

**THE PERSISTENCE OF SMOKE**

opera in one act

libretto by JOHN JUSTICE

music by GEORGE LAM

(FINAL \ 02282011)

**CAST**

KEVIN (baritone), 35

architect, about to unveil his plans for the city's old tobacco warehouses

SKYLAR (mezzo-soprano), 34

his wife

CURTIS (bass-baritone), 62

his father, a former cigarette factory worker

WOMAN (lyric soprano), 50

a local citizen at the press conference

**ORCHESTRA**

B-flat Clarinet

F Horn

Percussion

Scrap Metal

Vibraphone

Drum Kit (Snare / Hi-hat / Bass)

Suspended Cymbals

Wood Blocks

Bass Drum

Anvil

Banjo

Accordion (or Synthesizer)

Piano

Violin

Viola

Cello

Double Bass

## SCENE ONE

*[Prelude. KEVIN and SKYLAR's downtown loft, converted from a cigarette factory warehouse. They are sitting drinking coffee with CURTIS.]*

CURTIS

LIGHT UP A LUCKY,  
IT'S LIGHT-UP TIME.  
BE HAPPY GO LUCKY,  
IT'S LIGHT-UP TIME.  
FOR THE TASTE THAT YOU LIKE,  
LIGHT UP A LUCKY STRIKE,  
RELAX-X-X-X....  
IT'S LIGHT-UP...

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT BLOOD ALWAYS TRUMPS TIME?  
WHAT IF I SWEAR YOU WERE ALWAYS THERE,  
ALWAYS ON MY MIND?  
AND WHAT IF I SAY MY SON  
I CAME HERE TODAY JUST TO TELL YOU I'M DYING?

KEVIN

ASSUMING IT'S NOT A LIE  
OR MERELY YOUR LATEST SCAM  
I'LL LOOK YOU IN YOUR BLOODSHOT EYE  
AND SWEAR ... I DON'T GIVE A DAMN.

CURTIS

I SAW YOU ON THE TV.  
YOU'RE GONNA SHOW EVERYBODY YOUR PLANS FOR WHAT YOU'RE BUILDING.

KEVIN

SKYLAR, YOU'VE GOT TO GET READY TOO.

SKYLAR

YOUR FATHER JUST TOLD YOU HE'S DYING.

CURTIS

EXCUSE ME.

THE DYING PART IS REAL  
BUT IT'S NO BIG DEAL  
IT HOWLS A LITTLE IN THE NIGHT  
BUT ITS BARK IS WAY WORSE THAN ITS BITE.

*[Sounds of the machines in the old cigarette factory as CURTIS begins his aria.]*

CURTIS  
(in a reverie.)

THE MACHINES ROARED  
AND THE GOLDEN LEAF Poured  
INTO PACKS AND CARTONS  
IN THIS ROOM WHERE THE MACHINES ROARED

THE CITY ROARED

WITH ALL ITS MIGHT  
 NIGHT AND DAY  
 AND DOWNTOWN  
 WAS A HAPPY RUCKUS  
 OF FIDDLES AND BANJOS AND MANDOLINS  
 THE SWEET PLACE THE MUSIC TOOK US

THE CITY AIR  
 WAS THICK WITH A SMELL  
 ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS  
 EVEN A BLIND MAN COULD TELL  
 THE THICK SWEET AIR THEY BREATHED...  
 CIGARETTES WAS MONEY:  
 T-BONES AND BIKES, STOVES, FROCKS AND FORDS  
 TO CARRY US TO THE BEACH WHERE IT'S ALWAYS SUNNY.

THE MACHINES ROARED  
 AND THE GOLDEN LEAF POURED,  
 IT POURED INTO PACKS AND CARTONS.

BEFORE, LONG BEFORE,  
 TOBACCO DIED  
 SMOKERS QUIT  
 THE FACTORY SHUT DOWN  
 AND THEY TURNED OUR FACTORY FLOOR  
 INTO THIS PRETTY LOFT  
 OF YOURS.

ONE DAY BACK THEN  
 IN A HAPPIER TIME  
 YOUR MAMA AND I MADE  
 YOU A GIFT  
 THAT I'VE COME TO FIND  
 BEHIND THESE WALLS OF  
 ORIGINAL BRICK  
 OR UNDER THE HEARTPINE FLOORS

I DON'T RIGHTLY REMEMBER  
 BUT IT'S HERE I KNOW  
 THE GIFT I GOT TO SHOW YOU  
 WHILE I'M STILL ABOVE THE DIRT.

