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The Public Theatre, NYC 2005

New Georges, NYC 2004-2005

The Lark Theatre, NYC 2003-2004

**DEAD CITY**

(A modern riff on Joyce's *Ulysses*)

**DEAD CITY was commissioned by Playwrights Horizons with funds provided by The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Commissioning Program.**

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## DEAD CITY

|  |  |
|--|--|
| SAMANTHA   | female, mid-forties<br>(optimistic, cheery, round, good-natured, attractive) |
| JEWEL  | female, 22<br>(undernourished, broody, bad teeth, a poet and intellectual)   |
| GABRIEL / HANK / HOMELESS MAN /<br>SAM ONE                 | male, mid forties<br>(sexy-as-hell)  |
| BEATRICE / WOMAN ONE /<br>NORA / SAM TWO                   | female, mid-late twenties<br>(bull-like, loud, hot shit)                     |
| HENDRA / ROSALIND / GLORIA<br>PIPER / A.A.M. / SAM THREE   | female, mid-thirties<br>(sharp, together, very stylish)                      |
| VOICE / MAN ONE / JACOB /<br>WOMAN TWO / SAM FOUR / CABBIE | male, 45-55<br>(somewhat crusty and lecherous)                               |
| CHILD / YOUNG MAN /<br>ERIK / WAITER / SAM FIVE            | male, mid-twenties<br>(an adorable boyish young man)                         |

A stroke (/) marks the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue. When the stroke is not immediately followed by text, the next line should occur on the last syllable of the word before the slash— not a full overlap but a concise and intentioned interruption.

Also, the VOICE should be miked the entire show.

## DEAD CITY

*Dates, times, and settings will be projected above the stage, or on a screen, or on the proscenium wings, or on the floor, or wherever is most effective for viewing.*

**PROJECTED: June 17, 2004—The day after.**

0. Samantha dreams of Jewel walking along the pedestrian path near the West Side Highway, towards Tribeca. 5:45am, sunrise.

SAMANTHA appears, dreaming of JEWEL.

JEWEL clutches a bag from McDonalds. She is slightly jaunty... she has been walking all night.

got my Patti Smith walk my Patti Smith knees  
sausage-egg-n-cheese-sausage-egg-n-cheese-sausage-egg-n-cheese

She smells her bag of food desperately. She continues.

the Hudson choking up its morning rot  
Momma stopped smoking but her lungs did not  
sausage-egg-n-cheese-sausage-egg-n-cheese-sausage-egg-n-cheese

She smells her bag of food desperately once again.  
Sound of traffic... she has reached the West Side Highway.

...the west side highway is now laid across my lap and the crossing is all that lies between myself and this day's most absurd parade and if I could levitate I would choose this very moment but I cannot so I wait for the sign to stop blinking and I wrap my mind around a single image that continues to open into itself in an infinite stumble through space don't walk and it is forever changing shape in my mouth the brittle bones the paper hand don't walk the ashen breath rosary beads don't walk and the hunger in the pit of my core that all the sausage-egg-and-cheeses in the five boroughs might be able to quench and she's...

JEWEL tears into the McDonalds bag and jams an entire sausage egg and cheese into her mouth. She eats ravenously. She screams though a mouthful of food.

GOOD MORNING, TRIBECA!!!

**PROJECTED: June 16, 2004—The day before.**

1. A spacious, tidy apartment on the Upper East Side. The day before. 8:00am.

SAMANTHA is preparing breakfast happily in her kitchen. She wears an expensive and tasteful black business suit. Pale orange light streams through the window.

Behind her in the bedroom, GABRIEL sleeps soundly on a luxurious satin-sheeted bed.

We hear a VOICE from the radio.

VOICE

You're listening to NYPR, New York Public Radio. It's 8AM and we have a sunny June morning outside, and the smell wafting off the East River is delightful. However, expect clouds and murkiness with patches of barometric gloom, right... about... now.

The light through the window turns grey.

In today's news, Samantha Blossom is preparing a breakfast tray for her lovely sleepy husband. He was out so late last night....

SAMANTHA butters toast.

Not too much I-Can't-Believe-It's-Not-Butter, you know how he is about his figure. Will he take tea or coffee? Tea for his vocal chords, coffee for his mood....

SAMANTHA pours coffee into a mug.

Ahhh. Fresh ground organic blend from the bulk coffee aisle...

She lifts the tray and begins to head toward the bedroom.

Oh, don't forget the mail. Baby likes to read his mail while he eats his gluten-free toast.

SAMANTHA places the tray back down and exits. She returns with two envelopes. She examines the first.

