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I

(LEO is dozing in a hospital bed. He is being treated for burns all over his body. LIVIA enters with flowers and puts them at the foot of the bed. She stares at Leo for a few moments.)

LIVIA: Leo...Leo...

(LEO stirs and peers through his bandages.)

LEO: Is she dead?

LIVIA: No, Leo. She's not dead. What a question.

LEO: I'll kill her myself. *(pause)* How's the school?

LIVIA: Three classrooms off the court and the gymnasium-

LEO: Gone?

LIVIA: No...left.

LEO: My God...she's a monster...

LIVIA: She didn't mean it.

LEO: How could she survive!

LIVIA: Shh. She didn't mean it.

LEO: Of course she didn't bloody mean it. That's the problem! If she'd meant it, I could at least be impressed!

LIVIA: Shh.

LEO: If she'd ever actually listened to me-....Given one glance at her periodic table. Dammit, looked to the front of the class once in four years!...

(LEO lies back, exhausted.)

LIVIA: Do you like the flowers?

LEO: Who else? What else?

LIVIA: Most of the school. The cleaning staff. The service will be this Sunday.

LEO: ...my God...

LIVIA: But we're doing what we can. Classes are running in the three rooms left.

LEO: It's good the gym's still there.

LIVIA: Once we've found a new coach, we'll start floor hockey up again.

LEO: Good.

LIVIA: We've got just enough for two teams.

LEO: Hm.

(pause. LEO starts to drift.)

LIVIA: Leo.

LEO: Hm?

LIVIA: You have to pass her.

LEO: *(laughs quietly)*

LIVIA: I know-

LEO: Is that why you came?

LIVIA: I came to see how you were.

LEO: Saint Livia.

LIVIA: I'm serious. We can talk about her grades later. How are you?

LEO: How is *she*? She as poached as me?

LIVIA: Well, she's quite shaken up.

LEO: Jesus...not a scratch, right?

LIVIA: She's very upset.

LEO: A witch! The girl's a witch!

LIVIA: So lets get rid of her.

LEO: How can you invent a deadly weapon by *mistake*... and live to paint your stupid little face...

LIVIA: Pass her! Or do you want her back in Chemistry next year.

LEO: That girl does not deserve a Scholarship.

LIVIA: She passed everything else.

LEO: Sure. And just wiped out the teachers who let her.

LIVIA: The school needs-

LEO: Never! You want her to destroy Duke too?

LIVIA: She won't take Chemistry there. I made her promise. Look, it's just a sports Scholarship.

LEO: She fails my class.

LIVIA: But her basketball-

LEO: She fails! I need morphine. Get the nurse.

LIVIA: Leo-

LIVIA: Get the nurse!

HOGG: I'm so glad you were spared, Isabelle, I'm so glad you're alive.

ISABELLE: Really?

HOGG: I don't know what I would have done.

ISABELLE: Gosh...sir, I-...I didn't think-

(LIVIA enters with MAJOR LATCH. ISABELLE and HOGG stand.)

LIVIA: Good morning, class.

ISABELLE: Headmistress.

HOGG: Good morning, Livia.

(MAJOR LATCH is fascinated by and begins to stroke the twisted desks. LIVIA peers at the book in ISABELLE's hands.)

LIVIA: Ah, Middleton. Of course. Are you enjoying it?

ISABELLE: Very much, thank you ma'am.

LIVIA: This is Major Latch.

LATCH: Please carry on. Sorry to disturb.

LIVIA: Yes, do. Carry on...At ease. *(winks at Latch)*

(HOGG and ISABELLE sit. LATCH produces a tape measure and throughout the following, he goes about using it. He measures the damage methodically, almost mathematically while LIVIA records it on a clipboard.)

ISABELLE: *(looking straight at Hogg)* I will keep you fast now,
And sooner part eternally from the world
Than my good joys in you.

LATCH: Excuse me, Miss. Which is yours?

ISABELLE: (*still looking at Hogg*) This one.

LATCH: Incredible. Thank you. You can go back to your rhyme.

ISABELLE: When we invite our best friends to a feast
'Tis not all sweetmeats that we set before them.
There's somewhat sharp and salt, both to whet appetite,
And make'em taste their wine well: so methinks-

LATCH: You were sitting-...sorry. You were sitting just there, Looking just there
and....Woom! (*pause*) How did it feel?

ISABELLE: Hot.

LATCH: Yes?

ISABELLE: Hot and...unexpected.

LATCH: Yes, hot...of course. Very hot...Incredible.

ISABELLE: A kiss tastes wondrous well and full o'th' grape.
How think'st thou, does't not?

Mr HOGG: (*looking straight at Isabelle*) 'Tis so excellent
I know not how to praise it.

III

(BIANCA and LATCH are standing beside a lab sink. The long, slender tap, usually arched toward the drain now points up and away in a kind of sickly, oxidized spiral.)

LATCH: When you mixed the chemicals, you were standing right here.

BIANCA: Yes.

LATCH: Incredible. Not even your hands were burned? *(She shows him her hands)* Wonderful. And what were these chemicals?

BIANCA: I don't know.

LATCH: *(smiles)* You don't know.

BIANCA: I can't remember. Sodium.

LATCH: Yes?

BIANCA: Wait. Sodium's salt, right?

LATCH: That depends.

BIANCA: Sulfur. That's it. There was sulfur something.

LATCH: Sulfur...Sulfur what? Try to remember Bianca. Sulfur's a wonderful start. A treacherous explosive in the right hands. What did you do with that sulfur?

BIANCA: Look, I don't know. The teacher's a jerk. He gave me the wrong chemicals, Ok?

LATCH: The wrong chemicals. *(writes it down)* You mixed these wrong chemicals in just the right way.

BIANCA: What the hell is it to you anyway?

LATCH: We want to make sure this never happens again.

BIANCA: Have you talked to him?

LATCH: Who?

BIANCA: Leo. The teacher. Mr Abbott.

LATCH: I do my report on him tomorrow.

BIANCA: So ask him.

LATCH: he knows?

BIANCA: He's the teacher.

LATCH: Bianca, we can learn a great deal from our mistakes.

BIANCA: Good Luck.

(BIANCA exits. LATCH is about to stop her, thinks better of it and lets her go. He writes on his clipboard.)

LATCH: Salt...

IV

(HOGG's classroom. HOGG and ISABELLE are reading to each other. LATCH is quietly measuring and recording. He takes photos.)

HOGG: Oh you have named the most unvalued'st purchase,
That youth of man had ever knowledge of.
As often as I look upon that treasure,
And I know it to be mine - there lies the blessing -
It joys me that I ever was ordained
To have a being, and to live 'mongst men.

(LATCH opens his mouth to ask a question but is cut off. He looks down, embarrassed.)

ISABELLE: Heaven send a quiet peace with this man's love,
And I am as rich, as virtue can be poor -
Which were enough, after the rate of mind,
To erect temples for content placed here.

(LATCH is cut off once more.)

LATCH: Uh-

HOGG: Didst thou but know what a most matchless jewel
Thou now art mistress of, a pride would take thee
Able to shoot destruction through the bloods
Of all thy youthful sons!

