder bag.

MEREDITH

S’cuse me: you the luggage person?

MEREDITH approaches /ATOR.

MEREDITH

Cuz I have another, oversized, out at the—

/ATOR turns and they see each other: a moment.

Then /ATOR moves to off.

MEREDITH stares off towards /ATOR as YIN enters.

YIN is dressed to the nines, maybe even the nine-and-a-halves. Stunning Missoni power suit, ankle-graze boots, her hair smartly pulled back and pinned with a gilded clip.

YIN

Good afternoon? Hello?

MEREDITH

You work here?

YIN

Are you...[referencing her tablet]...

MEREDITH

Trying to check in.

YIN

Meredith Rose.

MEREDITH

...I was traveling under...

YIN

Oh, yes. Americans and their names. Madam’s Organ.

MEREDITH

Right.

YIN

But you *are* Meredith Rose.

MEREDITH

Unfortunately.

YIN

Identification?

MEREDITH

I have another bag at curbside with all my belongings and a roller wheel just broke so I could really use a luggage cart.

YIN

Perhaps a driving license.

MEREDITH

I don’t have one, anymore.

YIN

Federal passport then.

MEREDITH

We’re in the United States. This is the San Diego Ritz Carlton.

YIN

I do not work for the hotel. I am the attaché for your host.

MEREDITH

Great, where’s *your* ID?

YIN

Do you read Mandarin? That would help us both. Especially with translations.

MEREDITH

[Furnishing her passport] It’s just that it was a long flight getting here, a very bumpy, crowded, delayed long flight. And I can’t sleep on planes anymore, especially with the random guy sitting next to you, you never know what could happen if you fall asleep, even if first class.

YIN

Especially in first class.

MEREDITH

I need *one* room key and several hundred Do Not Disturb signs to plaster all over the door to my room which, by the way, can’t be an adjoining with a passthrough doorway. However you say *capiche* in Mandarin.

YIN

And press credentials.

MEREDITH

Good God.

YIN

I must verify at least two positive forms of identification. You understand, Missus Rose—

MEREDITH

Miss. Very much Miss.

YIN

You are not married.

MEREDITH

I was engaged.

YIN

To be married.

MEREDITH

That’s why they have the engagement.

YIN

Miss Rose, I must verify the identity of all attendants.

MEREDITH

Wait, there are others?

YIN

This says Budget Travel Advisor.

MEREDITH

Here, also under contract.

YIN

Not National Geographic.

MEREDITH

Hold on, I was told, I was promised, I was coming to meet The Rancher, some radical eco-tarian providing some ferocious jolt...I have it all here.

YIN

I know what your contract contains, Miss Rose. I wrote it. See, we are both writers.

MEREDITH

You know what?, forget the room, let's just get this over with. I want to interview this Rancher right now.

YIN

Miss Rose, you are not being paid to meet *with* The Rancher. You have are being paid to observe a secluded meeting *over which* The Rancher will preside.

MEREDITH

No, it says...[reading]...

YIN

Verifying documentation is important, yes?

MEREDITH

What matters is I came all this way with very little to go on, and I feel a bit exposed. As a woman in today's world you should understand that.

YIN

I believe I can.

MEREDITH

So I'd like to know what this whole thing is about. Whoever this Rancher guy is will meet me in a very public and very brightly lit place and I'll ask the questions I want to ask. And then you can file my writeup through whatever wire house or PR firm you have on this.

YIN

I see why you Americans have so many contracts. Because of the secretive nature of our purpose I will escort you to your suite on the penthouse level, where refreshment will be brought every several hours, and that you are not allowed to exit your suite for any reason until the full summit with the other attendees, occurring tonight, at exactly eight o' clock, in a secured meeting room on the underground level.

INFILTR/ATOR

[Crouched low, with MEREDITH's luggage] Here!

YIN

More details to follow, once you will. Checking in, please.

MEREDITH

Good God.

MEREDITH follows YIN as...

Lights shift.

SCENE 3.

Like night.

We hear the sounds of the outdoors, what could be an animal sanctuary.

/ATOR has MEREDITH's extra luggage.

/ATOR creeps across stage, crouched and low, perhaps using the luggage as defense.

INFILTR/ATOR

Here!, *shhh!*

Park ranger about for sure, *ah still!*

This one like Bushmanland Quiver tree, eh? Like home.

But home we had rifle. Home we had silencer and scope. Home we had intelligence, *the way.*

Home, we cross Mozambique border by moon, find the northern white by white moon, then pour black tar across South African highway, set ablaze during getaway like swaart gevaar to National Party, that was easy.

But here?

Here no tiger dick, giraffe ass, no cheetah balls stolen from European museum for parlors of puritan piss-off finance men, paid by debt.

Here like nothing.

But target stay the same. Because Asian buyer still want long horn, smooth horn, and we still paid to hunt, *now low!*

Because if park ranger come we still attack first, we still kill first...

Then we go for the horn.

Lights shift.

SCENE 4.

*In the small room HUFF is reclined,
perhaps plucking fruit from a decorative
platter.*

*YIN opens the door, and MEREDITH backs
in, liberally spreading Do Not Disturb signs.*

*/ATOR chucks MEREDITH’s bag into the
room and moves to off.*

MEREDITH

Thank you.

*YIN shuts the door as MEREDITH turns to
see HUFF.*

MEREDITH

...no.

HUFF spits a seed back onto the platter.

MEREDITH

Hell. No.

HUFF

Fine, thanks, how’ve you been?

MEREDITH

Absolutely not.

HUFF

Chocolate kumquat?

MEREDITH

This is you.

HUFF

No, they bring it every couple hours. Quail egg with hollandaise curry, I mean
who does that?

MEREDITH

I thought I made it clear I never wanted to see you again.

HUFF

‘Mr. Huff Thompson, having become a long-distance admirer of your award-winning Reveal photography’—

MEREDITH

—you set this up?—

HUFF

‘—pay handsomely for your time to attend a covert summit related to your field of expertise—’

MEREDITH

Unbelievable.

HUFF

‘—during which you will be granted exclusive access to a sensitive event that will serve a ferocious jolt to the global ecosystem.’

MEREDITH

This your way of finishing the hunt?

HUFF

From what I’ve been able to gather the two journalists they sourced for whatever-this-is are sharing the same suite.

MEREDITH turns and tries to open the door. It won’t budge.

HUFF

They, uh, don’t want us leaving.

MEREDITH

Let me guess, you got a button under the desk, keeps all your women locked in.

HUFF

Actually, I tried sneaking out to learn more about our little situation here. There’s an old friend who runs city desk at the Diego Tribune.

MEREDITH

Oh really, what’s her name?

HUFF

...but there's private security keeping us here.

MEREDITH

It just doesn't end, does it.

HUFF

After I worked my tail off to access the Moru in South Sudan, and then have the natives there somehow agree to a photo shoot, only to receive this offer. The money getting thrown around by whoever these people are. But you know me, abandoning who I am for the paycheck. Thought San Diego would be more civilized. Had to connect three times to get here. You?

MEREDITH

...

HUFF

Well. I guess I should first say how much I admired you sending your article to everyone on staff.

MEREDITH

Me being childish.

HUFF

I thought it took courage. So did many of the women on staff who used to hate you. Would you believe they're the ones now calling you the freshest and most daring voice in journalism. Investigative Fantasy they're calling it. But the whole article got buried in one of those internal investigations. Going after those alleged sex harassers you wrote about. Mainly me.

MEREDITH

...

HUFF

I'm sorry about what happened.

MEREDITH

No you're not.

HUFF

I tried calling you before the issue ran. Many times actually, but you never answered.

MEREDITH

What could you have possibly said?

HUFF

For starters: I just learned your rhino story isn't going to run the issue. Second: I miss you.

MEREDITH

I think you just beat me for the childish award.

HUFF

Meredith.

MEREDITH

Don't.

HUFF

You never called back.

MEREDITH

What exactly do you miss, Huff? Hmm? The hunt? All the female reporters you slept your way through?

HUFF

I'm talking about you.

MEREDITH

Well there's been several versions of that. You'll have to choose which one you miss. The eager, overeducated girl who first entered journalism, only to realize she was nothing but same ogled and groped piece of flesh featured in the pages? Or do you miss the conflicted staffer who decided to 'mate' with the largest lion in the office herd, the managing editor, the story idea which set the whole mess in motion. Or do you miss this, what she ended up becoming. Unable to forgive herself. Trying to stay as unseen as possible. I got rid of my cell. I don't want to have a trace, a scent.

HUFF

I don't work there anymore.

MEREDITH

Must be nice to have a choice. I didn't realize standing up for your sense of moral equality is nothing compared to the good-old-boy network making sure I don't work again.

HUFF

Look, I didn't know about you until I got here, okay? I slipped bills to that porter at concierge, learned you were the other journo contracted by this Rancher.

MEREDITH

Because you're not The Rancher.

HUFF

Wish I was. Could live like this for a living.

MEREDITH

Some random mystery mastermind putting you and I, of all people, in a room.

HUFF

It's a suite. Separate rooms.

MEREDITH

I hate how you can still be so charming. And that you'd sink to this.

HUFF

You know it crossed my mind *this* wasn't our former managing editor. But even the most cultivated toff trying to explain to some committee why he let your story happen in the first place wouldn't spend a pretty coin to fatten me up and toss me out the window. He'd just have me tossed out the window.

MEREDITH

He moved on the second after you did.

HUFF

I didn't move on, if you recall, I was thrown out.

MEREDITH

Thrown out. You're still getting hired, doing what you want to do, and that's great, really.