*[CURTIS lights up.]*

OH, LET HIM.  
 JUST LOOK AT HIM.

SKYLAR

I SEE AN OLD SINNER  
 TOO TIRED TO SIN....

KEVIN

LOOK AT THE SORROW IN HIS EYE,

SKYLAR  
 (cold)

SEARCHING FOR YOUR LOVE.

KEVIN

...I SEE AN OLD SINNER  
TOO TIRED TO SIN  
WHO RAN AWAY FROM HIS FAMILY  
AND NOW WANTS BACK IN.

SKYLAR  
(colder)

...LISTEN TO THE YEARNING IN HIS VOICE,  
HE'S SUFFERED ENOUGH.

KEVIN

DO AS YOU WISH  
YOU ALWAYS DO.

SKYLAR

HE'S SUFFERED ENOUGH!

KEVIN

GIVE HIM A CHANCE:  
HE'LL HURT YOU TOO.

CURTIS  
(continuing on)

...I'M BUBBLING WITH JOY  
I SEE YOUR MOTHER  
THE FIRST TIME I SAW HER  
AT HER WORKSTATION RIGHT OVER THERE  
WE BROKE FOR LUNCH AT NOON AND  
SHARED BALONEY, A NEHI AND A SMOKE  
I SANG HANK WILLIAMS AND WON HER SMILE  
I SENT HER HOME WITH A LOVER'S NOTE  
THAT LED OUR HEARTS TO WED

YOU WERE CONCEIVED  
RIGHT HERE WHERE YOU'VE HUNG  
THAT PRETTY PICTURE OF  
THE WATER LILIES.

GOT AN ASHTRAY?

KEVIN

IN TWENTY MINUTES I UNVEIL MY PLAN  
FOR REBUILDING THE CITY'S NEW HEART AND SOUL  
TWO THOUSAND PEOPLE WAITING AT THE HOTEL  
I DON'T WANT TO SMELL HIS TOBACCO BREATH  
NO, I DON'T WANT TO LISTEN TO HIS BULLSHIT STORY  
I DON'T GIVE A DAMN -

CURTIS

HERE WE WERE  
HAPPY SERVANTS OF  
THE HUMMING MACHINE,

THE MACHINE THAT MADE A VILLAGE A TOWN  
AND A TOWN THE CITY.

WHAT WE DID ON THE LINE  
PAVED THE STREETS  
LIT THE LIGHTS  
RAISED THE STEEPLES  
BOUGHT THE SCHOOLBOOKS  
OPENED THE HOSPITALS –  
ALL OF IT FLOWED  
FROM THE LITTLE WHITE STICKS  
PUMPING FROM OUR MACHINES

BY THE THOUSANDS, MILLIONS,  
BY THE JUMPING GAZILLIONS  
FROM THE MACHINE  
WE TENDED SO TENDER...

KEVIN

A PRETTY SONG  
BUT IT'S ALL GONE

YOUR FACTORY PARADISE  
WAS RUNNING ON LIES PILED  
ON TOP OF LIES.  
CANCER.  
YOU WERE MAKING CANCER –

*[Short interlude / outburst in the orchestra.]*

CURTIS

WE DIDN'T KNOW.

KEVIN

THEY CALLED THEM "COFFIN NAILS"!

CURTIS

NOBODY TOLD ME.

KEVIN

OH NO, NOT YOU. YOU USED TO SING TO ME:

"TOBACCO IS A DIRTY WEED.  
I LIKE IT.  
IT SATISFIES NO NORMAL NEED.  
I LIKE IT.  
IT MAKES YOU THIN, IT MAKES YOU LEAN,  
IT TAKES THE HAIR RIGHT OFF YOUR BEAN.  
IT'S THE WORST DARN STUFF I'VE EVER SEEN.  
I LIKE IT."

SKYLAR

LIGHTEN UP, KEVIN.

WE CAN'T ALL BE AS SMART AS YOU--

YOUR FATHER SAYS HE DIDN'T KNOW:  
LET IT GO.

AND IF HE WAS IN FACT IGNORANT,  
IF HE SPEAKS FROM AN ADDICTION,  
HE HAD COMPANY.

THE PROOF...

KEVIN

THERE WASN'T NO PROOF.