(LATCH makes the sound of an explosion and throws a brick across the classroom. Lights down as he begins to measure its trajectory.)

V

(LIVIA is in her office with HOGG.)

- LIVIA: I knew it! That's exactly what he described. The poor Major.
- HOGG: He didn't say anything...
- LIVIA: Of course. He's a gentleman. But he was as red as a beet when he walked in here. He could hardly look up from his clipboard. Put yourself in his boots, Hogg. It's very embarrassing.
- HOGG: Oh.
- LIVIA: He hardly knows you.
- HOGG: No, but-
- LIVIA: There's a lot more to Middleton than his sex scenes. Please. Next time...a modicum of tact.
- HOGG: They're love scenes.
- LIVIA: How is he supposed to concentrate? Hm? The poor Major. I'd be embarrassed too. He has a lot of work to do here and it will be in our best interest to let him do it. Can the smut.
- HOGG: But they're love scenes! They're harmless!
- LIVIA: *(looking hard at him)* How harmless, Hogg?
- HOGG: Oh, now...Now really, I- Me? Come on, Livia, You've known me twelve years-
- LIVIA: She's very pretty.
- HOGG: You really think-
- LIVIA: I've heard you reading.
- HOGG: Reading! Yes, reading! It's *poetry*, It's- you get caught up. Anyone would! You try to read Middleton without feeling something. She's beautiful- I mean, it's...beautiful. It's... Livia, we read so well together. The love scenes are-

LIVIA: Not to be done...

HOGG: But-

LIVIA: ...with Latch in the room.

(pause)

LIVIA: Not when he's around.

HOGG: Ah.

LIVIA: Just be careful. We've already made the front page once this month..

HOGG: Thank you, Livia. Thank you.

LIVIA: Do you love her?

HOGG: *God*, yes. Thank you.

LIVIA: Well, if we're going to rebuild, that's a good place to start.

VI

(LEO's hospital bed is one over from another, even more unfortunate burn victim. They are separated by a curtain. LATCH, who has come to speak with LEO goes to the wrong bed. He speaks to the PATIENT.)

LATCH: Mr. Abbott?...Leo Abbott....

(LEO about to respond in the next bed. The bandaged PATIENT stirs.)

LATCH: You're a genius.

(LEO decides to listen on rather than identify himself. As LATCH speaks, he sets up camera on a tripod, sets the timer and snaps his picture with the PATIENT.)

LATCH: They all think it's a mistake. They think ...even the girl thinks that you just handed her the wrong stuff. You're an amazing man. The girl has every eyelash God gave her. And the school...You should see that school, it's- Here look. *(produces photographs.)* I took these yesterday. *(pointing at photos)* Molecules. Your molecules did that. Your conspiracy of little, tiny, rogue atoms...*worked*. It works Leo. My name is Major Latch and I'm very pleased to meet you.

(camera takes the picture)

When I was eight, I fell backwards into my Mother's hibatchi. My first true surprise. A good memory, yes...to be sure. Every child should have one. A saucy bolt of agony, yes. My fault, yes. But *not* my creation! Salt!! No one has ever thought of salt!! You see, Leo, I've never had the satisfaction of my own Frankenstein rising to meet me. The heat of my own creation, my...my own *mind* suddenly outside of me! What else? What else did you give the girl?

(silence)

You're on to something Leo. Something-...and I don't say this often...Something *incredible*.

(silence)

She was very, very kind. My dear mama...so gentle. I cried every day on the hour for a week just so she would apply more cream. Then she was too kind. Got rid of the Hibatchi just as I was planning my next accident. I never had a chance, Leo. Until I joined the artillery.

Patient: ...water...

LATCH: Yes? What was that?

Patient: ...water...

LATCH: Water. Incredible.

(LATCH writes in his notes.)

VII

(HOGG's classroom. ISABELLE and HOGG are reading to each other. LATCH doing his business.)

HOGG: The man loves best
When his care's most - that shows his zeal to love.
Fondness is the idiot to affection.

ISABELLE: I have good hope you'll stay now.

(LATCH enters.)

LATCH: Good morning.

(HOGG casts a glance and a perfunctory smile in LATCH's direction. Then continues to read.)

HOGG: I could well wish myself where you would have me;
But love that's wanton must be ruled awhile
By that that's careful, or all else goes to ruin.

ISABELLE: Excuse me, Major Latch.

HOGG: Isabelle!

ISABELLE: Sorry sir.

HOGG: If you wish to speak in class-

(ISABELLE raises her hand.)

ISABELLE: Where did you get that medal? The red one.

LATCH: Oh, this one. This is-

HOGG: That's classified information. He can't tell you that.

LATCH: Nonsense.

ISABELLE: So you're allowed to tell me?

LATCH: Of course. Why would I wear my secrets? Your teacher's been reading too much.

ISABELLE: Was it bravery?

(HOGG rolls his eyes.)

LATCH: *(a sad smile)* I'm not brave....I'll always regret not going in for the third

ISABELLE: The third...?

LATCH: The third man. A burning tank. I saved two. Then it was too hot. *(to HOGG)* Would you say there was something poetic in that?

HOGG: There's nothing poetic in that at all.

LATCH: No. I suppose not.

HOGG: There's nothing poetic about a tank.

LATCH: A burning tank, maybe...

HOGG: No.

LATCH: *(eagerly)* Alright. A burning tank on a snowy ridge?

HOGG: No!

LATCH: You're right. You're absolutely right. Just as well....

ISABELLE: What happened? Was it like here?

LATCH: *(keen)* What do you mean?

ISABELLE: I mean was it a mistake?

LATCH: We don't know.

HOGG: Did that third man know? That man you didn't save?

LATCH: That! That would have been poetic. Mr. Hogg, you're an excellent teacher!

HOGG: (*mumbling*) ...not poetic...

ISABELLE: I think it's po-

HOGG: Isabelle, you're in class.

(*ISABELLE puts up her hand*)

HOGG: Yes, what is so gripping?

ISABELLE: I just wanted to say that I think it's poetic. I think a burning tank on a snowy ridge has a lonely sort of pride in it.

LATCH: (*smiles*) You would know better than me.

ISABELLE: Did you do poetry at school?

LATCH: I pretended to. (*HOGG guffaws*) It frightened me. It still does.

HOGG: Well it doesn't frighten us. If you'll excuse us, we have a lot to cover.

LATCH: Absolutely.

VIII

(LEO's hospital bed. BIANCA enters.)

BIANCA: Hi.

(silence)

BIANCA: I said hi!

LEO: Nice try last Tuesday. But I'm still alive. And you *still* fail.

BIANCA: I think you owe me an apology.

LEO: *(his body tightens ever so slightly)*

BIANCA: Because you gave me the wrong chemicals, I killed four boyfriends. *(pause)*
And I really miss them. *(pause)* And I think you owe me an apology.

LEO: Could you please leave now.

BIANCA: Are you gonna apologize?

LEO: If you pass a doctor, just point him in my direction.

BIANCA: Hey, sir, you're not the only one who's fucked up!

LEO: How dare you-

BIANCA: You gave me the wrong stuff.