HUFF

Yes, your article made me a sort of cult icon within the industry.

MEREDITH

Meanwhile I've had to scramble for minimum wage copyedits, to beg for whatever stories I can ghostwrite under male pseudonyms. I'm a casualty of the very rhino story I wanted to write.

HUFF

You did write it. I watched you write it. It was amazing.

MEREDITH

You were the only one to see it for what it really was.

HUFF

Well somebody knows something about us, went through the trouble of contracting us, paying us a boatload to be here, and swearing us to secrecy about it. I didn't almost wonder if this was some plan of *yours*.

MEREDITH

I only got to play reporter for three days.

HUFF

Then I learned about the other two. Down the hall. Couple snake-catching maniacs from Florida.

MEREDITH

...you're serious.

HUFF

Makes me nervous, which makes me curious. Problem is they keep bringing this glorious manna, dulls my natural urge to get the story.

MEREDITH

You still can't accept you're part of the problem.

HUFF

I accept the outcome of my actions, Meredith. In fact, I think a lot about them.

MEREDITH

Because you're not the one that's hunted.

HUFF

No? I meant: I think a lot about you. Tell me it's not the same.

MEREDITH

...

HUFF

[Her luggage] What are you, living out of this?

MEREDITH

Once you’ve been the prey you only see yourself as this small thing, scampering from place to place, trying to survive. I’m ruined, Huff.

HUFF

All I wanted was to see you again. But there’s something strange going on and I need to find out what that is...[going off]...and since you won’t cover for me at least let me know when the next course arrives, will you?

Lights shift.

SCENE 5.

We hear the throbbing pulse of South African bass-and-drum.

/ATOR is atop the stage, by the fenced area, awash in red swirling light. Like a nightclub.

/ATOR wears a style of executioner outfit: black apron, heavy leather gloves, mask.

There is a rhino head.

/ATOR takes a large, white towel and places it over the rhino’s eyes. The horn is still visible, protruding.

AMPUT/ATOR

Hahahahahahaha!

/ATOR dancing to the backbeat, holds a power saw, and prepares to cut the horn.

AMPUT/ATOR

I put it on the eyes and you go to sleep!

I put it on the eyes and you go to sleep!

I put it on the eyes and you go to sleep!

I put it on the eyes and you go to sleep!

Perhaps others from the cast join in the rap-chant.

This repeats ad infinitum until the music abruptly stops.

We hear the sound of a lion’s roar, large and close.

*Then many animals screaming, a cacophony
of jaguar, bonobo, leopard and stork.*

AMPUT/ATOR

Ah, shit.

An alarm blares.

Lights shift.

SCENE 6.

A small conference room.

ELDRA is by MEREDITH, who somewhat cowers in the corner.

JP slouches.

ELDRA

And by that time JP already bagged *fourteen* of ‘em, HUGE full-sized Burmese, one of ‘em a twenty-footer weighing two-fifty, ain’t seen nothing like it!, and the other wannabee losers competing for the state contract were sitting on a couple littler wrigglers and we had FOURTEEN! I told Florida fish and wildlife you can stop the hunt right now, ain’t nobody catching more snakes than us, *ain’t-that-right-JP!*

JP

Mmm.

ELDRA

My husband JP. Used to install pools. Spent more time wrestling snakes than installing pools. Now you might be so curious as to ask why.

MEREDITH

...

ELDRA

Cuz if they ain’t clogging toilets they gettin’ a tan by the diving board, *ain’t-that-right-JP!*

JP

Mmm.

ELDRA

I’m here to tell you, honey: survival of the Everglades?: real.

JP

Mmm.

ELDRA

The swamp: real.

JP

Mmm.

ELDRA

Camo in the Mangrove: real.

JP

Mmm.

ELDRA

Bet you didn't know them fangy buggers first came from Asia as pets. Now there's so many they're eating all the turtles from Key West to Key Largo! So they need us for the toughest hunt around...stalking...creeping...still as still can be... 'til they feel almost comfy with you near, and then BAM!, grip and grab and in the bag! Why JP hunts with his bare hands, strongest grip in the south, skin on skin, cuz what no one else tells you is that you need to *Feel The Slither*.

JP

Mmmmm.

ELDRA

Stroke the slither.

JP

Mmmmmmmmm.

ELDRA

Capital 'e' *Ecstasy* the slither...

JP and ELDRA have a moment.

ELDRA

Which is why after bagging fourteen the Florida agency said we taking you to contract and I was like buck twenty doing pools or buck sixty catching snakes, you know what I'm saying?

MEREDITH

...it's eight oh two.

ELDRA

Total Florida love story. Jacksonville beauty queen, he’s Panhandle construction. At a pool boondoggle in West Orlando he introduces himself by grabbing my ass from behind and *squeezing*. Now there ain’t no Burmese south ‘a Okeechobee ain’t terrified when I drive us up in our new JP-The-Snake-Man van, ha ha!
[Handing MEREDITH a business card] 24 hours a day, buck ninety on weekends and we don’t do sinkholes, *ain’t-that-right-JP!*

JP

Mmmmmmmmm.

More cuddling and cooing as YIN enters, while /ATOR appears to stands before the doorframe as security.

YIN is now the nine-and-three-quarters; Marc Jacobs macramé lace maxi-dress, gliding on Prada tasseled oxfords with punk studs.

YIN

Good evening. Oh, I see you and Miss Rose have met.

ELDRA

Oh no, we ain’t met, we just talking.

MEREDITH

Where’s The Rancher.

YIN

Miss Rose, I assure you, all questions will be answered during this evening’s presentation, which I will now begin, given the urgent timing of our event.

MEREDITH

It’s not a question, I want to get this over with.

YIN

Miss Rose, you are under contract to observe these proceedings and not as a participant.

ELDRA

Yeah, who’s this Rancher anyway? We wanna thank him for all the eats. We ain’t never seen before much less tasted half the stuff put to our suite. Where’s he at?

YIN

The Rancher is here but will not be presenting tonight.

MEREDITH

I’m outta here.

As dialog continues, /ATOR as guard blocks MEREDITH’s exit. This time MEREDITH shares a longer and more defined look: awareness, disbelief.

YIN

I serve as sanctioned extension of The Rancher’s interest, bearing not an insignificant offer of contractual employment.

ELDRA

But you say this gal here with the shaggy clothes and bunned-up hair’s already under contract? JP and I ain’t got no contract.

YIN

If you will let me continue—

ELDRA

Lady, JP and I do ‘preciate getting flown here, and hospitality has been top-notch out-of-this-world two-and-a-half-star, but we come a long way to help you catch a snake.

YIN

If you Americans would be silent long enough so instructions could be delivered in full then you will learn your skill is required for obtaining a rare and volatile item.

ELDRA

What item’s that?

YIN

The offer for obtaining this item is extended only to you and your husband as an offer of contingency, with total payment rendered only to you upon full delivery to me.

ELDRA

Okay, whatever you just said, but what item?

YIN

Where is Mr. Thompson?

ELDRA

Ma'am, you brought us all this way, and we'll listen, I mean you want to sell us the timeshare or the cruise line, it's all good, but I'm asking you maybe cut the wordy talk and just hit the punch line.

YIN

I must not continue without Mr. Thompson.

ELDRA

JP and I been waiting days now and this so-called Rancher ain't here? Now I'm as patient as the next victim but it's about time you told us what we're doing here and whatever this item is you want us to get.

YIN

...the horn of a rhinoceros.

MEREDITH

[To /ATOR] No.

ELDRA

A rhino horn.

/ATOR

[To MEREDITH] Yes.

ELDRA

And just where the hell in Southern California you expect to find that?

YIN

The San Diego Zoo.

MEREDITH

[To YIN] How did they know.

ELDRA

You want JP and I...to just waltz into the San Diego Zoo...and snag a horn off their living rhino.

YIN

Four horns, actually. From their four living rhinos in captivity. With Ms. Rose and Mr. Thompson as journalistic observers.

ELDRA

Well I don't know much 'bout California law, 'cept anyone who stars in movies gets to become Governor, but what you're asking seems mighty illegal.

YIN

And because of its unlawful nature I am offering payment equivalent to standard market rate per horn, to you, upon delivery of each horn, to me.

ELDRA

For what? So JP and I can have news people get our asses tossed in jail for a couple thousand bucks? What's the black market rate these days for even one rhino horn?

YIN

The current market rate for one rhino horn is: five hundred thousand dollars. Half a million dollars per horn.

Pause.

JP

Well. You just got my attention.

Lights shift.

SCENE 7.

*/ATOR remains a guard by the doorframe,
which is now an airport security screening
portal.*

*/ATOR speaks in the cadence and style of a
slam poet.*

SCRUTIN/ATOR

I! scan this screen on this machine airport San Diego defense of safer skies aero-conduct checkpoint eyes ain't nothing gets past the field of my seeing being until SHE HER HERSELF little miss Asia so high class so first class shaking her curvaceous salacious but very sebaceous...skin...not sweet smooth Asia skin but waxy skin grey tough skin waterproof skin matching colorless eyes and a bump in the middle where she used to be little and not taking off her shoes and belt and not walking through my machine but laying herself down on it I say this ain't how it works but SHE HER HERSELF is crying and says she wants it to end it has to end before it's seen not just by my machine but the world for the thing they made her do I say who? she goes the men of the syndicate that's who I say the only thing I know that's syndicated is the Simpsons now KMA cuz I'm the TSA and this the FAA of the USA but SHE HER HERSELF says she's been changed in the worst ways a mother of the thing they want to have to show how much power they have over us the womb of death and hers a smuggler's coffin after they learned of The Frozen Project a very real thing look it up the San Diego Zoo where thousands of extinct animals are kept as frozen embryos and the men of the syndicate think the great black northern? they can breed they can clone they can make it their own but there's only one way to get it cuz frozen embryos don't just hatch all alone you think the sex trade is servicing men on beds? how about operating tables? they want the horn to show how much and how often and how deep they can stick it in us so SHE HER HERSELF lays down because she started out on her back and wants to die that way her own carry-on bag with more than 3.4 ounces of liquid in the middle and I start to wonder if it's my reflection the way they made her quiet and still and far from home and on the x-ray screen I see a horn and when she comes out the other side of the machine all that remains...is a rhinoceros.