CURTIS

KEVIN  
WAS IN MY MOTHER'S COUGH.  
FROM THE STUFF HE MADE HERE IN THIS LOFT,  
COUGHING HER LUNGS LOOSE FROM HER CHEST  
SUCKING OXYGEN,  
THE IV DRIPPING,  
HEART GOING INTO OVERLOAD...  
AND THE REST.

DEEP IN THE NIGHT  
A GRAVEYARD COUGH  
FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BEDROOM WALL  
I HAD A NIGHTMARE OF FLOATING  
ALONE IN DEAD BLACK SPACE  
I SCREAMED, BUT HER PAIN  
SCREAMED LOUDER,  
AND SHE DIDN'T HEAR ME.

HE WASN'T THERE.  
HE RAN.  
HE DIDN'T HEAR  
HER TOMBSTONE COUGH.  
YOU WEREN'T THERE  
EITHER OF YOU  
TO HEAR THE COUGH,  
OR TO HEAR IT  
WHEN IT STOPPED.

CURTIS  
(overlapping, delirious)

...HERE WE WERE  
HAPPY SERVANTS OF  
THE HUMMING MACHINE...

KEVIN  
(overlapping)

ONCE IN A MAIN STREET DINER  
I SAW AN OLD MAN  
WITH A HOLE IN HIS THROAT  
DRINKING COFFEE WITH HIS BUDDIES  
KIDDING AROUND, TIME TO KILL.

WHEN THE OLD MAN SPOKE  
THROUGH THE HOLE IN HIS THROAT  
CROAKING VOICE THROUGH A METAL BOX...

CURTIS

...THAT MADE A VILLAGE A TOWN  
AND A TOWN THE CITY...

KEVIN  
(overlapping)

...THE SOUND HURT TO HEAR, BUT  
WORSE, MOST SHOCKING TO SEE,  
HE WAS STILL SUCKING ON  
A KING-SIZED CHESTERFIELD  
BLOWING SMOKE RINGS,  
CIRCLES OF SMOKE FLOATING OUT  
FROM THE HOLE IN HIS THROAT...

CURTIS  
(overlapping)

...WHAT WE DID ON THE LINE  
PAVED THE STREETS  
LIT THE LIGHTS  
BOUGHT THE SCHOOLBOOKS  
OPENED THE HOSPITALS--  
ALL OF IT FLOWED,  
ALL OF IT FLOWED...

CURTIS  
(overlapping)

...BY THE THOUSANDS MILLIONS  
BY THE JUMPING GAZILLIONS  
FROM THE MACHINE  
WE TENDED SO TENDER.

KEVIN  
(overlapping)

...SUCKING ON A KING-SIZED CHESTERFIELD  
BLOWING SMOKE RINGS,  
CIRCLES OF SMOKE FLOATING OUT  
FROM THE HOLE IN HIS THROAT.

*[CURTIS hesitates, then continues.]*

CURTIS

I KNOW YOU'RE A PRINCE OF THE CITY  
I KNOW IN YOUR EYES I'M THE PUTRID REMINDER OF THE OLD.

LET ME REST JUST FOR A MINUTE,  
I'M A TAD DIZZY AND THINGS ARE BLURRY,  
I NEED TO LIE DOWN  
JUST FOR A MINUTE  
THEN I'LL GO...

KEVIN

THAT'S ENOUGH -

CURTIS  
(interrupting)

YOU MAY BE RIGHT ABOUT THE FUTURE  
BUT THERE'S THINGS ABOUT THE PAST  
THAT YOU DON'T KNOW...

KEVIN

SKYLAR, WE'RE LEAVING.

(to CURTIS)

SHUT THE DOOR WHEN YOU'RE DONE.

*[KEVIN walks out of the apartment. SKYLAR lingers for a bit and looks back at an exhausted CURTIS. She grabs her purse, follows him out, and shuts the door.]*

## SCENE TWO

*[KEVIN and SKYLAR are in a crowded downtown hotel auditorium. KEVIN is concluding his presentation on his plans for the new downtown residential/commercial district, SKYLAR sits behind him and slightly to the side. CURTIS stays behind in the loft.*

*Prelude from the orchestra.]*

KEVIN

WHAT WE ARE BUILDING IS NOTHING NEW.  
ITS EVERY PARTICLE EXISTS  
COMPLETE IN FORM AND FUNCTION.  
WHAT WE ARE BUILDING IS NOTHING NEW.