LEO: You got exactly what everybody else got.

BIANCA: I don't think so!

LEO: If you hadn't passed notes and made faces at me all year you might have had some idea of what the hell you were doing!

BIANCA: So why'd you make me take the exam!! *(tears)* It's true! I didn't know what I was doing! You knew I was- You *knew* I couldn't do it....You knew...you knew...

IX

(LIVIA is in her office with HOGG. She is fuming)

LIVIA: We agreed.

HOGG: It wasn't a love scene.

LIVIA: "Love that's wanton". He distinctly heard you say "Love that's wanton"

HOGG: "Must be ruled awhile". "Love that's wanton must be ruled awhile"! That's the line!

LIVIA: Well he felt awkward.

HOGG: He *is* awkward. What am I supposed to do?

LIVIA: Not Middleton.

HOGG: What?

LIVIA: No more, please.

HOGG: *You* chose that play!

LIVIA: To be read in the privacy of the classroom. Now you have a guest.

HOGG: I didn't invite him! God! I'm just trying to teach, Livia. He throws bricks across the room!

LIVIA: It's his job.

HOGG: The other day he melted a pencil case and watched it drip for half an hour! Now he's changing the curriculum! What the hell is he doing here anyway?

LIVIA: Not investigating *you*, thank God.

(pause. HOGG is effectively cowed.)

LIVIA: *(quietly)* He was the highest bidder. He outbid Israel, France and India.

(HOGG is silent.)

LIVIA: A lot of people want to make sure this never happens again.

HOGG: ...hm...

LIVIA: We're about to have the pants sued off us. It's good to make friends, Hogg. Friends like Major Latch.

HOGG: Yes.

LIVIA: ...Or the Chinese. If they call.

X

(LATCH is alone in HOGG's classroom. In ISABELLE's chair is a mannequin, it's arms shielding its face and its body angled away from the origin of its final agony. LATCH is putting finishing touches on a second mannequin seated at HOGG's desk in a pose consistent with the other.)

LATCH: *(quietly, to himself)* Sodium nitrate, sodium sulfate, sodium sulfite, sodium tetrahydrate, monosodium glutamate, sodium bicarbonate...

(ISABELLE and HOGG enter.)

LATCH: I'm sorry. Eleven already? I meant to be through. I think I know why you survived.

HOGG: *(irate, eyeing the mannequins)* Major-

LATCH: Oh.

(LATCH raises his hand.)

HOGG: *(venomously)* What.

LATCH: You were looking at each other at the time, weren't you. See, By my calculations, a brick from the wall behind you, Miss...er...

ISABELLE: Isabelle.

LATCH: Miss Isabelle. Your head was on a 15 degree angle which allowed a brick to miss it by a quarter of an inch. Instead, it ploughed into the back of Terry Morgan...here *(points at the desk in front of ISABELLE's)* Correct?

ISABELLE: She sat there.

LATCH: And killed her. Now Mr Hogg, your eyes, according to your heat shadow, were trying to find Miss Isabelle's.

HOGG: What's wrong with that? Maybe she asked a question!

LATCH: Nothing's wrong at all. She saved your life. Had Miss Isabelle not such pretty eyes, you would have lost your life. Certainly your teeth. (*quietly to HOGG*) Of course, if you would like this to remain classified, I can arrange for that. Never wear your secrets, Mr. Hogg. (*beat*) Anyway, I shall name my report "Heat, Wind and the Coincidence of Space". What do you think? Perhaps a little poetic. I'm not sure.

(*HOGG leaves the room.*)

LATCH: Oh dear... I'm- This is not good form. My deepest apologies. This is not good form at all. (*almost reciting*) I enter, I investigate, I leave. I'm not to bother-

ISABELLE: You don't bother me.

LATCH: I've ruined your lesson.

ISABELLE: I don't think you could bother a fly.

LATCH: Miss Isabelle. There are sides of me you will never know. I have bothered many insects in my life.

ISABELLE: Really?

LATCH: Yes. Third medal from the right.

ISABELLE: What did you do?

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

ISABELLE: Secret?

LATCH: Of course not. There's difference between what we mustn't talk about and what we don't *feel* like talking about. Anyway, we must attend to your education. My blundering will not cost you a lesson. Where's the book? Hand me a book.

ISABELLE: A book?

LATCH: The one you've been reading with Mr. Hogg.

ISABELLE: Here.

LATCH: Page...

ISABELLE: Uh...73.

LATCH: Fine. I'll begin...*(reads)* He's gone, beauty.
Pish, look not after him, he's but a vapour
That when the sun appears is seen no more.

ISABELLE: Oh treachery to honour!

LATCH: Prithee tremble not.
I feel thy breast shake like a turtle panting.

(breaking from text, a little confused) Turtle panting...that's a little-
sorry...*(back to text)*

I feel thy breast shake like a turtle panting
Under a loving hand...

(breaking from text) Hm...

ISABELLE: Go on.

(Lights fade as LATCH frowns at the text. Isabelle smiles and watches him deeply.)

XI

(LEO is sitting quietly in his hospital bed. His eyes are closed but he appears less fragile than before. He is on the mend. LIVIA and BIANCA enter. BIANCA carries an armful of schoolbooks. LEO opens his eyes.)

LEO: Strength in numbers.

LIVIA: Hello Leo. Bianca has a question for you.

BIANCA: Carbon's-

LIVIA: Bianca, say hello.

BIANCA: Oh. Hi, sir. Ok. Carbon Dioxide's CO₂ right?

LEO: What's going on?

BIANCA: I just wanted to know.

LEO: It's in your textbook. There's a chart in the back.

BIANCA: Really? *(looks down at the pile of books in her arms.)*

LEO: The yellow one. Yes. It says 'Chemistry' on it. *(to LIVIA as BIANCA leaves through her book)* What's going on?

LIVIA: Why are you so jumpy? She has a question. That's all.

BIANCA: *(pointing in her book)* There...yeah. CO₂. *(pause)* Sooo....Carbon Dioxide is CO₂.

LEO: Yes Bianca.

(There is a silence. BIANCA looks at LIVIA, slightly panicked.)

LIVIA: You...must have some other questions?

BIANCA: Yeah...um...I was wondering...um....

LIVIA: Wasn't there something you wanted to tell Mr. Abbott?

BIANCA: Oh yeah. I really like chemistry now. Anyway, thank you, sir. CO2...CO2, CO2...

(BIANCA exits committing CO2 to memory)

LIVIA: She is such a little soldier.

LEO: Please don't call her that.

LIVIA: Do you know what she's been doing?

LEO: I-

LIVIA: That young woman has been learning- and I mean *sweating* over her periodic table.

LEO: Livia, there's something I-

LIVIA: She's very thankful for your help. Every day now, she writes down a question for you.

LEO: What was yesterday's?

LIVIA: Well, she just started today but she's so keen, Leo. It's very exciting.

LEO: *(beat)* Did you send someone called Major Latch to see me?

LIVIA: Yes I did. He asked to speak with everyone.

LEO: Who is he, exactly?