*In the upstage geometric fenced area we see
for the first time a living single rhinoceros.*

And we have...full blackout...

*Over darkness we hear a call recording, as
from another place, the voice South African.*

VOICE

You have reached the Department of Environmental Affairs, Crimes and
Incidents Hotline.

This national service is for the South African public to report emergency incidents
taking place, including the killing of wildlife and protected species.

Please wait while we transfer your call to the next available agent.

*We hear the growing roar of an airplane on
takeoff...*

SCENE 8.

The time is now the past.

Lights up on the small room.

A beige blade fan might swirl slowly overhead.

MEREDITH reviews documents. She now wears attire appropriate for South Africa. Perhaps a travel jacket over a sleeved Gilet and broad canvas hat with her hair tucked under. The attire is somewhat loose and baggy.

We hear the sound an approaching Jeep.

HUFF

[To OFF] Cheers, mate.

MEREDITH

Where is it, you bastards.

HUFF approaches the doorframe, backing in, lumbering through under the weight of carrying gear: a camera around his neck, lens case and worn rucksack.

HUFF

Hey hey!

MEREDITH

I help you?

HUFF

Hope so! Looking for...can't believe I forgot this...

MEREDITH

British camp is next village.

HUFF

Thank you for that, I’ll know where to snog a proper pint later, but eh, bear with me...[his cell]...Madam’s Organ?

MEREDITH

Oh!

HUFF

Glorious.

MEREDITH

Mr. Thompson! You made it!

HUFF

[Dropping gear, flopping down] Barely.

MEREDITH

...Mr. Thompson the photographer. National Geographic.

HUFF

...yeah?...

MEREDITH

Sorry, it’s just I didn’t expect you to be...

HUFF

So incredibly tan, don’t worry, it happens all the time. [Extending to shake hands] Huff, please.

MEREDITH

...[not shaking]...I don’t do physical interaction with men. Anymore. Given the way things are.

HUFF

Okay? Well. The way things are. Is that I’ve been fetched all the way to South Africa against my will by some Madam’s Organ.

MEREDITH

Meredith Rose, actually. Field reporter on first assignment. And I’m thrilled you’re here, really, it’s great to finally meet you. Sorry for the sudden grab but it was necessary to bring you in. Hopefully it wasn’t too much trouble.

HUFF

Well let's see, my exfil from the DRC was just a small disaster, what with the helo you sent stirring discontent among the natives who didn't want to give access in the first place, then the botched flight crew, then the charter here thirty-five thousand feet of brutal.

MEREDITH

Hate flying as well. I'm okay right until takeoff.

HUFF

I'm okay right after drink cart. [An airline mini-bottle] Mind?

MEREDITH

Please.

HUFF

Johannesburg: walked away from the landing which I've come to learn from all my travels really is the only condition for a successful flight, only to endure the ground ride here: six hours of stop-and-go.

MEREDITH

Six hours to cover a hundred fifty miles?

HUFF

Bloody maniacs crossing the road everywhere. Jeeps and roving bands of armed paramilitary blocking traffic. gunfire in the distance. Thought South Africa was supposed to be more civilized.

MEREDITH

First time?

HUFF

More wet than I imagined.

MEREDITH

Downpours are Indian Ocean backwash. They come out of nowhere, the only thing that stops the hunt. [A map] The red dot is us, just outside Kruger National Park, as far northeast as we can go before hitting Zimbabwe.

HUFF

Nearest town?

MEREDITH

You’re in it.

HUFF

Right. So. You don’t background your photographer before working with him, and you don’t touch hands when you meet, but you sure burned someone’s bum in Washington to get staffed to this mess.

MEREDITH

...excuse me?

HUFF

Which editor in DC did you infuriate to get assigned here?

MEREDITH

The editor that’s my fiancée. The managing editor. The one who runs the whole magazine.

HUFF

...aha.

MEREDITH

Listen, we got a lot of ground to cover. Why don’t you get cleaned up? We’ll meet back once you’re presentable.

She’s back to reviewing documents.

HUFF

Look, I’m—

MEREDITH

Don’t be.

HUFF

—not sorry, but—

MEREDITH

Here to take exceptional photos when I need you to take exceptional photos. Of rhinos. The bloody ones, literally. Their horns getting sawed off, their body strewn everywhere. You must have seen at least one along the highway by the abandoned checkpoints.

HUFF

...it's just I was taken, torn, from a delicate posting in the Congo.

MEREDITH

Are you the guy who has to repeat himself to make sure his point's heard?

HUFF

No, I'm the guy who just got transferred to somewhere he doesn't want to be and wasn't even given the courtesy of a hello, heads up or handshake.

MEREDITH

Your work supporting Jennifer's article on the Ethiopian Afar was astonishing. Sobering, even. I had to touch up most of Jennifer's, let's face it, pedestrian copy, but your photography was beyond vivid. It almost told the story without the words. So I transferred you. I requested you, actually.

HUFF

Your fiancée is our managing editor, early 60's?, walks with a cane?

MEREDITH

I believe the South Africans are planning to relocate what's left of their 25,000 rhinos.

HUFF

Bald and heavyset? Strong odor about him?

MEREDITH

I'm thinking South Africa's sold out their rhinos.

HUFF

Looks the other way when talking to you?

MEREDITH

Vulnerable economy, corrupt leadership, all sorts of illicit dealing with private ranchers, so an exodus makes sense, right? But word's leaked. And because of the obscene prices offered for each horn, South Africans have entered gang-like warfare. I'm thinking three or four dead rhinos piled on top of each other could make a great cover shot.

HUFF

Are we not talking to each other here, Meredith?

MEREDITH

Ms. Rose. In Western culture addressing only men by last name gives an advantage.

HUFF

...right. I guess you're not aware, and I'm sorry to break it to you now, but I retired from animals. I don't do animals anymore.

MEREDITH

Obviously I don't know your process.

HUFF

No, what I'm saying, because the man who still pays me so I can still have a career is...

MEREDITH

My fiancée.

HUFF

I photograph humans.

MEREDITH

You're here to support my story.

HUFF

From what you said there's a bunch of dead rhinos lying around and let's take pictures.

MEREDITH

You're right. I've been overly secretive with details. Only two people know about this story. And that it's going to be the cover. And ten thousand words.

HUFF

You're getting the cover and ten thousand words.

MEREDITH

We're getting it, yes.

HUFF

That's insane, nobody gets that.

MEREDITH

Well, we are.

HUFF

Let’s just say for the sake of whatever-this-is that I believe you. What exactly is the ten thousand word story?

MEREDITH

The link between rhino poaching in Africa and the sexual harassment of women in America. [She’s taken out her own mini-bottle, from her belongings, also the airline variety] You mind?

HUFF

...yeah, cheers.

MEREDITH

Good God, it’s been a while.

HUFF

You say sexual harassment...

MEREDITH

Of women, yes.

HUFF

And you requested me.

MEREDITH

Well I needed the best. Photographer.

HUFF

Uh-huh.

MEREDITH

Besides, when I asked for you my fiancée said we’re alike: traumatized by a diminished world and trying to deal with it through art.

HUFF

He said that.

MEREDITH

Sort of. He said you were a charming bastard with a reputation but I knew what he meant. Having really connected with your work.

HUFF

With Jennifer.

MEREDITH

No, I saw your Reveal shots at the National Portrait Gallery.

HUFF

The exhibit.

MEREDITH

Museums are very safe. Older people, not sexually active, attention focused on the wall. But the DC Metro, to get to the museums, now *that* takes cunning. Not standing up for your stop until the last second, only moving once the doors open, avoids any [groping]. Anyway, it was your Reveal work, the native faces, which totally spoke to me. Know what they said?

HUFF

We're not animals?

MEREDITH

Stop feeding the hypocrisy. I thought what if I stopped wearing makeup? Stopped brushing my teeth?

HUFF

You mind me asking what you were doing before?

MEREDITH

The Lincoln Memorial.

HUFF

No, before here.

MEREDITH

Oh. Um. Copyediting. Fact checking.

HUFF

Uh-huh.

MEREDITH

I know what you're thinking.

HUFF

I don't think you do.

MEREDITH

How this girl with no feature credits to her unknown name went from menial, entry-level tasks to the biggest story in the history of one of the world’s most recognizable magazines. Did she just sleep her way to the top?

HUFF

Okay, maybe you do know what I’m thinking.

/ATOR has entered.

EMANCIP/ATOR

Eyes down!

HUFF

Not to get too blunt with it.

EMANCIP/ATOR

Eyes on floor!

MEREDITH

...[to /ATOR]...no.

EMANCIP/ATOR

Yes, he’s coming.

MEREDITH

How are you even here?

EMANCIP/ATOR

Me? Him!

MEREDITH

I don’t understand.

EMANCIP/ATOR

Heading this way from the office kitchen.

MEREDITH

I don’t see you. You’re not real.

HUFF

Ten thousand words and the cover.