ITS PATHS AND PARKS AND MARKETS AND LOFTS  
ALIVE AND POWERED BY ITS OWN  
STRONG, LOVING, CURIOUS, BEATING HEART.

THE NEW CITY EXISTS  
INSIDE EACH OF US  
INSIDE WHERE WE CHERISH A CITY  
THAT IS OUR HOME.  
WHAT WE ARE BUILDING IS NOTHING NEW.

TREATING THE OLD  
MILLS AND FACTORIES AND STORES  
WITH LOVE.  
FOR EVERY BIT OF  
WOOD AND GLASS, BRICK AND STONE,  
CLEANING, PLANING, AND MAKING STRAIGHT AND NEW  
EACH PLANK AND EVERY NAIL,  
TO REASSEMBLE THE OLD  
WHILE EMBRACING THE NEW.  
WHAT WE ARE BUILDING IS NOTHING NEW.

GIFTS IN OUR HAND--  
GEOTHERMAL... SOLAR... WIND...  
ERASING OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT  
TRACING LIGHTER PATTERNS AS  
WE BEGIN TO LIVE

IN THE NEW CITY.

SO YOU SEE  
I'VE *CREATED* NOTHING,  
ALL I'VE DONE IS TRANSLATE  
YOUR DEEPEST INNERMOST DESIRE  
FOR COMMUNITY THAT'S LIVELY, SAFE, AND BEAUTIFUL,  
THAT'S ALL.

THAT'S WHAT AN ARCHITECT IS,  
IT'S WHAT I DO:  
TRANSLATE DREAMS  
THAT'S ALL.

WHAT WE ARE BUILDING IS NOTHING NEW.

*[KEVIN continues the presentation.]*

CURTIS

(CURTIS is smoking a cigarette, and hammering on the bricks and ripping up the floor.)

IT'S HERE  
SOMEWHERE  
HER AND ME PUT IT  
HERE WHERE IT WOULDN'T SUFFER DAMAGE

I KNOW IT'S HERE  
IN THIS ROOM WHERE  
EVERYTHING'S THE SAME  
BUT SOMEHOW ALL CHANGED

I'LL BE DAMNED:  
AT THIS POINT IN MY LIFE  
ONE BRICK LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER.

*["Smoke, Smoke, Smoke That Cigarette", 1947, written by Merle Travis for Tex Williams.]*

"NOW I'M A FELLOW WITH A HEART OF GOLD  
AND THE WAYS OF A GENTLEMAN I'VE BEEN TOLD  
KIND-OF-A-GUY THAT WOULDN'T EVEN HARM A FLEA  
BUT IF ME AND A CERTAIN CHARACTER MET  
THE GUY THAT INVENTED THAT CIGARETTE  
I'D MURDER THAT SON-OF-A GUN IN THE FIRST DEGREE

IT AIN'T CUZ I DON'T SMOKE 'EM MYSELF  
AND I DON'T RECKON THAT IT'LL HINDER YOUR HEALTH  
I SMOKED 'EM ALL MY LIFE AND I AIN'T DEAD YET  
BUT NICOTINE SLAVES ARE ALL THE SAME  
AT A PETTIN' PARTY OR A POKER GAME  
EVERYTHING GOTTA STOP WHILE THEY HAVE A CIGARETTE

SMOKE SMOKE SMOKE THAT CIGARETTE  
PUFF PUFF PUFF TIL YOU SMOKE YOURSELF TO DEATH  
MEET SAINT PETER AT THE GOLDEN GATE  
TELL SAINT PETER HE'LL HAVE TO WAIT

I JUST GOTTA HAVE ANOTHER--"

*[SKYLAR takes out a phone and calls CURTIS. The telephone in the loft rings.]*

TELL SAINT PETER I JUST GOTTA HAVE  
ANOTHER CIGARETTE.

KEVIN

... AS WE BEGIN TO LIVE IN THE NEW CITY.

*[SKYLAR calls the loft again. This time the ringing phone startles CURTIS. He looks up, and starts speaking to an imaginary MR. ALLGOOD, his boss. Sound of Curtis whacking away at bricks, walls, floor.]*

CURTIS

OH -  
MORNING, MR. ALLGOOD.

KEVIN

I'LL TAKE YOUR QUESTIONS NOW. YES?

WOMAN  
(from the audience.)

WHAT'S THE COST?  
HOW BAD'S THE PAIN?  
WHAT'S OUR LOSS?  
WHAT'S YOUR GAIN?  
HOW MUCH WILL IT COST TO LIVE IN THIS PLACE?