LIVIA: Everyone *left*, that is. Poor Bianca. Imagine...just imagine being her. We must all make an effort to be very kind. Major Latch? He's an expert.

LEO: Ah...comforting.

LIVIA: He likes you, by the way.

LEO: What kind of expert?

LIVIA: Well, what the hell kind do you think!? He's looking into the explosion, alright! He's doing a job!

LEO: For who?

LIVIA: *I'm* doing a job if you'll let me! I'm trying to run a-
We're still a school, you know. And we're managing very well without your
daily frown! (*she is exhausted and emotional*) We need to be good, Leo Good
to each other. I'm too tired to fight you.

LEO: Livia, I'm not-...hey, I'm not fighting...

LIVIA: We're trying so hard.

LEO: I know, I know.

LIVIA: (*pulling herself together*) Do *your* job, Leo. Get better. Just get better and
come back soon.

LEO: I will...I'm sorry. It must be difficult.

LIVIA: Do you miss us?

LEO: Of course.

LIVIA: Are you lonely?

LEO: Sometimes.

LIVIA: You must miss teaching.

LEO: I suppose, sometimes.

LIVIA: Well, I wonder if I could arrange for some-...I know! What if you were to do
some tutoring?

LEO: Here?

LIVIA: Here, yes. It would be fun for the students. I think they need to get away, you
know. Somewhere a little less glum, like a hospital. It's so hard for them these
days. And, Bianca, the poor girl. Every day, reminded of what she's done. It's
awful for her. *But*...each day brings its little triumphs. Simon- you know Simon
Philips. Of course. You had him last year. Anyway, they found his
arm...*finally*... and in the most unexpected of places. Leo, you'll never guess
where they found it.

LEO: Alright...

LIVIA: I'm sorry, you don't want to hear this. Anyway, all we have to do now is find Simon.

LEO: Yes Livia.

LIVIA: But we're doing what we can.

LEO: Yes, I'll do some tutoring.

LIVIA: Are you sure?

LEO: If it'll help, I'd love to.

LIVIA: *(calling off)* Bianca!!

LEO: ...oh god...

(BIANCA enters instantly.)

LIVIA: Thank you Leo. Bianca, Mr. Abbott has agreed to tutor you.

BIANCA: In chemistry?

LIVIA: In chemistry. We're all pulling together.

BIANCA: Wow! That's totally great, sir!

(BIANCA opens her books to the ready and sits attentively beside the bed.)

BIANCA: Now, Sir, could you please tell me what I did wrong. We need to make sure it never happens again.

XII

(LATCH is at the hospital sitting beside the PATIENT.
The PATIENT's condition has not improved since the
last scene.)

LATCH: Have you ever seen a turtle pant? Incredible. What they're reading, I mean.
Ridiculous. "I feel thy breast shake like a turtle panting". That was the line. I'm
serious Leo, that was the line.

(pause)

Dog's pant.

*But...now see, it does get better. Every once in a while, the man says what he
means. What do you think of this?*

(LATCH recites.)

"Tis great policy
To keep choice treasures in obscurest places:

Hey? Considering, hey? Considering it's poetry, it's not bad. Who's he talking
to Leo. Middleton, that is. Guess who he's talking to. See, I think he's talking
to you. "Choice treasures"...he's not talking about a woman. No, no, no. He's
talking about...*salt*. He's talking about *water*...He's talking about your mind.
Your "jewel cased up from all men's eyes." That's another line. Middleton. He's
the poet. Not me...no. That's his line. I would never steal another man's
inspiration. I can only ask for a glimpse of it. I'm not a thief.

(savouring)

"Tis great policy to keep choice treasures in obscurest places...

(pause.)

Take your time...

(pause)

(chuckles) Here's something a little odd...little strange...A little peculiar. Leo,
I'll tell you a secret. Because friends tell each other secrets. I've been thinking
about it, this- ...this turtle behaviour. The panting, for example. I mean- ...now

this is a secret...But ever since I read it, you see...I- ...I've been kind of hoping they do.

XIII

(The School playing field. LATCH is on the cross bar of the goal posts measuring something and contemplating the view. LIVIA stands beneath him holding his uniform jacket.)

LATCH: Perfect. Nice. Very nice.

(LATCH is helped down sensually by LIVIA.)

LATCH: Thank you, Ma'am.

LIVIA: Is there anything else? Anything else I can help you with?

LATCH: I think at this point I should be fine.

LIVIA: I'm very good with a measuring stick.

LATCH: You've been very helpful. Thank you.

LIVIA: You're sure?

LATCH: Of course.

(LIVIA hands LATCH his jacket. He puts it on.)

LIVIA: You have a wonderful uniform. *(pause)* Do you sew on your own badges?

LATCH: If they come off.

LIVIA: I thought- I only- I mean you don't have anyone at home who...who sews...?

LATCH: I am very good at sewing.

(pause)

LIVIA: So everything's on track?

LATCH: I hope.

LIVIA: And Leo? I hope he's-

LATCH: As well as can be expected.

LIVIA: Quite a fellow, our Leo. (*chuckles*) Yes. Yes...and Hogg is *almost* behaving.

LATCH: Hogg is a fragile man.

LIVIA: You mustn't worry.

LATCH: I worry about fragile men. They remind me of others. I'll apologize tomorrow.

LIVIA: Don't worry. He's fine now.

LATCH: I stirred some embers. I regret it.

LIVIA: But he abandoned *you*.

LATCH: I think it may have been the other way around. Although I assure you that Isabelle lost very little. We read for half an hour.

LIVIA: (*ice*) Oh. That must have been nice.

LATCH: How much do you know about turtles?

LIVIA: Did you enjoy yourself?

LATCH: I...I don't understand the question.

LIVIA: She's pretty.

LATCH: I don't understand.

LIVIA: Well exactly. She's pretty. Who really understands? Who knows why that has to be so dreadfully important. She's pretty. That's all. Spoken for, of course. But then, aren't all the pretty ones. I mean, have you ever read poetry with anyone else? (*in for the kill*) I mean, if you were to read with...anyone...with someone more... versed, as it were, you might enjoy yourself as well.

LATCH: I am not a great lover of enjoyment.

LIVIA: Do you enjoy love?

LATCH: (*disengaging*) I did.

(pause)

LIVIA: No. I don't know anything about turtles.

XIV

(Hogg's class. HOGG and ISABELLE sit in a tense silence. LATCH enters.)

LATCH: Good morning Miss Isabelle. Good morning Mr. Hogg.

HOGG: She wanted to wait.

LATCH: I wish to extend an apology-

HOGG: She wanted to wait until you arrived.

LATCH: Yes, my apologies and thanks. I will no longer require your classroom for the investigation. My Commanding Officer faxed this earlier. A note of...of encouragement.

HOGG: She wants you to read.

LATCH: Pardon me?

HOGG: The student wants you to read.

(Short pause, looks at ISABELLE then begins to read the note.)

LATCH: "Dear Mr. Hogg, I understand the last two weeks have been-"

HOGG: Not the note. The book. She wanted to wait. She thought we could all read together.

ISABELLE: You were so good the other day, I thought-

HOGG: She wants you to read. *(thrusts a book at LATCH)* Page 77. Line 25. Go.