EMANCIP/ATOR

Move, child! Blend to the area, disguise in natural habitat, mimicry and elusion.

MEREDITH

He’s really coming.

EMANCIP/ATOR

He who roams the hallway.

MEREDITH

Red tie guy.

EMANCIP/ATOR

You know what they say about him, now quick, *the way*.

MEREDITH

‘It’s a desk, a cubicle, an open workstation.’

EMANCIP/ATOR

Under here!

MEREDITH

Georgetown BA, GW postgrad, to be the girl before and the woman after, of deft phrasing and boundless ambition to become the soaring starlet of international journalism, to annihilate the world of—!

EMANCIP/ATOR

No sudden movements! The prey wears grey to blend with the wall color. Like the owl matches the tree bark, the ant by a dark pebble.

MEREDITH

‘At first she thought it was just rumors.’

EMANCIP/ATOR

Shhh!

MEREDITH

‘Stories meant to scare the new hires, a hazing.’

EMANCIP/ATOR

Welcome to National Geographic: today’s episode: the American woman.

MEREDITH

Would be funny if it wasn’t so true.

EMANCIP/ATOR

No hand lotion, nothing to give scent, *ah still!*

MEREDITH

You don't want to be seen, but you can't hide, you can never hide, I mean look how big you are.

EMANCIP/ATOR

'Her curve shakes the hallway, her sensuality calls a meeting.'

MEREDITH

God how they want it, they're aching for it!

EMANCIP/ATOR

Can't you move faster?

MEREDITH

I'm a turtle, a star fish, a loris.

EMANCIP/ATOR

Under here!

MEREDITH

A clinging koala, a creeping gila, a floating manatee.

EMANCIP/ATOR

A rhino.

MEREDITH

...

EMANCIP/ATOR

...a rhinoceros.

MEREDITH

Good God.

EMANCIP/ATOR

Big and helpless.

MEREDITH

Tragic and alone.

EMANCIP/ATOR

The long, smooth horn they cut and take.

MEREDITH

‘A sex trophy for men. A symbol of sexual injury women across the world suffer.’

EMANCIP/ATOR

No one’s going to read that! Everything here is criticism and shit. Now crouch low and hold your breath.

MEREDITH

Behind a potted plant.

EMANCIP/ATOR

You got a better hiding spot?

MEREDITH

I’m a rhino!

EMANCIP/ATOR

That’s why he’s coming!

MEREDITH

Maybe I’ll say something to him. Why don’t I just say something?

EMANCIP/ATOR

His hands don’t have ears. You’re doing good here, child.

MEREDITH

I’m such a child. Why am I still such a child? WHY AM I SUCH A DAMN—

HUFF

So let me get this straight...you’re saying these are all *possible* coordinates where you think that *maybe* the South Africans are *perhaps* planning to assemble all 25,000 of their remaining rhinos for an *unconfirmed* transport and sale to some *unknown* buyer? I got that right?

EMANCIP/ATOR

Now look where you got yourself.

HUFF

Doesn’t that seem a bit, you know, fanciful?

EMANCIP/ATOR

You’re on your own. Child.

MEREDITH

[Rising, snatching the map back from HUFF] We just need to find where the rhino selloff is happening. We need to be there to see it, to actually catch them being sold for money, for their horn—

EMANCIP/ATOR

—for their shape—

MEREDITH

Into slavery.

HUFF

...

MEREDITH

Now I just blew half my budget getting you here. So you with me or what?

HUFF

...yeah...sure...

Lights shift.

SCENE 9.

YIN with ELDRA and JP, analyzing a detailed planogram and ground survey.

ELDRA

I ain't so sure about this.

YIN

The operation has been carefully planned.

ELDRA

By who?

YIN

Our people. Of course the exact equipment required by our local assault team could not be anticipated.

ELDRA

I'm thinking bail and a lawyer.

JP

Not if we got the right gear.

YIN

Tell me what you need and I will have it by tonight.

JP

All depends how we gettin' in, how we gettin' out.

YIN

Initial penetration here.

ELDRA

[Reading] Marker Point Alpha.

JP

The San Diego Zoo parking lot.

YIN

Perimeter fence, here, will be deactivated.

ELDRA

Deactivated by who?

YIN

Precut for your entry.

ELDRA

Precut by who?

YIN

Our people.

ELDRA

And JP and I are just walking in.

YIN

At Two AM. Once inside you go uphill.

JP

Why not straight to the rhinos?

YIN

All equipment you request will be waiting here: Marker Bravo.

JP

Gonna need a hydraulic case for carrying out the horns. And each of us grabbing a handle, maybe some gloves?

ELDRA

All the damn cameras these places got, maybe I want a mask.

YIN

Tonight is no moon. The dark will conceal your movement from human detection.

JP

But not animal. These rhinos got names?

YIN

Their leader is Betty.

JP

Betty got a crew?

YIN

Lions. Outer defense.

JP

We’ll need deodorizer to mask our scent during approach. And moccasin boots to cover our sound.

YIN

No problem.

JP

Really half a million per horn?

YIN

From East Asian buyers, yes.

JP

The hell they use it for?

YIN

The modern misconception is aphrodisiac.

JP

...

YIN

Sexual arousal.

JP

That’s weird. Eldra and I just pop in Sade’s Greatest Hits. Sweetest Taboo, couple snakes and a six-pack of Milwaukee’s finest always worked for me.

YIN

It is amazing Americans have consensual sex.

ELDRA

I don’t know about this, baby. I don’t like it.

JP

What’s not to like? Two million dollars. Tax free.

ELDRA

She thinks everything’s gonna be easy. She thinks I just drive us to the zoo, walk through some fence, cut off some horns, and walk back out the way we came in.

YIN

Not the way you came in. From the rhinos you exit here: Marker Zulu.

ELDRA

The Fisher Price Petting Zoo.

JP

And they’re used to dealing with commandos snagging horns?

YIN

Since it has never been done in your country, no. That is why it will work.

ELDRA

But to cut off the horns, since Betty and Co. ain’t gonna be thrilled about it, since they won’t just sit still and play nice and let us do it...

YIN

You place a towel over their head to calm them. The head stays still so you can saw.

JP

Lady, I ain’t hacking the horn off some 2-ton prehistoric holdout ‘less it’s deader than dead, know what I’m saying? I’m gonna need some serious firepower.

YIN

That I cannot do.

JP

I don’t know how y’all *do* in China but in America we don’t mess around. ‘Specially if we gotta blast our way to wherever we’re taking our two million.

ELDRA

Shooting *people*.

JP

Rhinos, border patrol, whatever.

ELDRA

Leaving the country?

JP

Maybe Mexico, huh? A little puerto-va-somewhere. Get you in a bikini and roll in the sand all day?

ELDRA

Baby, the only Spanish word I speak is ‘no.’

JP

C’mon, hon! Even if we get just one horn, that’s the rest of our life paid for.

YIN

Four horns. Four or nothing.

ELDRA

See what she’s doing? Let’s go back to Florida and forget all this.

JP

This ain’t snakes in the Glades, hon, this is A League. How many hunters get this contract?

ELDRA

To become fugitives.

JP

If we got problems and we got money, and spending money can get rid of the problems, then we don’t got problems.

YIN

One hour from initial entry to our control house, here, Mission Beach, the rally point after, where your fee will be exchanged for four horns.

ELDRA

How do we know she won’t turn us in? Take the horns and snag her money back?

YIN

My purpose is worth far more than two million dollars.

JP

And mine is staying alive to enjoy it. You want your four horns? Then I’ll tell you exactly what firepower we need.

Lights shift.

SCENE 10.

We hear music, a neo-Afrofunk power groove.

/ATOR is now a YouTube personality, perhaps speaking from within a square frame of frond, wearing military field fatigues, a la the Black Mambas.

AGIT/ATOR

hey wassup my sistahz this is DAYUMN!, thanks again for checkin me out, don't forget to drop a like and hit that subscribe, 'specially with all the dope swell i'm about to rep in this here latest YouTube video.

now: i know many of youz been rockin the comments below and been like: hey, ur app recommendations are cool and all but they getting kind of stale and i need somethin different, somethin above and beyond, somethin that's gonna make my Black Mamba sistahz out here in the field go: DAYUMN!

y'all need that sizzle and i feel ya cuz y'all the only anti-poach sistahz out here in south africa and you wanna be reppin ur cell to your girls like: i got this on my mobile and u don't.

so i got for u...a brand new app that lets u beat the global stock market.

now i know what y'all thinkin, y'all thinkin *DAYUMN girl!*, ain't no way a bunch'a bushveld beauties like us gonna rep some global stock market!

okay, but this app is like blowing away the templeton and the vanguard, not that i know what that means but it says it gives ur own 'E.T.F.', (?), and lets u trade any stock with 'RHINO' in the name.

half a million percent returns!

now i don't know if this thing's pickin stocks with the full 'RHINO' in the name or 'RH' or 'NO' and i'm not really sure what a stock is but it's getting *yield, y'all!*

it's so easy even a rhinoceros can do it!

so say ur flippin through all them borin apps while waitin to stop some hunter tryin to kill some animal.

AGIT/ATOR [CONT.]

i mean...dayumn...when u stop to think about it that is *peasant war, my sistahz!*
that is the man laughing at u! u r just another bullet in his gun and that's the *real*
poach.

u might bag ur own horn, yeah, u bag the horn 'fore he can, then u sell that horn
for half a mil, then u bag half a mil percent returns on that half a mil from this
here app and double poach the poach!

and these days...that's kinda what the world's come to, ya know?

i got promo codes in the links below, i got serious sponsor ups in the play store,
and y'all be lovin me while runnin ur own 'RHINO E.T.F.' and subscribin the life
u always deserved to be livin!