*[Hammering sounds continue.]*

CURTIS  
(acknowledging a MR. HAYWARD next to MR. ALLGOOD.)

YES, MR. ALLGOOD.  
HOWDY, MR. HAYWARD.  
GOOT TO MEET YOU.  
YOU JUST OFF THE TRAIN FROM THE NEW YORK OFFICE?

KEVIN

...THERE'S A VERY NICE RANGE  
OF UNIT PRICES,  
SOMETHING FOR JUST ABOUT EVERYONE  
ONE BED ONE BATH TOWNHOUSES  
STARTING IN THE MID TWO HUNDREDS  
ON UP TO OH, TWO THOUSAND SQUARE FOOT LOFTS  
FOR SIX FIGURES MORE OR LESS.

WOMAN

WHO GETS RICH?  
WHO STAYS POOR?  
WHO CAN AFFORD  
THIS DREAM OF YOURS?

KEVIN

ALL ARE WELCOME

THAT'S THE PLAN

WOMAN

MY HOME'S UNDERWATER  
THE WATER'S RISING STILL  
WILL YOU LIFT ME UP  
HELP ME LIVE IN YOUR MANSION ON THE HILL?  
WILL YOU?

*[Hammering sounds starts to lower, continue.]*

CURTIS

YES MR. HAYWARD,  
TOBACCO'S AT A TRICKY TIME  
SALES ARE FLAT  
PROFITS DOWN  
AND LOW-DOWN CANCER RUMORS  
FLYING  
*METASTACIZING*  
FROM TOWN TO TOWN

CURTIS  
(overlapping)

... TOBACCO GROWERS ARE GREEDY  
PLANT WORKERS SLACK,  
SMOKERS HAVE THE JITTERS  
RECKLESS SCIENCE ON THE ATTACK.

KEVIN  
(overlapping)

PROVISIONS ARE MADE TO HELP. SUBSIDIES.  
LOW-INTEREST LOANS. LEASE TO BUY.  
PUBLIC PRIVATE SPECIAL LOANS. FIRST TIME  
BUYERS...

KEVIN

...THERE'S A VERY NICE RANGE  
OF UNIT PRICES,  
SOMETHING FOR JUST ABOUT EVERYONE...

WOMAN  
(interrupting)

EXCUSE ME SIR  
BUT I GOT TO ASK YOU WHY  
WHY DO YOU TORTURE US WITH A VISION  
OF HAPPINESS THAT WE CAN'T BUY?

WHAT'S THE HAUL?  
WHAT'S THE TAKE?  
HOW MANY MILLIONS  
WILL YOU MAKE?

KEVIN

I'M AFRAID THAT'S ALL THE TIME WE HAVE FOR NOW...

WOMAN

IT'S NOT A QUESTION  
IF IT'S GOOD OR BAD OR GREEN OR BLACK OR OLD OR NEW  
YOU JUST GOT TO ASK YOURSELF  
WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO.

IT'S PEOPLE ASSIGNED TO DIRT STREETS  
NOBODY ELSE WANTED  
CONSIGNED TO PROJECTS  
THAT HAD TO DO  
PEOPLE WHO MADE A NEGLECTED  
SQUARE MILE BLOSSOM AND BLOOM  
UNTIL THE FREEWAY CUT IT IN HALF.

YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST.  
WE'VE BEEN DEVELOPED  
AND REDEVELOPED  
AND RE-RE-DEVELOPED,

*[Orchestra enters underneath.]*

WE'VE BEEN SCREWED, GLUED, AND  
URBAN RENEWED TO A FARE-THEE-WELL,  
AND THE ONE COMMON THING  
TIME AFTER TIME IS  
WE'VE GOT A NICKEL  
AND THE NEW THING COSTS A DIME.

SO FORGIVE ME BUT TIME IS SHORT  
SO LET'S CUT TO THE BONE  
IN ALL THIS SPACE YOU'VE DESIGNED  
DOES YOUR FATHER HAVE A HOME?

*[This catches KEVIN off guard, and he tries to speak but the WOMAN continues on.]*

I SEE THE RECYCLE AND THE SOLAR,  
ONE GOOD THING PILED ON TOP OF ANOTHER  
BUT HARD AS I LOOK, I DON'T SEE,  
I CAN'T SEE  
A ROOM FOR YOUR FATHER.