ISABELLE: Major?

LATCH: I'm flattered but I must decline.

ISABELLE: Why?

LATCH: I don't see how it's appropriate.

ISABELLE: You read before.

LATCH: It was my duty.

HOGG: *(to ISABELLE)* I told you...

ISABELLE: Your duty? You mean you didn't want to?

LATCH: I was restoring the status quo. I was doing my duty. I want to do my duty.

HOGG: *(to ISABELLE)* I told you...

ISABELLE: But you read so well.

LATCH: Beginners luck. I assure you.

ISABELLE: Just once more. Please.

LATCH: I have an appointment with Leo Abbott.

ISABELLE: He's there all day. You can spare half an hour.

LATCH: The status quo has been restored.

ISABELLE: Just half an hour!

LATCH: There's no reason for me to help with your course.

HOGG: *(to ISABELLE)* I warned you...

ISABELLE: *(to HOGG)* Wait, sir.

HOGG: It's better you should get to know these types now.

ISABELLE: *(to HOGG)* Shuttup!

LATCH: At any rate, thank you for the use of your classroom.

ISABELLE: You would have read any book, wouldn't you?

LATCH: Er...

ISABELLE: With anyone! What if Terry Morgan had survived? You would have read with her wouldn't you? Wouldn't you!?

(ISABELLE slaps LATCH.)

HOGG: *(smiles)* Co-lateral damage, Major? *(to ISABELLE)* Now come over here.
Don't let-

*(ISABELLE slaps HOGG and runs out of the room.
LATCH takes a medal from his uniform and pins it to
HOGG's coat.)*

LATCH: For bravery in the field of poetry and literature. I don't know how you do it.
It's hotter than a burning tank in
here.

XV

(ISABELLE is sniffing. LIVIA approaches. I don't know where this is set.)

LIVIA: What is it, pet. What's the matter?

ISABELLE: Nothing.

LIVIA: We're all friends now. We've got to pull together. I want to know.

ISABELLE: No you don't.

LIVIA: Is it a boy? *(no answer)* Is it a man?

ISABELLE: I told you I'm fine!

LIVIA: It's a man.

ISABELLE: No. You- Just- Achh...

LIVIA: I know about you and-

ISABELLE: Please don't expel me.

LIVIA: It's alright. I think it's totally natural. Come here.

(ISABELLE and LIVIA embrace. ISABELLE sheds a few more tears.)

LIVIA: When I was young...like you...I had a book. A beautiful book full of beautiful, searching words that- half of them I hadn't even seen before. And there was this fellow, this *man* ...three times my age. He knew them all. Oh, but what I did to get him to teach me. They weren't the best but they're still the...happiest...words...I've ever-...*(sighs)*...But he's hurt you hasn't he? *(ISABELLE nods)* Stay true. I'll talk to him.

ISABELLE: No!

LIVIA: It's fine. I don't know what he's playing at but-

ISABELLE: Please don't-

LIVIA: He loves you-

ISABELLE: Just...He does?

LIVIA: He does.

ISABELLE: ...oh, my...

LIVIA: He told me himself.

ISABELLE: He never told me

LIVIA: (*shaking her head*) Classic...

ISABELLE: He won't even read it.

LIVIA: What?

ISABELLE: It *is* a classic and he won't even read it. If he loved me, don't you think-

LIVIA: Ohhh (*laughs*) No. I told him. It's my fault. No, you should have seen the fight he put up. I told him he wasn't allowed. I told him he's not to read Middleton in *class*. But surely, you've got the park, the town, the rest of the planet, you two. Typical! Men! Tablespoon imaginations. (*ISABELLE laughs too*) Isabelle, he loves you.

ISABELLE: Wow...

LIVIA: But be careful.

ISABELLE: Yes.

LIVIA: Most men turn their pages when you're not looking. Speak his language. Play his game. Make him feel like he owes you something.

ISABELLE: Yes.

LIVIA: Make him dance around *you* for a while.

ISABELLE: Yes. Yes, I will.

LIVIA: And it's easy. Just remember: hearts as breakable as yours ...and you can make anyone dance....(*a memory, a cloud*)... for years...

ISABELLE: I wouldn't break his heart.

LIVIA: Oh, but they're so much more fun to watch when they're like that. You must. Just a little. It'll kickstart his imagination. And you'll both get more out of it.

ISABELLE: No. I would never break his heart!

LIVIA: Then you don't really love him.

ISABELLE: I do! Headmistress, I *do* love him. I would marry him. I would follow him everywhere.

LIVIA: Now he's not a boy. He doesn't want a puppy.

ISABELLE: The whole planet, like you said. I'd follow him. And we'd read...

LIVIA: (*smiling, whistful*) Reading, yes...

ISABELLE: And we'd talk about his days...

LIVIA: Talking yes...

ISABELLE: And I'd sew on his medals...

LIVIA: Sewing, y-

(*Boom! A long, juicy silence.*)

LIVIA: Of course. He's very busy.

ISABELLE: (*confident now*) But he loves me. You told me-

LIVIA: And he hardly knows you.

ISABELLE: (*smiling but puzzled by the change in wind*) No, but, I think you *know*, you know.

LIVIA: Like I said, be very careful.

ISABELLE: Headmistress?

LIVIA: You're not in love with the Major. Sew on his medals. Ph! What, then kiss him on the nose? Blow off some old poetry and goodnight?

ISABELLE: We would be happy.

LIVIA: And who would feed the puppy!?

XVI

(LEO's hospital bed. BIANCA is seated beside.)

LEO: Uranium.

BIANCA: U.

LEO: Nitrogen.

BIANCA: N

LEO: Iron.

BIANCA: I.

LEO: Wrong.

BIANCA: W.

LEO: No.

BIANCA: What?

LEO: I is not for Iron.

BIANCA: It starts with I.

LEO: But I told you it does not necessarily-...in Latin, iron is "ferrum".

BIANCA: Oh yeah.

LEO: I told you that five minutes ago.

BIANCA: Ok. I remember.

LEO: My God, you must be good at basketball.

BIANCA: I am.

LEO: Iron.

BIANCA: Fer.

LEO: No, the letters. The first two letters-

BIANCA: I - R-

LEO: Of "fer"!

BIANCA: P.

LEO: P!?

BIANCA: P - H...

LEO: Jesus-

BIANCA: Well, I don't know. It's Latin. I don't know how they spell their words.

LEO: Bianca-

BIANCA: F E?

LEO: What?

BIANCA: F E. It's probably F E.

LEO: Say it again.

BIANCA: F E.

LEO: Thank you. Plutonium.

BIANCA: P U.

LEO: *(to God)* Thank you.

(LIVIA enters)

LIVIA: How's our little scientist?

LEO: She's not little and she's not a scientist. If you meant me, they peeled an inch of skin off my ass today. Thank you for asking.

LIVIA: I was in the area.

LEO: So you were.

(LIVIA looks inquiringly at BIANCA.)

BIANCA: So...uh, sir...was there any plutonium in the experiment?

LEO: *(laughs)*

BIANCA: Was there any uranium?