DAYUMN!

peace.

Music plays us out as...

Lights shift.

SCENE 11.

Again the past, South Africa.

*MEREDITH enters the small room,
dejected.*

HUFF follows a moment behind.

HUFF

Didn't think it was that bad.

MEREDITH

Pfff.

HUFF

I mean it wasn't *good*...

MEREDITH

We're getting nowhere.

HUFF

There's been some progress. We got a little conversation with that last one.

MEREDITH

A series of denials isn't conversation.

HUFF

[Handing her a new mini-bottle, from his gear] You drown sorrows, I'll reintroduce myself to soap and water.

MEREDITH

We had him, too. The Deputy General of Conservation.

HUFF

Each time he kept calmly denying everything to me you made sure he knew you were the one in charge. Not an easy thing to do, especially here.

MEREDITH

It doesn't matter. We're no better off than we were three days ago. I still have no idea if a rhino exodus is taking place.

HUFF

People here conserve their opinions.

MEREDITH

Unless they’re talking to you. Government offices, private ranchers, even game outfitters. Everyone talks to you.

HUFF

Well, I’m less into conservation and more into conversation that way. Also...I’m not so pushy.

MEREDITH

...wow.

HUFF

Sometimes volume and force work the opposite of how you want it go.

MEREDITH

Yeah, well, I’m always eager for people to see it my way. Probably why all my early story ideas never got approved. Would rush into the issue director’s office and blurt them out. Stories always sound so petulant and stupid when you speak about them. That’s why you read them! Plus I hate the sound of my voice.

HUFF

Not as bad as you think.

MEREDITH

Everyone here barely bats an eye when I talk to them.

HUFF

This place is history. Waving a press card and demanding answers from a place where war and fire are like water? What are they supposed to do, freely admit their involvement in the illicit horn trade?

MEREDITH

Which means readers on the other side of earth won’t bat *two* eyes. You take people from around the world and ask them to list the top one hundred problems we’re facing and rhino poaching is, at best, 101. No one gives a shit about animals!

HUFF

I don’t know, dolphins still get a good beat.

MEREDITH

They’ll see the connection when they read it. This rhino exodus is the hook to get them reading.

HUFF

It’s not even close to the hook.

MEREDITH

...I know this is hard for you to hear, but...your job is taking pictures.

HUFF

Well I’ve now expanded my duties. I’m rather selfish about helping others that way. And I’d rather not waste any more time so in the end our story gets dumped.

MEREDITH

You know for three days we’ve been side by side, from the local bank to the Nazarene church, and you haven’t once made ready your camera. You haven’t taken out a single roll of film. This whole time and not one picture.

HUFF

Because I haven’t read one word of your writing. Like you say, there’s talking about it and then seeing it. Rhino poaching and sexual harassment isn’t exactly smile-and-say-cheese material. I need to go where you’re going. To feel what you’re feeling.

MEREDITH

My fiancée know your taking his job, too?

HUFF

This isn’t a field report for the UN Security Council, it’s a magazine article. A blast for impatient readers courted by adverts. Quick, they’re looking at front cover, oh noooooo! They’re on to Travel & Leisure.

MEREDITH

Like I don’t get that. But what the industry doesn’t seem to get is that the ones in charge of breaking the news are being exposed for breaking the law. It’s like at this point we’re either an avoider of it, or a survivor. So I’m working a new and totally radical style for this story, dispatches from a shared disreality!, a completely berserk and!—...what.

HUFF

Where’s your ring?

MEREDITH

What?

HUFF

You’re engaged, right? Three days and I just realized your finger’s bare.

MEREDITH

...diamonds.

HUFF

Yeah?

MEREDITH

Harvested by Angolan slave lords so men worldwide can mate women by an imperial act of subjugation.

HUFF

...okay, but he still gave you one, yeah?

MEREDITH

We’re not—

HUFF

—you’re not—

MEREDITH

—it’s a process.

HUFF

Thought the process took ten seconds, especially in America, very efficient your country.

MEREDITH

We’re working this story.

HUFF

So managing editor, ours by commercial arrangement, yours possible long-term husband, still murky on that one, dispatched you from the stodgy Washington back office to your very first assignment in the remote wilds of South Africa for some totally radical rhino sex story of which no one’s heard one word, with dwindling project funds and a heroic photographer.

MEREDITH

...you always this charming?

HUFF

When waiting for the story, absolutely. You’ve got draft, yeah? The yes-editor, sort-of-fiancée has an opinion where this thing’s headed?

MEREDITH

He won’t see it as journalism. Besides, he doesn’t really listen. Like you do.

HUFF

Well. Guess marriage is about compromise.

MEREDITH

How do you do it?

HUFF

Oh no, I’ll be the last bachelor standing. Until amazing comes along.

MEREDITH

I meant your work. If you sweat it’s effort, intensity. Me, it’s coming undone, or worse, fear. Just another way the deck is stacked in your favor.

HUFF

You been to Hackney? Poor part of London. When I was growing up there I always saw this codger about, the lens of a camera stuck to his face. Know what he was doing? Taking pictures of *us*. Talking in shops, dancing at festivals. Know what he was really doing? Documenting the system of displacement. Pushing *us* to the margin before throwing us off. Quite an organized campaign. His tiny lens against that. Know what I learned following him around? There’s power in revealing people as they are, not as the family album of the world would have you believe. Because when you see pictures of The Blacks it’s always the same, yeah? Solemn, tragic. Show one thing over and over and it’s what we become. Well what about our native moments, vibrant and alive!, before the condos and high-rises take our homes.

MEREDITH

A different kind of hunt.

HUFF

The codger died. I picked up where he let off. Submitted my early Reveal shots of *us* to some major contest and won first prize and then a pet magazine of all things called and asked if I’d like work and I’m like are you serious? I’m chronicling gentrification as a weapon! I can’t be bothered with!...I’m sorry, how much were you offering?...now look at me. Salamanders and cockatoos.

MEREDITH

But I saw your photos. You’re doing it.

HUFF

Am I. How easily we unbecome ourselves to fit a career. [The camera] Always there to remind me who I am and who I’m not.

MEREDITH

Should bring that thing to Madam’s Organ. It’s a bar in Adams Morgan, DC where the working women gather, to help each other. I subscribed to every travel mag growing up. My dreams began then. To be those stories. The only friends I had, really. And there I was in the Organ, fresh from grad school, where do I apply? They said [her body] *this* is your application. It’s not like that anymore, is it? But you put on that nice dress and eyeliner and you get hired and work twice as hard to be seen as half as good. Because it is still happening, sometimes right in front of you. It’s something to see the world for what you can’t believe to be true. But then it’s all you can see. I was so terrified of it happening to me I lowered my voice to ward off predators. Wrapped gauze to flatten myself. I didn’t want to face that moment where I had to choose between my career or shame. And I didn’t want to have to go along with it and feel like it was my fault. I felt like I couldn’t escape but I couldn’t back down and I couldn’t stand up, like there was nowhere else to go. So I pitched a story. But this time direct to the managing editor. I just barged into his office and blurted it out: me ‘mating’ with him. A story about us tying the knot, the rhino on the bottom rung to the largest lion of the office pride. But nothing physical, no touching, just a secret arrangement where only we knew the truth. For journalistic purpose. To see how it would affect everyone around us. He said: sure. Like that, like it was nothing. God, did it backfire. The vicious sniping from the other women. Maybe they were jealous I got out of dealing with it while they still had to fend for their bodies. Nothing changed. Except I couldn’t show my face in the Organ. And I felt even more alone than before. But here I am. He called it his engagement gift. The cover and ten thousand words.

HUFF

So he’s never...to you.

MEREDITH

It’s hard to tell anymore. The day I left for here, know what he said? ‘Maybe this trip will finally loosen you up.’ I’d just like not having to work in order to work.

HUFF unstraps his gear bag and takes out a roll of film, applying it to MEREDITH’s finger.

HUFF

I realize we haven't known each other very long...

MEREDITH

What are you doing?

HUFF

I, Meredith Rose—

MEREDITH

Can you [not]?

HUFF

—promise never to hold back on telling the story.

MEREDITH

...

HUFF

With all that's getting revealed by everything being hunted, I think there are many who'd relish your story. Including me.

Long pause.

MEREDITH

There are horrible things happening in the world.

HUFF

I'm with you.

MEREDITH

Rhino poaching being one of them.

HUFF

Kind of less with you.

MEREDITH

Representing the male need for sexual conquest.

HUFF

Somehow back to being with you.

MEREDITH

The horn a symbol of power and influence. The same influence a manager wields in the halls of American power.

HUFF

Surprisingly still with you.

MEREDITH

How the lines blur: creeping up to their prey: a full-sized rhino: a young staffer: the grasslands, the office, closer, wondering what’s it going to take to subdue it, to bag it, where you’ll touch first, where you’ll shoot first, because you’re going to have to kill it or this time maybe it stands up for itself or charges back and...Good God.

HUFF

That’s...

MEREDITH

The hook.

HUFF

A bloody bloody hook.

MEREDITH

But how do we even get that hook?

HUFF now is readying his camera, and going to off.

HUFF

Now that you’re starting to do your job, let me do mine.

HUFF goes as we hear children singing hymns, a group prayer.

Lights shift.

SCENE 12.

*We hear a cappella hymns, children singing,
as before.*

*/ATOR is now a minister of education, in
robes, perhaps bespectacled.*

EDUC/ATOR

Hello.