Elizabeth... nineteen next month ... must email her...

SAMANTHA moves onto the next letter. The envelope is much different...

Mr. Gabriel Blossom. Embossed parchment. Long flourish on the G. Return address, A.A.M...

She smells the envelope.

Jasmine.

SAMANTHA freezes a moment, in a panic.  
GABRIEL calls from the bedroom sleepily.

GABRIEL

Sammy?

VOICE

Shake it off, woman ... deep breath. Deliver that letter. Coffee, toast, tray, hands, feet, breathe. You're listening to NYPR, New York Public Radio. Support for NYPR comes from Hawk Pharmaceuticals, making chemical dependency a vital part of YOUR life/

SAMANTHA turns off the radio and enters the bedroom with the tray. GABRIEL raises his head. He wears a satin lavender beauty mask and silk pajamas. He pulls a pair of earplugs from his ears.

SAMANTHA

Good morning sleepy...

GABRIEL

Mm... time is it?

SAMANTHA

A little after eight...

SAMANTHA places the tray on the bed.

GABRIEL

Tea?

SAMANTHA

Coffee.

GABRIEL

Perfect.

GABRIEL begins eating.

SAMANTHA

How was the show?

GABRIEL

A drag. First the rain, couldn't get a cab to 44<sup>th</sup> to save our lives, subway was a mess, the F was running on the C track, got there forty-five minutes late and couldn't do sound check so the levels were completely off for the first number, had to stop and re-do levels in the middle of the set.

SAMANTHA

Oh dear...

GABRIEL

But it was a good crowd. Sober, engaged.... They listen harder at the expensive places...

GABRIEL begins to look through the letters.

GABRIEL (cont.)

Elizabeth. Nineteen next month, hm? Should write her a letter...

SAMANTHA

Why not shoot her off an email? You so rarely email her...

GABRIEL

Those tiny letters make me go cross-eyed...

SAMANTHA

You can change the font size, you know. In your browser preferences.

GABRIEL

The what?

SAMANTHA

In the drop down menu at the top of the screen, under appearance...

GABRIEL

I prefer ink and paper. It's more, it's more, like...

SAMANTHA

Utilitarian

GABRIEL

Personal.

SAMANTHA

Right.

SAMANTHA watches him as he looks at the other envelope.

SAMANTHA (cont.)

Who sent that one?

GABRIEL

A drag. First the rain, couldn't get a cab to 44<sup>th</sup> to save our lives, subway was a mess, the F was running on the C track, got there

SAMANTHA  
(quietly)

Who.

GABRIEL

forty-five minutes late and couldn't do sound check so the levels were completely off for the first number, had to stop and

SAMANTHA  
(more quietly)

Who.

GABRIEL

re-do levels middle of the dreamed last night I was spinning and I had many arms, all of them flailing, and my throat was closed so I couldn't sing, and I was losing my teeth, or rather a little boy was picking wildflowers in my mouth, and I thought it might have been Zach, and I wondered why he didn't want me to have teeth any more, and I thought you might know.

A beat.

GABRIEL (cont.)

He was four. He wore green overalls.

GABRIEL sips his coffee.

GABRIEL (cont.)

Good coffee.

SAMANTHA

Organic.

Perfect.

GABRIEL

A beat. SAMANTHA begins to leave.

GABRIEL

What time's that funeral in Queens?

SAMANTHA checks her watch.

SAMANTHA

Eleven.

GABRIEL

Doing anything after?

SAMANTHA  
(brightly)

Nora from Beau Monde dot com just texted me, so I may check in with her about the banner ads...

GABRIEL

Beau Monde dot com...

SAMANTHA

I've never actually been to their office... I've got some stats to show Queen Nora...

GABRIEL

And after?

SAMANTHA

I'll probably stop by the picture archive at the library, see if anything moves me...

GABRIEL

Going to the spa at all?

SAMANTHA

Could pop in for a quick wrap before the funeral...

GABRIEL

Would you pick up me up some glycerin pomade with the nettles and rosemary and comfrey root?

SAMANTHA

Comfrey root. No problem.

Thank you.

GABRIEL

A beat.

Well. Have a good day.

SAMANTHA

You too. I love you.

GABRIEL

You too.

SAMANTHA

SAMANTHA exits cheerfully. GABRIEL smells the second letter. He snuggles down in the bed to read it.

2. The corner of 73<sup>th</sup> Street and Lexington. 9:00 am.

SAMANTHA is trying to hail a cab. She holds a folded piece of paper. She is eating a bagel.

A YOUNG MAN appears, also trying to hail a cab. He has smoky eyes and obsidian hair. He is chewing on a large street pretzel. He chews slowly, staring at SAMANTHA.