LEO: *(laughs harder)*

BIANCA: *(to LIVIA)* When he laughs it usually means 'no'.

LEO: I gotta get some sleep. That's enough for today.

LIVIA: Oh, come on Leo.

LEO: Take her away.

LIVIA: But look at her. Look at her face.

LEO: I'm tired.

LIVIA: ...So disappointed. She wants so much to learn.

LEO: See ya.

LIVIA: Just give her the goddamn formula!

LEO: Aha...

LIVIA: Oh, cut the crap. You know what we're after.

LEO: I thought the uniform was on it.

LIVIA: China called. Finally.

LEO: *(sarcastic)* Well, in that case-

LIVIA: You have no idea how much they offered. But they won't send someone with Latch sniffing around. I told them though, if I...if *we* get them the formula before he figures it out. *(beat)* Oh God, you haven't told him, have you?

LEO: So far he's halfway to developing a new contact lense solution.

LIVIA: Is this because I have the job you wanted? Is it? Because this is getting very petty.

LEO: I don't *know* the formula!

LIVIA: I can't help that they chose *me* to run the school. I've gone out of my way to be good to you. You liked running the biology club.

LEO: What are you-

LIVIA: Alright, Leo. Fifteen clubs just lost their staff supervisors. Take any one. You want to do rock climbing with the kids?. It's yours.

LEO: You know that huge portrait of yourself behind your desk?

LIVIA: It's not huge....

LEO: It fell off and hit you on the head didn't it?

LIVIA: There, see? You are so jealous. God, you're vindictive! Just tell her the formula. We need the money. We need to rebuild-...The lab! There. I'll outfit the best lab in town. Slick bunsen burners. I'll buy you a fireproof suit.

LEO: (*to BIANCA*) You want to know the formula?

BIANCA: I just want my scholarship.

LIVIA: Bianca dear, with the money the Chinese will donate to the school, we could educate your children.

BIANCA: Who told you that? I had abortions!

LIVIA: Leo, just tell her.

LEO: I'm not getting involved in the arms race!

LIVIA: Tell her!

LEO: No. And don't ask me again!

LEO: (*simultaneously*)
Or I'll quit!

LIVIA: I'll fire you!

(Short pause. LEO and LIVIA both look at BIANCA.)

BIANCA: I just want my scholarship.

(simultaneously)

LEO: I quit!

LIVIA: You're fired!

XVII

(LATCH is sitting beside the PATIENT. There is no improvement in the latter's condition.)

LATCH: You have competition, Leo. I saw an explosion today. I was actually there. You see, these poets, they have no idea what they're really playing with. They're screwing with formulas that- Oh, Leo, it's dangerous. This poetry- this *art* business...It should be practiced only under the most controlled circumstances! I've always said that! You distribute safety goggles in your class, but Hogg, he gives them nothing. Nothing to protect themselves. When she let that slap go, I saw her eyes. The muscles in her lip. Her whole face was at war. With itself. Too much reading. Too many ideas at once. Like a baby learning to feel.

I've seen babies you know. Three of them. They're quite something.

Soldiers train before they fire a gun. They take it apart. They clean it. They understand it. What you created can be traced, Leo. Your destruction...it's clean. I'll never understand what happened in Hogg's classroom today. It's just a god damn mess!

(pause)

I went to an animal place- a pet shop yesterday. Looked at the turtles. They don't pant. *(pause)* They blink... But they don't pant.

(Over the course of the monologue, perhaps due to LATCH's gesticulating, a tube attached to the PATIENTS life support comes loose.)

PATIENT: ...oxygen...

LATCH: *(gasps)* My God!...of course!...Oxygen. Incredible!

(LATCH writes in his notes.)

XVIII

(The football field. Goalposts a few yards away. LATCH has, in front of him, a table on which are stationed a large bag of salt, a bucket of water and an oxygen tank. Behind him, on a shattered blackboard are some scribbled formulæ. He fills a small test tube with water and follows it with a spoonful of salt. Then another. ISABELLE enters approaches but he does not see her. He takes the hose attached to the oxygen tank and gingerly approaches it to the test tube. He twists a knob at the top of the tank and a hiss emits from the hose. ISABELLE knocks on the goalpost.)

LATCH: Jes-!!!

(LATCH drops the test tube and the hose at the end of the oxygen tank into the bucket causing the water to foam and splash all over him. He puts his hands in front of his face and ducks behind the counter. Then, just as quickly, jumps back up and tackles ISABELLE to prevent her from being hit by an explosion that never comes. He lies on top of her.)

LATCH: Are you alright? I'm in control.

ISABELLE: Is this top secret?

(LATCH is very uncomfortable with their proximity.)

LATCH: I'm investigating.

ISABELLE: Are you finding anything?

(LATCH springs up and turns off the oxygen.)

LATCH: Stay down! Are you alright?

ISABELLE: What are you-

LATCH: Are you alright?

ISABELLE: Yes.

(LATCH helps ISABELLE up, turns to his work and begins to clean up.)

ISABELLE: Im sorry that I slapped you.

(No answer. LATCH continues to clean.)

ISABELLE: I think you deserved it.

LATCH: Then you're not sorry.

ISABELLE: You deserved it. If you meant what you said, you deserved it. I know you didn't mean what you said. Did you mean what you said?

LATCH: It is not military policy to read poetry with the subjects of one's investigation. On this point I am particularly distinguished. I got this medal for it.

ISABELLE: So when do you get off work?

LATCH: Run along please.

(ISABELLE watches LATCH blissfully)

ISABELLE: What do you do to people who know things?

LATCH: I find them.

ISABELLE: What if they find you?

LATCH: All the better.

ISABELLE: *(playfully)* Oh...*(giggles)*

(Pause. she watches him.)

ISABELLE: Why are you frightened of poetry?

LATCH: Miss Isabelle, you must not allow yourself to investigate *me*!

ISABELLE: I thought you had no secrets.

LATCH: Exactly. No need for investigation. I ask the questions around here.

ISABELLE: Hardly.

LATCH: I ask a lot of questions. My questions are very good.

ISABELLE: Did you get a medal for that too?

LATCH: *(stops his work)* Have I offended you again?

ISABELLE: I'm just trying to get to know each other! If you're not going to make conversation, I guess it's up to me. Headmistress told me, Ok. She told me everything.

(LATCH is puzzled, goes back cleaning.)

ISABELLE: Anyway, you've only asked me one question. Ever.

LATCH: It must have been very important.

ISABELLE: It was boring. About where I was sitting.

LATCH: Were you telling the truth?

ISABELLE: Yes.

LATCH: Good.

ISABELLE: So it was useful.

LATCH: Of course.

ISABELLE: So you owe me.

LATCH: Owe you...?

(ISABELLE produces a couple of books of poetry.)

LATCH: Miss Isabelle, I will not read poetry with you. And I recommend that you get off the stuff yourself.

ISABELLE: But you said....she said...But I gave you information! You owe me! *(suddenly emotional)* Oh, sir...you read so beautifully. With, Mr. Hogg it's nice but...It's the way you- It's because you're frightened, I think. You make it wonderful! You make it- You don't need to worry about Mr. Hogg. There. You know where I stand.