It is not often people come to see where their book donations go.

I have been the deacon of education here at Church of the Nazarene since we first opened thirty-three years ago.

For thirty-three years I teach the children history, mathematics, art.

The one thing in thirty-three years they have taught me? Desperation. My children lack proper clothing. They get sick and never heal. Some die before me.

I make visits to neighboring churches and beg for help. This is as they are preparing to come visit me and beg for mine.

So you see, when opportunity comes to serve my children...it is a difficult decision.

I have never killed anything in my life, you see. Not even a fly.

For God teaches us His most important creation is man. That of all creatures inhabiting His earth, man stands above.

Then what is a fly to me? The ones that disturb and distract my students? So small and insignificant?

What then is the distance to the next larger animal, and the next larger animal, and the one after that?

If killing is done once, at any level, then does a difference in animal accord a difference in divine law?

They pay so much for one horn. And my children have so little.

EDUC/ATOR [CONT.]

The man told me to go only when night has the moon. After the rains. The moon shines on water, and the rhino comes to drink.

But when you see it, when you stand before it, you cannot move, because it is not a fly.

It is God’s kingdom.

Then another villager came out of nowhere. He attacked, shot, shot again, and once the rhino went down he began to saw.

But he didn’t come home with the horn that night.

I did.

In fact, I was the only one to come home that night.

/ATOR makes a silent prayer and lights a candle.

EDUC/ATOR

Thank you for visiting our church. We appreciate the books.

The candle remains lit, as...

SCENE 13.

Again the past, South Africa.

Night, candlelight from the previous scene.

*/ATOR is on the periphery of the scene,
perhaps continuing to light candles.*

*We hear shouts from off: ‘Go, go! Don’t
stop!’*

HUFF and MEREDITH rush on.

Hahahaha!	HUFF
Holy shit!	MEREDITH
Insane!	HUFF
HOLY SHIT!	MEREDITH
You alright?	HUFF
You alright?	MEREDITH
My legs!	HUFF
My heart!	MEREDITH
My lungs!	HUFF
You think they followed?	MEREDITH

HUFF

We’re not exactly Olympic sprinters.

MEREDITH

Lock the door.

HUFF

Guns!

MEREDITH

They were shoo-ting!

HUFF

Don’t think at us. Besides...they weren’t the only ones shooting.

MEREDITH

...ohhhh.

HUFF

OHHHhhhhhhoho!

MEREDITH

Please tell me you got it.

HUFF

Whole thing.

MEREDITH

You got it.

HUFF

I got it!

MEREDITH

I mean vast land, BIG—

HUFF

Midnight hike in the bush—

MEREDITH

—and we just happened to—

HUFF

—come upon them?

MEREDITH

...how'd you know.

HUFF

Greased that bloke from Environmental Tourism.

MEREDITH

You bribed him?

HUFF

No, I bought a REALLY expensive map and he pointed and said oh two hundred.

MEREDITH

Where'd you get the money?

HUFF

Project funds.

MEREDITH goes to inspect her bag, which /ATOR holds. /ATOR hands MEREDITH money from the bag, a look is exchanged.

HUFF

But I ever imagined we'd get *that* close!

MEREDITH

There's hardly any money left.

HUFF

You know another journo crew catching a poach in the act?

MEREDITH

...alright.

HUFF

Alright???? As it was happening!!!

MEREDITH

Yes, I'm—

HUFF

[Locking the door] Recognizing few things in life are as thrilling as sidestepping danger with cunning and verve. And plain running away at full speed. We need to celebrate.

MEREDITH

This is the cover.

HUFF

There she is!

MEREDITH

There’s no way we’re not the cover with this!

HUFF

[In her stuff, finding more airline mini-bottles] What’s this?

MEREDITH

First class.

HUFF

Smashing.

MEREDITH

I can’t even think straight.

HUFF

Flush with the burn of mortal jeopardy! Figured you’d be jumping off the ceiling.

MEREDITH

I’m behaving like a future Pulitzer winner on the inside.

HUFF

Momentary panic when we came upon them. Almost forgot to remove the lens.

MEREDITH

Looked so small.

HUFF

Those buggers are *huge*!

MEREDITH

Not the rhinos, the shorter one, aimed his rifle, my whole body froze.

HUFF

Your mouth didn’t freeze.

MEREDITH

I started shouting.

HUFF

You and them screaming at each other.

MEREDITH

And the dead rhino!

HUFF

[Toasting] In frame!!!...[drinking]...so!...you have to tell him now, right? That you got the hook?

MEREDITH

...

HUFF

...uh-huh...what about me?

MEREDITH

...oh.

HUFF

Just the photographer.

MEREDITH

No.

HUFF

Let me finally join the story, Meredith. Let me be with you. Otherwise it's just two art forms bounding along each other with no real connection. I've been thinking about what you said, about being hunted. But all you and I really share against that is length and width on a page. We can do better. Let me hear it. [His camera] And then you can see it.

MEREDITH

It's raw.

HUFF

Then it's you. Natural, *native*, before tussled about by outside forces.

MEREDITH

Editorial serves a purpose.

HUFF

To tell writers how to smear lipstick all over their work? What I submit is what people see. They see me. Making things possible because I made myself vulnerable. Otherwise, we stomp around this planet analyzing gaps in our self-esteem and calling it progress. To hell with that! You threw that all away to put your art where your heart is! You made a decision that brought you here and now it's Meredith, *it's Meredith*, two thirty in the morning, somewhere past the last rounded corner of earth, and we've just done danger, contact with the very quarry you've been surviving all this time to find, *the heartbeat!*, *the drum!*, and now you're brimming with the power of transmitting that to the world. And I'm ready to listen.

MEREDITH

...alright.

HUFF

Yes!

MEREDITH

But—

HUFF

No cuts, no edits. As only you can tell it. This is you now. It's you.

MEREDITH prepares, perhaps lets down her hair, long and luxurious.

MEREDITH

...they arrive mostly in pairs—

/ATOR

—mostly young—

MEREDITH

—mostly barefoot—

MEREDITH & /ATOR

—and bound to the same murderous act they are about to commit.

HUFF

Now *that's* a hook!

MEREDITH

They are migrants on a mission of death, but already dead, these lifeless mercenaries, sent to the KNP by the most truculent animal in the kingdom—

/ATOR

Male. Lust.

HUFF

Flame meet torch!

MEREDITH

Small game hunters have come—

/ATOR

—no—

MEREDITH

—have *flocked*—

HUFF

—nice—

MEREDITH

—under the state’s discreetly and tacitly blind laws—

HUFF

—trusting her adverbs—

MEREDITH & /ATOR

—to trade in illegal animal trafficking at the larger expense of human rights!

HUFF is taking pictures.

MEREDITH

The poacher syndrome is a familiar fever afflicting the rest of the world...

HUFF

[Still taking pictures] Yes.

/ATOR

These fields!

MEREDITH

These fields of blood—

HUFF

—yes—

/ATOR

—a visceral echo—

MEREDITH

...a visceral echo of the silent whispers of another species equally stalked...and hunted by...um...

HUFF

God, you should see yourself.

MEREDITH

What.

HUFF

No, your...

MEREDITH

What.

HUFF

...like a light...when you speak...like a...

We hear thunder from short distance.

MEREDITH

Let's, um...

HUFF

Hey.

MEREDITH

What.

HUFF

It's amazing. You're amazing.

/ATOR

Mmm.

HUFF

Don't change a word. Don't ever.

...really.
MEREDITH

Yes.
HUFF

Yes.
MEREDITH

Yes.
HUFF

Yes.
MEREDITH

MEREDITH takes the camera.

And looks at the picture screen.

She then looks at HUFF.

We hear again thunder.

And the lights shift.

SCENE 14.

Lights illuminate the upstage geometric fenced area. We see inside a single rhinoceros.

We hear music, a Southern Rock anthem. Perhaps the Allman Brothers, the Charlie Daniels Band, or, God forbid, Lynnyrd Skynyrd.

We see a clock somewhere that reads 2:15.

As music continues we see JP and ELDRA climbing uphill to reach Marker Point Bravo.

JP and ELDRA are dressed in mission gear: commando body suits, steel boots, night goggles, gloves, heavy belts.

Lights reveal a steel case.

JP opens the case and reveal additional gear from inside.

JP takes from the case a deodorizer, sprays himself, and goes to spray ELDRA who reluctantly obeys.

JP takes a power saw.

JP finally takes from the case a large white towel which he tosses aside, not necessary.

He then lifts the case by himself approaches the fenced area.

The rhino moves, slow, calm.

JP reaches the fenced area. JP withdraws from inside his commando suit a large high-powered assault rifle, obscenely large, something he clearly has brought on his own.

JP crouches, aims...and shoots the rhino. And again. The rhino stumbles and ultimately falls.

JP goes to high-five ELDRA, a sensual moment that she refuses.

JP takes the power saw and goes to dismember the rhino.

We see behind JP the shadow of a lion. The lion approaches slow, prowling.

JP continues to saw, perhaps laughing, a feverish smile.

The lion pounces and mauls JP, fast and vicious, biting at his head, clawing and pawing at his back. JP falls by the dead rhino, and the lion stands above, roaring.

ELDRA panics and runs off.

Music fades as...

Lights shift.

SCENE 15.

Still in the past.

Candlelight.

MEREDITH and HUFF, in each other's arms, perhaps wrapped in an African quilt.

Rain falls.

HUFF might be half-asleep.

/ATOR is nearby.

MEREDITH

Comes out of nowhere.

HUFF

Hmm.