IS THERE A PLACE FOR HIM?  
WHERE WILL HE STAY?  
WHERE WILL HE BE  
AND ALL THE OTHERS LIKE HIM  
AND LIKE ME?

IS THERE A PLACE FOR YOUR FATHER?  
WHERE WILL HE STAY?  
WHERE WILL HE BE  
AND ALL THE OTHERS LIKE HIM  
AND LIKE ME?

*[SOUND of Curtis' hammer sounding tempo. Curtis can be heard breathing hard. Curtis' breath: short, sharp gasps.]*

CURTIS

SHIT.

(laughing, delirious.)

I'M SUCH AN OLD FOOL.

(still delirious, singing.)

*["When I Grow Too Old To Dream", 1934, music by Sigmund Romberg and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II.]*

"WHEN I GROW TOO OLD TO DREAM,  
I'LL HAVE YOU TO REMEMBER,  
WHEN I GROW TOO OLD TO DREAM  
I'LL STILL HAVE YOU IN MY HEART.

SO KISS ME, MY SWEET,  
AND SO LET US PART.  
AND WHEN I GROW TOO OLD TO DREAM  
THAT KISS WILL LIVE IN MY HEART."

*[The phone rings again. CURTIS looks up, and sees his wife.]*

LUCY?

HELLO, DARLIN'.

YOU KNOW WHAT I CAME FOR. I CAN'T FIND IT.

*["LUCY" gestures to a corner of the apartment, orchestra swells.]*

THANK YOU.

*["LUCY" says something...]*

I DON'T KNOW.  
YOU THINK IT WON'T CHANGE A THING?  
YOU THINK NOT?  
SAME OLD OPINIONATED LUCY.  
YOU STICK AROUND AND SEE.

*[A trio for the WOMAN, KEVIN and CURTIS:]*

KEVIN

MA'AM,  
THESE BUILDINGS SIT EMPTY, DECAYING.  
RE-DEVELOPMENT NEEDS CAPITAL.  
CAPITAL NEEDS INVESTORS,  
INVESTORS NEED RETURNS,  
NUMBERS,  
A GUARANTEE.

WOMAN

I SEE THE RECYCLE AND THE SOLAR,  
ONE GOOD THING PILED ON TOP OF ANOTHER  
BUT HARD AS I LOOK, I DON'T SEE,  
I CAN'T SEE  
A ROOM FOR YOUR FATHER.

IS THERE A PLACE FOR HIM?  
WHERE WILL HE STAY?

WHERE WILL HE BE?  
WHERE WILL HE GO?

CURTIS

"...SO KISS ME, MY SWEET,  
SO LET US PART.  
WHEN I GROW TOO OLD TO DREAM..."

*[The meeting concludes. KEVIN and SKYLAR exit the hotel.]*

SKYLAR

REMEMBER THAT DAY AT OCRACOKE?  
I CAUGHT YOU IN THE DUNES  
SNEAKING A SMOKE.

I MADE THE MISTAKE OF  
MAKING A JOKE  
"YOU'RE ONLY HUMAN," I SAID

"COME JOIN THE CROWD  
BE ONE OF US REGULAR FOLK.  
YOU CAN STAY WITH ME," I BEGGED,  
"AND WE WILL FAIL TOGETHER."

AND THEN I CAUGHT THE HURT IN YOUR EYE  
AND HEARD THE WORDS YOU SPOKE  
SO COLD, CLIPPED AND MYSTERIOUS  
I NEVER UNDERSTOOD.

KEVIN

WHY ON EARTH ARE YOU SAYING THIS NOW?

SKYLAR

"I CANNOT FAIL," YOU SAID  
"IF I FAIL, I FALL FROM  
THE NECESSARY HEIGHT  
AND ONCE BEGUN,  
THE FALLING NEVER ENDS.  
I CAN'T ACCEPT FAILURE. I CANNOT.  
WHAT KIND OF WAY IS THAT TO LIVE?"

SUCH A SAD THING TO SAY  
SUCH A TRAGIC ASPIRATION  
I'D FORGOTTEN THE WHOLE THING  
UNTIL TODAY.

KEVIN

WE MADE LOVE IN THE DUNES.

SKYLAR

YOUR BODY SOFTENED, YOU WERE THROUGH,  
YOUR EYES CLOSED, YOUR BREATHING SLOWED,  
AND I WHISPERED...

"MY POOR LITTLE SUPERMAN,

IF PERFECTION IS YOUR PLAN,  
IT'S A PRESCRIPTION FOR DISASTER.