They begin chewing in unison. They both take one step closer to each other. They chew. Then another step. They chew.

ROSALIND suddenly appears between them. She does not see the YOUNG MAN.

Samantha Blossom.

ROSALIND

Rosalind! How perfect to see you!

SAMANTHA

They air-kiss.

How are you, darling?

SAMANTHA (cont.)

ROSALIND

Fabulously wealthy, as always. Let's share a cab. Where are you off to?

SAMANTHA

86<sup>th</sup> and Park. I was going to walk but it's so dreadfully hot...

SAMANTHA continues to peer over to the  
YOUNG MAN, who continues to chew slowly.

ROSALIND

Well Lord knows what possessed you to wear black in the middle of June

SAMANTHA

I have a funeral later.

ROSALIND

Oh fiddle, whose?

SAMANTHA

Hank Thorn. Gloria's husband.

ROSALIND

Oh, what a shame! He always had such good taste in shoes. Showed up to the Neiman Marcus luncheon last year in these divine leather Gravati's, dark brown with a double buckle...

SAMANTHA

I wonder if she'll bury him in the oxfords or the loafers.

ROSALIND

They never did get along, did they. Awful thing, death. Taxi!

They both hail. A taxi zooms by. The YOUNG  
MAN takes another step. SAMANTHA watches  
him.

ROSALIND (cont.)

You've had some death recently too, haven't you?

SAMANTHA

No darling, we've been quite lucky these days.

ROSALIND

Wasn't his name Hank as well?

SAMANTHA

Zachary. You know Elizabeth just finished her first year at Vassar, she adores it there

ROSALIND

What was he, three, four

SAMANTHA

He was newborn. You know she's spending the summer in Colorado as a counselor for Lacrosse camp

ROSALIND

Must have been what, three, four years ago/

SAMANTHA

(firm)

Twenty-two. Twenty-two years ago.

ROSALIND

Death. It's an opiate. Numbs you to the world. Taxi!

JEWEL appears, brooding.

ROSALIND

Do you know the carpenter Jacob Jupiter?

SAMANTHA

He re-did our kitchen last April.... right before his wife got sick, poor thing.

ROSALIND

Isn't that his notoriously gifted daughter who won that prestigious international poetry award at twelve for her epic about a dying moth?

SAMANTHA

Where

ROSALIND

Crossing the street and brooding

SAMANTHA

I believe you're right... she teaches somewhere around here, middle school I think...

ROSALIND

Not anymore... Scandalous. Got knocked up by the Principal, got fired two weeks later due to "excessive tardiness."

SAMANTHA

Delightful.

ROSALIND

Taxi!

They both hail. A taxi zooms by. JEWEL disappears. The YOUNG MAN takes another step.

ROSALIND (cont.)

So, what is that SCRUMPTIOUS little husband of yours up to these days? I've been seeing his name everywhere...

SAMANTHA

He has a new booking agent...

ROSALIND

Well, Jeremy and I MUST make one of his gigs this summer....

SAMANTHA

You MUST. He'd be DELIGHTED to see you there....

ROSALIND faces SAMANTHA squarely and makes a confiding gesture.

ROSALIND (cont.)

Samantha. I saw you through the window of that cafe last week, I was waving like a ninny outside but you were utterly spellbound by your computer

SAMANTHA

Well you know most of my work is, is internet-related...

The YOUNG MAN slowly approaches SAMANTHA as ROSALIND speaks. Something flashes behind and inside them all, like a siren light, or a glinting knife. ROSALIND changes somehow... she is in SAMANTHA's mind. Perhaps she speaks through a microphone...

ROSALIND

Chat rooms got you hooked, eh? Consorting with some fleshy young fawn with smoky eyes and dunes of obsidian hair? Of course that is your mind's eye doing the work of the blind sculptor... you know him only by his screen name. And his enigmatic use of punctuation. And his penchant for quoting postmodern French philosophers. But each time his cursor flashes hungrily for a reply you feel some sharp thing shatter in your loins. Hm? And that folded piece of paper in your hand is your latest and most salty discourse, printed out gingerly in the back of the cafe, its end marked with a most urgent plea... will you meet me, LadyEffloresce248? Will you meet me?

The YOUNG MAN has approached SAMANTHA.  
He slowly feeds her the last piece of his pretzel.

YOUNG MAN

Society functions as an expansive terrain designed to further extend the symbolic distance between the metaphoric and the authentic. Semicolon.

SAMANTHA

Brooklyn1448?

YOUNG MAN

If you want me to be.