MEREDITH

Indian Ocean backwash.

HUFF

Hmm.

MEREDITH

In parts of Africa only women perform the ritual to make it rain. You sleeping?

HUFF

I love that ritual.

MEREDITH

You talk in your sleep.

HUFF

Among other things. You okay?

MEREDITH

Yeah.

HUFF

Me, too.

MEREDITH

Huff, there’s something I have to tell you. About me.

HUFF

Okay.

MEREDITH

At the office, dealing with the feelings of being confused and threatened, I created a kind of beacon. Someone I could talk to.

HUFF

You have an imaginary friend.

MEREDITH

Children believe their words. But somehow she became more than a voice, like she wasn’t part of me, like she was there before I thought of her. Not just experienced and savvy, all the things I’m not, she was...strange and powerful.

HUFF

Now you’re in abusive relationships with people you can’t see.

MEREDITH

You like that? The truth?

HUFF

The truth is where you sleep at night.

MEREDITH

She’s South African.

HUFF

She here then.

MEREDITH

...no.

HUFF

Shame. I’d tell her I could go blind and listen to you speak your writing. You’re different, you know. You’re the real deal.

MEREDITH

We barely know each other.

HUFF

I just got to know a lot of you. And it was amazing. You're amazing.

MEREDITH

You are this place. All those handsome and gentle thoughts that weave through all those magazine stories.

HUFF

You writing my obituary?

MEREDITH

Could you die now?

HUFF

If this is heaven I'll take it. Otherwise, mouth-to-mouth in the morning, please.

MEREDITH

Don't die on me. We need the cover. The cover!

*MEREDITH is up and across the room,
going for his camera.*

MEREDITH

This is going to put my career in motion. Once the story runs we can go anywhere.

HUFF

Wait.

MEREDITH

I got this radical story idea about female entropy and climate change.

HUFF

They're not set.

MEREDITH

Then it's raw, it's you.

HUFF

Hey.

MEREDITH

How do you—?

They're not ordered—
HUFF

These are fantastic!
MEREDITH

Can you not?
HUFF

Oh wait, I—
MEREDITH

Please stop.
HUFF

Weird.
MEREDITH

Give it to me.
HUFF

Somehow got Ethiopia.
MEREDITH

Right now.
HUFF

And the pictures...
MEREDITH

...
HUFF

...of you.
MEREDITH

Meredith.
HUFF

Many pictures.
MEREDITH

Can I?
HUFF

Shirtless.

MEREDITH

HUFF

...

MEREDITH

...you took these?...Jennifer?

HUFF

...

MEREDITH

What have I done.

HUFF

Nothing.

MEREDITH

No?

HUFF

You're misreading.

MEREDITH

I'm this month's issue.

HUFF

Stop.

MEREDITH

You gallop around Africa acting as muse for all the ladies?

HUFF

You asked me to come here.

MEREDITH

Oh, *I asked for it!* I don't believe this.

HUFF

There's nothing to believe.

MEREDITH

[To /ATOR] I am so stupid.

HUFF

If you're feeling conflicted about this, or—

MEREDITH

Preyed?

HUFF

That's—

MEREDITH

How many have there been?

HUFF

...I think you might be acting a bit irrational.

MEREDITH

Oh, okay, yeah, let me show you irrational.

/ATOR throws his camera and the rest of his gear to off.

HUFF

Meredith—

MEREDITH

Get out. GET OUT.

HUFF collects his stuff. Then goes.

/ATOR slams the door on HUFF.

MEREDITH

[To /ATOR] Don't. Just...

/ATOR leaves.

MEREDITH ultimately deflates, compresses and combusts, as...

SCENE 16.

We hear knocking on the door. Rapping with an intensity.

MEREDITH stares at the door. Then goes to open.

YIN stands there. The small room is now the present, the suite at the San Diego Ritz Carlton.

YIN

May I?

MEREDITH

...you're paying for it.

YIN enters the room, looking around, inspecting.

YIN

Mr. Thompson.

MEREDITH

Check the San Diego brothels.

YIN

The others are also gone. The snake hunters. Their suite is vacated.

MEREDITH

Sounds like you got nobody bagging horn tonight.

YIN

I fear they intend to get the horns alone. They were displeased I would not acquire high-powered rifles. I did not realize Americans choose their guns as a fashion statement.

MEREDITH

Surprised everyone isn't arming themselves when they hear its half a million per horn.

YIN

They did not say anything to you.

MEREDITH

Who talks to journalists these days? Go to the zoo for yourself.

YIN

This is why you are contracted.

MEREDITH

Are you The Rancher?

YIN

No.

MEREDITH

Not interested.

YIN

But you stay.

MEREDITH

Free wi-fi.

YIN

Like you stayed in Kruger to write your rhinoceros story.

MEREDITH

...

YIN

The National Geographic did not print it.

MEREDITH

He was never going to print it. The managing editor dumped my story, then dumped me when I wouldn't meet him at midnight to discuss, and to make his point stick ran only Huff's photos. Not one word I wrote made the issue. Just Huff's pictures. Now I'm just surviving, if you call it that. Free wi-fi is all I can afford.

YIN

Maybe someone else saw your story. Verifying documentation is important, yes? Your writing was so inventive. Mixing the danger of the American office against the ageless hunt. The photographer, though, not like you wrote, very charming in person. But it was the fantasy woman, the African Mother, taking the faces of those harmed by this war. Though I did not understand the slam poetry part, we do not have that in the People’s Republic of China. Where we are winning a war America does not realize it is losing.

MEREDITH

The hell does that mean.

YIN

As you wrote: ‘the rhino is an unlikely symbol for the complexities of globalization. Yet it is now surely as worldly an item as a cell phone, or drug. American drugs are poppy seed from Mexico. North Korea hacks our currency. Russia calls our election. Do we feel our reality altered? No, we need to know who touched who.’

MEREDITH

Yeah, well, we’re a young country. We’re like the hormonal teenager of countries. Intense work environments, close and personal, tension, and risk.

YIN

Maybe it is why he was so charming.

MEREDITH

‘Sex: the one thing that makes us powerful//

MEREDITH & YIN

//’and powerless at the same time.’

MEREDITH

We’re no longer the country everyone looks to to make things right.

YIN

But this is why I come.

MEREDITH

Yeah, for some guy named The Rancher.

YIN

For *a woman* I call The Rancher. [Pause] You must think this is easy for me. This is dangerous. I attend his political functions in China. Always bowing before him in public. Home as well.

MEREDITH

Your father.

YIN

Old enough.

MEREDITH

Your husband.

YIN

We do not always have the engagement, or the choice. Now I see America, where this is being revealed. Whispers becoming a voice. But with the weakening of any democracy comes the weakening of that voice. China needs America. So, as they say in Ritz Carlton, a wake-up call.

MEREDITH

Four rhinos won't move the needle.

YIN

America likes bigger. If a problem cannot be solved make the problem bigger.

MEREDITH

So you're The Rancher.

YIN

No.

MEREDITH

Then who the hell is?

YIN

You are. [Pause] Chinese women need to know what is happening outside China. Especially those taken to reeducation camps. Monitored and tracked. I need to import what is happening to shock and inspire. I need the person I cannot be to report on global affairs to those who have no voice.

MEREDITH

For a magazine.

YIN

Online. As Confucius say: print is dead.

MEREDITH

My writing will be posted into China for some e-zine as The Rancher.

YIN

Madam’s Organ was not able to translate.

MEREDITH

I don’t get it.

YIN

[From her neck, a red necklace] Elephants killed for their skin. Their blood, like rubies. He spends his fortune and makes me wear this. Nothing else but this. Don’t I look pretty? I am very scared, like you. I am here to bet on a future I cannot see but know by heart. Our countries still live in the past but your writing showed me that future. There are many steps to a revolution. Our first story: A Poaching in America. Five thousand words.

MEREDITH

...ten.

YIN

...five.

MEREDITH

Ten. And not one word changed in translation. What I submit is what people see.

YIN

Americans are very needy. [Extends an envelope] We start tonight, the San Diego Zoo. Instructions for how to file our first story. Also: a down payment on the future.

MEREDITH

[The contents of the envelope] Guess you can afford those clothes.

YIN

Like America, to the point.

MEREDITH

...reporters without borders.

YIN

It was an honor to meet you.

MEREDITH

So if you're my new editor will we see each other again?

YIN

It depends on that future. [Going to exit] Be careful.

MEREDITH

[Halting YIN's exit] How'd you ever get my original rhino story? The one that never ran?

YIN

It was sent to me, and others of similar persuasion, by a certain award-winning photographer.

YIN shuts the door, and moves to exit as...

Lights shift.

SCENE 17.

Night.

*We hear the distant baritone of a fog horn,
and the clanging of shipyard bells.*

/ATOR is now a Travel Agent.

/ATOR might stand near JP’s lifeless body.

EMIGR/ATOR

Hi!

This is me being South African acting Chinese speaking English.

Wait: this is me being Peruvian acting hablando Español.

Wait: this is me being Australian acting Indian speaking lingua Portuguesa.

We got places to go!

ELDRA enters, running, frantic.

ELDRA

Oh, God. Oh, shit.

EMIGR/ATOR

End times at the maritime port of trade! We got places to go!

ELDRA

...what?

EMIGR/ATOR

Indonesia: palm oil. No? Alright, we got choices. Cambodia?

ELDRA

Cam-who-dia?

EMIGR/ATOR

Timber. Metal as hell. That was funny.

ELDRA

Where am I.

EMIGR/ATOR

San Diego shipyards. Easiest way to get *out* the goods we’re dealing *in*. You’re still not laughing.