LATCH: Run along now.

ISABELLE: But you owe me..

LATCH: It doesn't work that way.

ISABELLE: I know something else.

(LATCH looks hard at ISABELLE.)

LATCH: It must depend.

ISABELLE: It's a wonderful passage. I know this perfect poem-

LATCH: This is conditional. It depends on your information.

ISABELLE: Yes sir.

LATCH: Well...?

ISABELLE: Does Leo Abbott effect your investgation?

LATCH: Where's my clipbopard. *(He grabs it)* You know something about Leo?

ISABELLE: He's gone.

LATCH: *(begins to write)* Leo - Abbott - is- *(looks up suddenly)* Good Lord. How awful....How terrible.

ISABELLE: He quit.

LATCH: Quit. Yes...well put. Very delicate. But you needn't soften the news for my sake.

ISABELLE: Well, I guess it depends who's story you listen to. Bianca said it was very sudden.

LATCH: She was there?

ISABELLE: Yes.

LATCH: Was he in pain?

ISABELLE: I think the burns never-

LATCH: Of course...of course.

ISABELLE: Anyway, he won't be coming back.

LATCH: *(crushed)* No.

ISABELLE: Headmistress is furious.

LATCH: Well, when fate tightens the screws. Oh, the poor man. Such courage, Miss Isabelle! The man was so brave. To face his own monster...

ISABELLE: *(pointing at books)* So what about my end...

LATCH: To stand on the wing of his own phoenix.

ISABELLE: What about the poetry!?

LATCH: This is no time for poetry! This is a time to honour the souls who dare to blaze their prints into our earth. Who dare to gamble with man's own dark purpose! This is no time for *poetry*.

XIX

(LATCH is lying on the PATIENT's empty bed.)

LATCH: I investigate, I leave. I'm not to get-...I'm not to feel this- ...feel so-...Oh Leo, how could you leave me like this? The coward abandoned by his hero. The coward! The little man! The fragile, little-...Look at me! Why couldn't I...be you! I tried to save the third man. Pull him from the tank. But the heat was-...I couldn't do it. I jumped away...and someone gave me a medal. *(pulls off his rack of medals)* I didn't suffer! Only heroes deserve to suffer!

(LEO speaks from the next bed. They are still separated by a curtain.)

LEO: You're a hero too, Major.

LATCH: *(Startled. Eyes widening Godward)* Leo...?

LEO: Over here.

LATCH: What? Oh, yes.

LEO: Are you Major Latch?

LATCH: Indeed. Yes. Yes, I am.

LEO: Well, he certainly *spoke* of you as a hero.

LATCH: *(flushing)* Leo?...Leo Abbott? The man in here? You knew him?

LEO: I heard him. At night he called out his nightmares. Ruined cities. Bleeding bicycles. Half a child with his name on its lips. And he called out your name. He knew you were the one to make sure this would never happen again.

LATCH: ...he thought I was a hero...?

LEO: He never meant to hurt anyone. Thank God you're here to make sure it doesn't get to the wrong minds. Major?Major Latch?

LATCH: Yes.

LEO: He was counting on you. Destroy the formula.

LATCH: But...then how will he be remembered?

LEO: Nothing must be remembered.

(pause)

LATCH: Yes.

(LEO sighs relief.)

LATCH: *(to himself)* Incredible. Incredible man...

LEO: You're doing the right thing.

(beat)

LATCH: How long have you been there?

LEO: What?

(LATCH pushes the curtain aside and steps into LEO's area.)

LATCH: What else have you heard? You know my name.

LEO: Well-

LATCH: You know the formula, don't you? You just said: Get rid of the formula.

LEO: Yes, I-...Well-

(LATCH unplugs LEO's life support tubes.)

LEO: Hey! Hey, that's my-...Hey!!

(LATCH covers LEO's mouth)

LATCH: Don't call the nurses. They won't understand. And I'm in uniform.

(LEO twists his head free.)

LEO: Hel-!!

(LATCH comes down more heavily with his hand over LEO's mouth.)

LATCH: Of course it's going to be difficult, but you mustn't be inelegant about this. You respected him didn't you?

(LEO nods slowly)

LATCH: Good.

(LATCH slowly takes his hand away.)

LEO: Look, I'm...Ok, this is gonna sound-

LATCH: I must say, I'm very flattered that he held me in such high regard.

LEO: I'm Leo Abbott.

LATCH: No, you're just running out of oxygen. But it's normal to be delusional.

LEO: It's true.

LATCH: Shhh....it's normal. I'd do anything to be him too...

LEO: HELP!!

(LATCH covers LEO's mouth again.)

LATCH: You force his hand.

XX

(BIANCA alone. Tears are streaming down her face. She is inflating a basketball with a pump. Around her are the torn remains of several other balls that have exploded from over-inflation. BIANCA pumps the one in her arms until it bursts.)

XXI

(LEO's hospital bed area. LATCH is covers LEO's body with a sheet then moves into the PATIENT's area, closing the curtain after him. ISABELLE enters.)

ISABELLE: I thought he was in the next one.

LATCH: He is. A better world too.

ISABELLE: What?

LATCH: Mr. Abbott.

ISABELLE: Were you speaking with him?

LATCH: I doubt he heard me. We all wish they could.

ISABELLE: They?

LATCH: The dead.

ISABELLE: Mr. Abbott's not dead.

LATCH: I'm afraid so, my child.

ISABELLE: Oh...wow...

(LATCH hugs ISABELLE, more for himself than for anybody else.)

ISABELLE: I thought he just quit *work*.

LATCH: His life *was* his work.

ISABELLE: Poor Mr. Abbott.

LATCH: *(still holding ISABELLE)* One of the pitfalls of our language. If everyone could just be a little clearer, we might spare ourselves these shocks. A tradition of poetry has given us nothing but vagueries. They should stop teaching it. I've always said that. I think Leo agreed.

ISABELLE: You owe me, by the way.

LATCH: This isn't the time for your books.

ISABELLE: (*breaking the hug*) If there's any time, it's now.

LATCH: We have real life *enough!*

ISABELLE: You said you'd-

LATCH: I never promised.

ISABELLE: Just a page.

LATCH: My honour is in tact.

ISABELLE: But you love me.

LATCH: Please Miss Isabelle. This is a hospital.

ISABELLE: But you do!

LATCH: On what are you basing this accusation.

ISABELLE: Major Latch, you said-

LATCH: I said nothing to no one! I read with you, four pages of an offensive text with which you are obviously not equipped to cope. I don't know what's firing off in that imagination of yours but God help us if the Chinese ever get a hold of it.

ISABELLE: (*raising her hand*) I could kill you!

LATCH: (*terrified, cowering*) Don't slap me again!! (*beat*) Wait. When you say you *could* kill me, does that mean that you *would* kill me? Or were you just being poetic?

ISABELLE: Huh?

LATCH: Yes. Slap me again. Come on. Do it.

(*ISABELLE slaps LATCH half-heartedly.*)

LATCH: With the fire. With hell in your eyes.