SAMANTHA

You're almost exactly what I had in mind

YOUNG MAN

I'm not real, you know. But nothing is. Ellipsis...

SAMANTHA

Ah. You're wearing your Baudrillard today.

YOUNG MAN

Indeed.

SAMANTHA

Go on

YOUNG MAN

I am *reality for its own sake*, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination.

SAMANTHA

I adore a literate man...

YOUNG MAN

I know...

SAMANTHA

Tell me how I must inhale such fumes

He raises his hand to her.

YOUNG MAN

Deconstruct your protected world of illusions. Drive your hand through the membrane of the hyperreal and feel my flesh pressed against the other side of your fears. Meet me tomorrow, at the place of your choosing. Will you meet me, LadyEffloresce248?

SAMANTHA

Will I...

YOUNG MAN

Will you. Period. Meet. Period. Me. Asterisk.

He holds his hand to her face but does not touch her.

A beat. ROSALIND changes back to normal.

ROSALIND

Ah, the internet. It's an opiate. Taxi!

Lights change. ROSALIND disappears.

3. The spa, 86<sup>th</sup> and Park. 9:15 am

Two women dressed in white spa uniforms begin to wrap her in a huge ream of foil from neck to feet.

Steam floods the room. Calming rainforest world-music is piped in, slightly scratchy; bad speakers.

The women's voices overlap slightly as they wrap.

WOMAN ONE

Toxins lift from your skin and alight the air like dust mites/

MAN ONE

Smoke-colored boys and their cerebral seductions /

WOMAN ONE

Rosalind Leech and her crude innuendos/

MAN ONE

Windows teeming with kitchy gifts and dead chickens hanging by their necks and/

WOMAN ONE

neon psychic signs and endless rows of leather pants and/

MAN ONE

Jackhammers cables scaffoldings traffic-cones SUV's/

WOMAN ONE

This is your narcotic/

MAN ONE

This is your religion/

WOMAN ONE

And now you are at the ultimate state of relaxation and amnesia.

The two women plop SAMANTHA on a relaxation cot and begin massaging her head and feet.

Soothing.

WOMAN ONE

Such glum occasions, funerals

MAN ONE

At least you'll be fresh all day

WOMAN ONE

You mustn't forget Gabriel's glycerin pomade

SAMANTHA

I won't

WOMAN ONE

His shape through the shower door

MAN ONE

No hot water left

WOMAN ONE

Baritone throated songs

MAN ONE

Towel on the floor

WOMAN ONE

Peeing while he cleans himself

MAN ONE

What is comfrey root?

They switch positions. Menacing.

WOMAN ONE

Did you wipe down the sink after you washed your face this morning?

MAN ONE

Did you put the coffee beans back in the freezer door?

WOMAN ONE

How tall do you imagine Brooklyn1448/

MAN ONE

Will you ride him in the grass/

WOMAN ONE

On a roof/

MAN ONE

In a bathtub/

WOMAN ONE

In his bed/

MAN ONE

In yours/

SAMANTHA

Yes/

WOMAN ONE

Will you cry afterwards like you did with the last one?

MAN ONE

Why are you so lonely

SAMANTHA

I don't know

WOMAN ONE

Just don't think of Gabriel's mistress/

MAN ONE

Just don't think of Gabriel's mistress/

WOMAN ONE

Just don't think of Gabriel's mis/tress

Just don't think of his mis/tress

MAN ONE

Just don't think his / mistress

WOMAN ONE

His / mistress

MAN ONE

His

WOMAN ONE

They switch positions. Soothing again.

Blue corn chips, reindeer, an oboe.

MAN ONE

The women are done.

Sweetly.

Ninety dollars, please.

WOMAN ONE

SAMANTHA pays the woman and exits.

4. The Cemetery of the Evergreens Queens. 11:00 am.

HANK lies dead as can be, downstage. He wears two different shoes and a watch on each wrist.

GLORIA is perched near HANK. She is nine months pregnant and struggling to hold herself together. JACOB is by her side.

SAMANTHA enters to pay her respects.

Gloria...

SAMANTHA

Samantha... thank you for coming... OH!

GLORIA

GLORIA receives a stabbing pain in the gut.

SAMANTHA  
(to Gloria)

You alright?

GLORIA

Just a little labor... Samantha, you know Jacob Jupiter, from Harmony Hardware...

SAMANTHA

Of course, Jacob re-did our kitchen last April.

GLORIA

He put in our deck AND sunroom

SAMANTHA

How are you, Jacob?

JACOB

Drunk.

SAMANTHA

Oh.

JACOB

Unemployed.