ELDRA

No, I’m not laughing, I’m running from the law!

EMIGR/ATOR

Why.

ELDRA

I tried to kill a rhino!

EMIGR/ATOR

Now why would you do that.

ELDRA

Do I look like someone who plays with stuffed animals??? My husband wanted to get its horn!

EMIGR/ATOR

Yeah?

ELDRA

Chinese gal said no moon. Big mistake. Couldn’t see a damn thing. Next thing you know a lion killed him.

EMIGR/ATOR

[Donning a police-style cap] Rhinos do well for their parts these days. Could’ve used it, where we’re going.

ELDRA

You’re the police!

EMIGR/ATOR

Port Authority. Your ‘transfer agent.’

ELDRA

...sent by The Rancher.

EMIGR/ATOR

...in a way.

ELDRA

Great, get me on whatever you got going back to Florida.

EMIGR/ATOR

Do I look like I work in old people and sand? Ivory Coast, illegal mining, ka-boom.

ELDRA

I'm in real trouble here. I'm a fugitive.

EMIGR/ATOR

The law doesn't care about you. When the stakes are this high there is no law. There's just the next job. I'm here to take you to the next job. Like Equatorial Guinea.

ELDRA

That by Orlando?

EMIGR/ATOR

God, I'm gonna love working with you. All the women there getting sex trafficked. Different horns for different tickles.

ELDRA

I don't even know what we're talking about.

EMIGR/ATOR

From what I'm hearing it sounds like you know exactly what we're talking about.

ELDRA

What we're talking about is getting me outta here!

EMIGR/ATOR

Once you start you're *in*, that's what I'm trying to tell you.

ELDRA

Not *in*, *out*!

EMIGR/ATOR

You failed rhino poachers are always so touchy. Here, best I can do on short notice.

ELDRA

...Myanmar.

EMIGR/ATOR

We barter you in Guinea for sex slaves, double-down at the Coast for cobalt, then straight to Myanmar.

ELDRA

Are you for real?

EMIGR/ATOR

Just because you don't see it happening doesn't mean it ain't happening. Now get on the damn boat.

ELDRA

...wait...wait-wait-wait whatif-whatif-whatif-I!....got YOU!...a rhino horn.

EMIGR/ATOR

The hell would I do with that.

ELDRA

It's MONEY!

EMIGR/ATOR

It's a horn.

ELDRA

I will sell it to you, one horn, for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

EMIGR/ATOR

And I look like someone carrying that kind of dough.

ELDRA

You could sell it for double that!

EMIGR/ATOR

Think I'm gonna roll a bunch of white folk foraging for food at Starbucks for half a mil?

ELDRA

A hundred thousand, I will sell you the horn for a hundred thousand dollars.

EMIGR/ATOR

...you playing for real.

ELDRA

Yes, I am playing for real. I am very real playing here. Seventy-five thousand.

EMIGR/ATOR

...

ELDRA

Okay, final offer, from you, to me, fifty-thousand dollars plus a Canadian passport so I can hide in Winnipeg.

EMIGR/ATOR

We're not going to Winnipeg.

ELDRA

My sister's there. She said when I got sick of killing things to come live with her. One rhino horn for fifty-thousand and passage to Winnipeg.

EMIGR/ATOR

You don't seem to understand what's going on. I'm not some magical friend or selfless saint to get you past your current problem. What I am is the power of the world. The power of the world stands before you. And that power's looking a lot like the traffic cop of death working the shipping lines of *pay* and *up*. You're about to see what it looks like in all those countries you hear about but can't place on a map. Now I'm going to tell you *The Deal*. The deal is you're going back there to get that horn. And then you're going to place it in my hand. And then I'm taking you to the next port of call. Cuz we got places to go. And You're In.

ELDRA

...shit.

ELDRA readjusts her gear, prepares.

The fog horn sounds again as...

Lights shift.

SCENE 18.

Still night.

MEREDITH is at the fence, with her shoulder bag and rolling her extra luggage piece with the broken wheel.

MEREDITH might be trying to climb through the fence and getting stuck.

/ATOR passes below, in koofiyad, perhaps whistling.

MEREDITH

Hey. Um.

EMIGR/ATOR

You're on your own.

/ATOR goes to off.

MEREDITH tries to mount the fence.

HUFF appears at her side.

HUFF

Alright—

MEREDITH

Good God.

HUFF

—this is it, the end, I blind it with flash, you swoop from the left, OR!, doesn't see I'm crouched behind it, you give a push, it trips over me, hacksaw.

MEREDITH starts to the fence.

HUFF

Or plan C! We blow this place and head to Fiji. Cups with those little straws on the beach. Or just catch up to those at the other American zoos. [Stopping MEREDITH] But Fiji's a lot more fun.

MEREDITH

Don't follow me.

HUFF

Hope the sight of human blood doesn't get you squeamish! Lot easier to digest the shock of it on film. Assuming they haven't cleaned up the mess yet, you know, preserving the crime scene.

MEREDITH

They got it.

HUFF

The horn's still intact. I mean the rhino's dead but so's one of the hunters.

MEREDITH

What?

HUFF

Doubt the press card will get you out of charges since you're all in that criminal look. [Pause] What are you doing?

MEREDITH

What are you doing?

HUFF

Waiting for you.

MEREDITH

Then you know what I'm doing.

HUFF

Then you know we need to get out of here.

MEREDITH

Male savior?

HUFF

...that's not...

MEREDITH

Don't follow me.

HUFF

Much as I wanted to be near you, with you, talk things out, I thought: just how many Ritz Carltons are there? In major American cities. With major zoos. With rhinos. All the top-level suites taken. All reserved under the same name. Anyway, that’s where I’ve been. But like I said, what I really wanted was to talk to you.

MEREDITH

There’s nothing to talk about.

HUFF

That night wasn’t just some jolly romp in the quilt, it was...alright, it was one night but those nights don’t just happen every day. You know?

MEREDITH

That speech you’ve been saving just cut off its nose to spite its other thing.

HUFF

You haven’t been thinking about it.

MEREDITH

It’s a terrible time.

HUFF

I think it’s a pretty good time, given you’re about to aid an act of domestic terrorism.

MEREDITH

I let whatever that night was distract me from what I wanted. This is distracting.

HUFF

No, this is figuring out what we’re going to do.

MEREDITH

There is no *we*.

ELDRA comes sneaking by...she doesn’t say anything as she passes...more steers clear of MEREDITH and HUFF.

MEREDITH

There’s really some plan to take out all the American rhinos in one night.

HUFF

Seems a pretty large coordinated effort.

MEREDITH

Make the problem bigger. Fantastic.

HUFF

Can we talk about this?

MEREDITH

Are you the guy who falls for the first woman he sleeps with?

HUFF

Clearly not. But that’s over. There’s been no one since.

MEREDITH

You want a horn for that?

HUFF

No, I just want...

MEREDITH

What about what I want.

HUFF

...you’re right.

MEREDITH

...

HUFF

If you’re looking for ideas, I’d like to insert myself in the want part.

MEREDITH

It was that night at Kruger. When I screamed, out there in the wild, screaming at the hunters, with an actual rhino there. Something shifted.

HUFF

Ferocious jolt.

MEREDITH

Then seeing myself through your lens, revealed. Then with you.

HUFF

You weren't the only one.

MEREDITH

But I see now the real moral ante isn't just commenting on it. I can't write it off as childish. There are lives at stake. And a path we haven't yet taken. And right now that takes a horn to gain admission.

HUFF

The thing is, Meredith, you and I are both victims of something that never happened to us. We've both been near it. We've both seen it. But it's never happened to us.

MEREDITH

But we're still victims. You see how that works?

HUFF

Yeah.

MEREDITH

All a delicious mess, huh.

HUFF

I really was trying to help.

MEREDITH

I know.

HUFF

[Sharing a mini-bottle] Yeah, well what if you head down there and the bobbies throw you in the clink?

MEREDITH

Then it's my problem. Besides, where I'm headed, my new assignment, this is the safest it's gonna be for a while.

HUFF

New assignment.

MEREDITH

Yeah.

HUFF

Radical?

MEREDITH

Understatement.

HUFF

Need a photographer?

MEREDITH

...maybe.

HUFF

Alright. Well. I'm bound for Singapore. Conde Naste wants pictures of *trees*, I know. Can't have sex with a tree. But! I get my own flat. Separate rooms. If you make it out alive and need someplace to hole up. Write. We could fly kites over Jurong Island. Share war stories by a fire. Plus, I can cook.

MEREDITH

You can.

HUFF

I'm not bad.

MEREDITH

...what if I show up weighing two tons, a big horn.

HUFF

Then you get the bigger bedroom.

MEREDITH

...maybe.

HUFF

Good luck, Meredith.

MEREDITH

You too, Huff.

HUFF goes.

Behind the elevated playing area we see the rhinoceros still lying on its side.

MEREDITH approaches. She touches the tail, the body, the skin, and finally the horn.

MEREDITH takes the towel and drapes it over the rhino’s head.

As she does this we see behind her, filling out the remainder of the area, the final three rhinos. They move near MEREDITH, surrounding her, almost protecting her.

As this happens we see the full space above the set filling with photographs of the world, an array of pictures blotting the stage space and transporting us to everywhere, first the native faces of the world, proud and honorable, melding into the strange beauty and curious tumult of the earth, the delicious mess of our collective life.

The pictures fade as we hear the growing sound of helicopters approaching, people shouting, guns firing, louder and louder, noise, noise, deafening noise...and...

Blackout.

END OF PLAY.