(ISABELLE wacks him good and hard.)

LATCH: Yes! Nice! I think we might be able to come to an arrangement.

XXII

(The Chemistry lab at the school. LIVIA and BIANCA are standing by the counter on top of which are displayed an array of chemicals in bottles, test-tubes, measuring cups, etc.)

LIVIA: Smell this. Did it smell like this?

BIANCA: I can't remember. Maybe.

LIVIA: These crystals...Were you using crystals?

BIANCA: I can't remember.

LIVIA: Why can't you remember!!

BIANCA: I don't know.

LIVIA: Leo was right.

BIANCA: Ma'am-

LIVIA: You're useless.

BIANCA: Hey-

LIVIA: Useless!

BIANCA: I was training!

LIVIA: On whom!?

BIANCA: Ma'am, I don't know what I'm holding, but if you speak to me like that again, I'll pour it down your fuckin' throat.
(reads the label on the test tube in her hand) Potassium biflourocarbon. Never heard of it.

LIVIA: *(a little disarmed)* All I'm saying is-

BIANCA: I prob'ly missed that class.

LIVIA: -that you must have had a bit of time...

BIANCA: I missed that class!

(BIANCA smashes the test-tube and its contents into a larger container.)

BIANCA: The tournament with Easthill. Remember? We won. You were so happy you stuck the trophy in your office! *(picks up another tube)* This stuff. *(smells it)* Don't know it. *(looks at the label)* Can't pronounce it. Prob'ly taught us about this the week I was in physio. *(flings the tube into the container)* After the doctors told me to stay off my ankle? *(picks up another)* Remember those dumb doctors who you told me they didn't know anything? *(smash)* What about the class you called me in your office and bawled me out for losing to Finchley! *(picks another one up)* We prob'ly learned *this* stuff. *(smash. The liquid begins to change colour)*

LIVIA: Bianca-

BIANCA: *(picking up another)* Oh yeah. Blue. Derek told me we mixed some blue stuff the day you took me to meet the scouts from Duke. *(throws it in)*

LIVIA: Bianca, what was that?

BIANCA: It was blue stuff!!

XXIII

(The school playing field. LATCH and ISABELLE are seated facing each other. Near them is the table used previously to support LATCH's experiments. It is clear at the moment. HOGG enters. He is unkempt and miserable.)

HOGG: Aha! I knew it!

(LATCH hops up nervously.)

LATCH: Ah. Funny you should arrive just as we-

HOGG: *(snatches book from ISABELLE)* What are you reading? *(looks at the book)*
You little tart! We read this last week! You and me! Alone! We read it to each other!

ISABELLE: But sir, the Major-

HOGG: The Major. What's he got to do with-

ISABELLE: He's better than you!

(HOGG staggers back as if hit by a bullet. LATCH is fascinated. HE grabs his clipboard.)

LATCH: *(to ISABELLE)* Say that again.

ISABELLE: What?

LATCH: To Mr. Hogg. Say it again.

ISABELLE: *(to HOGG)* He's better than you.

(HOGG reels back again, withered.)

LATCH: Incredible. Keep talking.

ISABELLE: *(to HOGG)* I want to read with the Major now. Please understand. You and I can still read prose. But I want to read poetry with the Major.

(HOGG limps away into the school. LATCH is scrawling on his clipboard.)

LATCH: ...devastating... *(suddenly)* No! *(rips sheet from clipboard)*
It must never be used again.

XXIV

(BIANCA and LIVIA in the chemistry lab. In the container, one hell of an unstable concoction has discovered itself. BIANCA pours another test-tube into it, looking steadily at LIVIA. LIVIA flinches in terror.)

BIANCA: No. That's not it.

LIVIA: Stop.

BIANCA: You want your formula or not?

LIVIA: You're being childish.

BIANCA: Oh? You gonna fail me? Call my daddy?

LIVIA: I'll call the police!

BIANCA: Stick with the Chinese, Ma'am. They'll pay more.

XXV

(School playing field. LATCH is setting out materials on the table. The salt, water and oxygen have had their labels removed. ISABELLE stands blindfolded.)

LATCH: He would be proud. I mean, this is respect, no? A tip of the hat. *(shouting skyward)* A tip of the hat and I'll see you up there! See you in Kingdom-Come!! She'll have no idea what she's mixing. I swear Leo. After this, the formulas's gone. But I just-...I have to-...grant me the indulgence. I'm ready this time. I have to feel it like you felt it!

(Everything is ready. LATCH removes ISABELLE's blindfold.)

LATCH: Slap me, Miss Isabelle.

(ISABELLE does. Then he ties the blindfold on himself.)

LATCH: Slap me again.

(She does)

LATCH: Yes. Yes, I think I'll keep it on. Better not to know...You know...when it's-...Sit me down. Seat me.

(ISABELLE guides LATCH to a chair placed a few feet in front of the table.)

LATCH: Better to be sitting. D'you think?

ISABELLE: Why don't you ask Leo.

LATCH: Leo. He would-...I'll stand. Get rid of the chair! Leo stood. Leo always stood! Wait, Miss Isabelle...

(LATCH takes a cheque from his pocket.)

LATCH: This is for the school. For your headmistress. To thank. To rebuild...and I suppose to re-sod the field...

ISABELLE: *(throwing herself on LATCH)* Oh, Major!

LATCH: No...no you don't. Not now. This day is for heros.

ISABELLE: I don't want to kill you.

LATCH: Now, now...you're not going to kill me.

ISABELLE: Yes I am.

LATCH: Yes, but...OK, but don't talk about it like that.

ISABELLE: I'm scared.

LATCH: You're like one of those poets. All bloody words and no balls.

ISABELLE: But-

LATCH: *I'm* the one catching it. *I'm* not scared. Today is for...heros. You have the instructions, now do it.

ISABELLE: I don't want you to die.

LATCH: You hardly know me. Get behind the table. *(to himself)* Today is for heros.

ISABELLE: What if-

LATCH: Stop talking! Don't- just Shuttup! Shuttup!!

*(ISABELLE is overcome. She runs into the school.
LATCH stands alone, still blinfolded.)*

LATCH: No more talking. This is between Leo and me now...Silence.
Good girl...hands steady...Just do it like I wrote it down. That's it...Keep behind the table. You won't be touched...Good girl. No talking. It's very important, Miss Isabelle...very important not to talk...If you keep talking, Miss Isabelle, I'll...I'll keep wanting...to stay.

XXVI

(LIVIA and BIANCA in the chemistry lab. The concoction is steaming and swirling. BIANCA has a test tube poised.)

BIANCA: Last one. Benzene.

LIVIA: Dear God, woman, listen to me.

BIANCA: Sounds promising.

LIVIA: Bianca, *don't!!*

(LIVIA runs out of the room in terror. BIANCA pours. Nothing happens. Pause. She gets up to leave but just before she does, she spits into the concoction.)

XXVII

(Playing field. Behind LATCH, what remained of the school explodes and collapses. The blast does not touch him.)

LATCH: Yes!...Here we go!!...Incredible...It's incredible!! I'm there Leo! I felt that...I'm sure I felt that...I think I felt that...