SAMANTHA

Oh.

JACOB

Visitin' the misses over yonda. Been a ye-ah since we lost huh. Ain't easy, this death shit.

He offers SAMANTHA a hit off his whiskey.

JACOB (cont.)

Wild Turkey?

SAMANTHA

No thanks.

JACOB shrugs and takes a pull himself.  
SAMANTHA and GLORIA regard HANK.

SAMANTHA (cont.)

He looks peaceful.

GLORIA

I didn't know which watch to give him... obviously this is a special occasion so the Cellini Rolex is appropriate but then so is the TAG Heuer sports watch because he might need a chronometer/

SAMANTHA

Of course/

GLORIA

And I couldn't decide between the Oxfords or the loafers so I chose one of each/

HANK

Gloria, I look like a madman

GLORIA

Well maybe you should have laid out your burial outfit before you decided to hurl yourself into the East River!

GLORIA receives a stabbing labor pain in the gut.  
She gasps.

JACOB

Always a bitch when they ansuh back....

GLORIA's contractions are getting closer. She holds her belly in pain.

GLORIA

I should probably go give birth. I'll be at St. Vincents if anyone needs me...

SAMNATHA

Do you need me to take you?

GLORIA

I have a car waiting.

SAMANTHA

Alright. I'll stop by later...

GLORIA

Thanks....

GLORIA disappears, doubled over in pain.

A beat as JACOB and SAMANTHA silently pay their respects.

JACOB sings.

JACOB

Oohhhh. The bleached bones buried  
The bleached bones buried  
With the souls of the bruised

Oohhhh. The heave-ho's hurried  
The heave ho's hurried  
When a chump's abused

SAMANTHA

Lovely singing voice

JACOB

Thanks.

An awkward beat.

JACOB (cont.)

So... how's work?

SAMANTHA

Slow... Like everything else these days...

JACOB

Still doin' that... ah, internet, ah...

SAMANTHA

Consulting.

JACOB

Ah.

SAMANTHA

Marketing and branding, identity and research, business to business solutions...

JACOB

Right.

SAMANTHA

But the economy has not been kind to freelancers...

JACOB

But hubby sets you up nice...

We do all right... SAMANTHA

Been seein' his name everywhere lately... JACOB

He has a new booking agent. SAMANTHA

And how is yuh dawta? JACOB

Oh Elizabeth adores Vassar... SAMANTHA

Still into sports? JACOB

As always SAMANTHA

And Disney movies? JACOB

Posters everywhere SAMANTHA

And chasing boys JACOB

But not her studies SAMANTHA

Squeakin' by? JACOB

Barely.... SAMANTHA

Not really the uh, thinkin' type... JACOB

Takes after her father SAMANTHA

JACOB

You wouldn't wanna brooda, believe me... crack yuh pumper right open.

SAMANTHA

How *is* Jewel these days? I think I saw her on the street... she looked, ah...

JACOB

PPff. She don't talk to me. All jammed up inside huh head.

SAMANTHA

Oh...

JACOB

Ever since my wife passed last June.

SAMANTHA

Oh.

JACOB

Headed straight for the guttuh. Can't do a thing about it.

SAMANTHA

They do say writers are more sensitive than regular people...

JACOB

Huh motha's death bed? Lungs all rattlin', breathing huh last.... "pray for me" she says. Hand clutchin' huh beads. "Jewel, pray for yuh motha's soul". What'd Jewel do? NUTHIN. The hell kinda kid won't kneel at huh own motha's death bed?

SAMANTHA

I don't know...

JACOB

Straight for the guttuh. What can I do? Keep an eye on huh, will you?

SAMANTHA

Oh, I don't often run into / her, but

JACOB

You're a classy broad, Sammy. A good listener, you CARE 'bout folks, yuh don't let crap get you down

SAMANTHA

Well thank you Jacob/

JACOB

Even when people shit on you again and again. Good to the core, I tell you.

Small beat.

People whom?  
SAMANTHA

Uh. People, I dunno...  
JACOB

A beat.

Well. See ya.  
JACOB (cont.)

JACOB staggers off.

SAMANTHA approaches the dead body.

To the core...  
SAMANTHA

SAMANTHA checks her watch and realizes she's  
about to be late.

Shoot.  
SAMANTHA (cont.)

She runs off. A gong sounds. A chorus of cheers is  
heard, "Way to go John!" and "Another sale, that's  
awesome!" and "you rock, Jenny!" etc.

**THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**  
**Contact the author ([sheila.callaghan@gmail.com](mailto:sheila.callaghan@gmail.com))**  
**to read more...**