WHERE WILL YOU GO?  
WHAT WILL YOU DO?  
I'M ONLY HUMAN KEVIN,  
WHAT ARE YOU?"

WELL, MY MASTERFUL MAN,  
YOUR MASTERFUL PLAN,  
LOFTY AS CHARTERS AND  
STRAIGHT FROM YOUR HEART  
WITH HEROIC AMBITION  
AND HUMBLE SUBMISSION  
TO FASHION A NEW CITY'S SOUL,  
TO RENDER IT IN ITS WHOLE...

KEVIN

SKYLAR, IS YOUR AIM  
TO DRIVE ME TO MY KNEES?  
IF SO -- REJOICE -- YOU WIN.  
SKYLAR, I DON'T BLAME YOU  
OR HIM OR ANYONE.

BUT PLEASE STOP,  
SOFTEN YOUR HEART TO ME.  
I'LL START AGAIN  
EMBRACE YOU AND DADDY,  
AND THEN BEGIN LIVING, AT LAST.

SKYLAR

TOO LATE, TOO LATE,  
YOU OUGHT TO'VE LISTENED  
TO HIM, TO ME, TO THE "COMMUNITY"  
INSTEAD OF BENDING ALL ELSE  
TO YOUR WILL.

YOU MIGHT'VE LISTENED MORE,  
YOU MIGHT'VE STOOD STILL FOR  
A MOMENT, JUST ONE MOMENT,  
OF CURIOSITY AND GENEROSITY--  
THE ELEMENTS OF LOVE--

*[Orchestra swells, subsides.]*

IT'S OVER, KEVIN. GO TO YOUR FATHER. I'LL HAVE MY LAWYER CALL ON MONDAY.

*[SKYLAR leaves. Interlude.]*

### SCENE THREE

*[KEVIN comes back into the apartment, alone.]*

*CURTIS is completely exhausted now, sitting on the floor, almost in a fetal position. He is rocking back and forth, cradling a dusty record in his arms.*

*Silence. And then:]*

KEVIN

ONCE I SAW AN OLD MOVIE,  
FATS WALLER AS A PRIVATE EYE  
IN A VERY NATTY PORK-PIE HAT  
WHO STEPS INTO A ROOM WHERE  
SOME ARTIST OF CHAOS HAD HIS FUN  
BUSTING FURNITURE SMASHING CROCKERY  
AND SHREDDING SOFAS AND BEDS,  
STREWING CORPSES WALL TO WALL  
AND BLACK AND WHITE BLOOD  
COVERING ALL.

FATS STEPS OVER THE SILL  
AND INTO THE CARNAGE  
TAKES A GOOD LOOK AT WHAT  
SOME BAD MAN HAS DONE  
AND HAS THIS TO SAY:  
"ONE NEVER KNOWS, DO ONE?"

*[CURTIS drops the record onto the floor. KEVIN picks it up, and plugs in the turntable. Scratching of needle on old vinyl record. Throughout the song that follows, CURTIS'S VOICE is heard, accompanied by a banjo, while a baby cries softly every now and then. CURTIS sings along, slightly behind the record.]*

CURTIS'S VOICE

DARLING LITTLE KEVIN  
OUR GIFT FROM HEAVEN  
SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.

SAFE IN OUR HANDS  
OUR PERFECT LITTLE MAN  
SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.

WE'LL TELL YOU A SECRET  
IF YOU PROMISE TO KEEP IT,  
DREAM ON, DREAM ON.

YOUR FUTURE WE BEHOLD,  
YOUR LIFE WILL BE PURE GOLD  
DREAM ON, DREAM ON.

YOU WILL DO GREAT THINGS  
YOU WILL SEE A NEW DAY  
YOU WILL BUILD A GREAT CITY  
YOU WILL BE LOVED  
EVERY STEP OF YOUR WAY.

WHEN THE TIME IS COME  
AND WE ARE OLD

YOU WILL MAKE A HOME  
AND WITH YOU WE'LL STAY.

CURTIS

SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.

CURTIS'S VOICE

WHEN THE TIME IS COME  
AND WE ARE OLD  
YOU WILL MAKE A HOME  
AND WITH YOU WE'LL STAY.

CURTIS

DARLING LITTLE KEVIN  
OUR GIFT FROM HEAVEN  
SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.  
SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.

*[Coda. Slow fade.]*