

Commissioned by and developed with Occidental College, 2007.
Developed with and produced by Woolly Mammoth Theatre, DC 2008-9.

FEVER/DREAM
an adaptation of Calderón's
Life is a Dream

By Sheila Callaghan

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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 an overlap but a concise interruption

ACT ONE

The basement. Darkness.

Sounds: dripping water. Rumbling boiler. A fluorescent light struggling to buzz on, no light. An ancient fax machine. Maybe the room is lit (very vaguely) by the little green "ON" switches on all the old machines.

We're here for quite a while, taking in the sounds.

Then:

The sound of an old-fashioned office phone ring.

Once.

Twice.

A voice in the darkness, the voice of SEGIS:

SEGIS

CustomerservicehowmayIhelpyou.

The light flickers on for a tiny moment. We see the hunched figure of a man over a desk piled with papers.

Darkness again. Silence. Then:

SEGIS (cont.)

I'msorrytohearyou'vebeenhavingtroubles.

The light buzzes on again, this time for longer.

We see: puddles of water on the floor near tangled electrical equipment. Exposed pipes. Piles and piles of papers. A drain in the center of the floor. An ancient fax machine. Grey concrete. Beat-up metal filing cabinets. Towering messy piles of papers. An enormous sign that reads "NO TRESPASSING."

Also, stacks and stacks of books. Text books, reference books, literature, etc.

It's a graveyard for outdated equipment.

Yellowing newspaper clippings are pasted to the wall and the floor, along with several yellowing newspaper photos of BILL BASIL. The articles are highlighted and circled here and there.

Centrally: A rusted freight elevator door from the 40's, with old numbers up to 77 and a wand.

A chute off to the side.

We can smell the asbestos.

SEGIS wears a T-shirt, stained and foul, and a pair of horrendous jeans. He is unshaven, unwashed, and grips the phone receiver as though it's part of his hand. His beard is down to his chest and his hair hangs in greasy ropes down his back.

SEGIS (cont.)

This must be very frustrating for you.

A pile of papers drops from the chute. Seconds later, an apple. Then, a handful of loose cooked macaroni and some lettuce leaves.

The fluorescent light buzzes off again. Darkness.

SEGIS (cont.)

I'll connect you with billing immediately, thank you for calling.

Silence, save the ubiquitous ambient noise.

More silence.

The phone rings again.

SEGIS

Customer service how may I help you.

A beat.

I'll connect you with billing immediately, thank you for calling.

Suddenly, a sound we haven't heard before... a screeching of metallic, then a booming sonorous 'waaannnnnnng', then the sound of un-oiled gears turning.

The entire room shakes.

In the darkness, a dirty yellow light flickers behind the panel of the freight elevator. The wand moves very very slowly from the letter L to the letter B.

The noise stops.

Then, the miserable creak of a stuck metal door trying to slide open.

Inside the lit elevator, two figures. One is dressed as a bike messenger, complete with helmet and shoulder bag. The other is a nerdy little thing.

They are both frozen in terror.

Where the heck are we?
ROSE

Um.
CLAIRE

What button did you push?
ROSE

I didn't. Your bag must have—
CLAIRE

WOW WOW WOW. WHAT IS THAT SMELL.
ROSE

Rosie—
CLAIRE

Don't call me that.
ROSE

Something died here... something large....
CLAIRE

Where's the light?
ROSE

ROSE fumbles around for a light switch.

CLAIRE
...when a thing decomposes the particles are released into the air so the smell is actually tiny little pieces of dead-thing....

ROSE
Claire, I wanna— okay this might not be the time for this conversation...

I know what you're / going to say

CLAIRE

But you promised you would hold / it together

ROSE

Right, right...

CLAIRE

You have a Very Important Role in all this

ROSE

I know, / I know

CLAIRE

And I REALLY like, need you to... Oh, wait, huh...

ROSE

What?

CLAIRE

Feels like a, a breaker, or...

ROSE

ROSE flips a switch. Worklight floods the room. SEGIS stares at them in terror. They stare back. No one moves.

WHAT IS THAT?

CLAIRE
(horrified whisper)

Don't...

ROSE
(quietly)

WHAT IS THAT?

CLAIRE

...move...

ROSE

SEGIS moves slightly. The girls yelp and run to the other side of the room.

CustomerservicehowmayIhelpyou.

SEGIS

Oh hi. We're looking for the 77th floor...

ROSE

SEGIS

I'm sorry to hear you've been having troubles.

CLAIRE

He's nice! He's nice!

ROSE

Thanks. I think we're okay now. Looks like you were just about to have lunch... sorry to bother you....

SEGIS

This must be very frustrating for you!!

ROSE

Um, yeah...

SEGIS lunges at the two. The girls scream.

We see his ankle is chained to his desk. The chair upon which he sits is stuck to his body, as is the phone receiver.

SEGIS

I'll connect you with billing immediately, thank you for calling!!!

He lunges again. The girls are less fearful.

SEGIS (cont.)

THANK YOU FOR CALLING HAVE A NICE DAY!!!!

ROSE

You're hurting yourself.

SEGIS

THANK YOU FOR THANK YOU FOR HAVE A NICE CONNECT YOU WITH SORRY FOR YOUR INCONVENIENCE INCONVENIENCE PISSING INTO A DRAIN ON THE FLOOR MACARONI'S ARE ALREADY COLD STAPLER STOPPED WORKING THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTEEN MONTHS AGO WHAT IS THAT SOUND?

He stops a minute. Listens.

What is that sound?

Again.

It's me. Talking. To someone else. This is what I sound like talking to someone else. I have language again. I'm looking at you. You're brighter. You are brighter and you have two eyes. I'm looking at them, they are looking back. Say something.

ROSE

I wish I wasn't here.

SEGIS

Ha! Trailing from your lips, the words in little spirals, "wish"... "wasn't"... wip wip wip... Do it again...

ROSE

I wish you weren't here.

SEGIS

Wip wip wip...

He unpries his fingers from the phone receiver, one by one, screaming in pain. Then he flexes his hand with much difficulty.

ROSE

How long have you been here?

SEGIS

Long time.

ROSE

Who put you down here?

SEGIS

I'm not a prisoner.

ROSE

So this is a choice?

SEGIS

It's a JOB.

ROSE

Do I look like a moron Claire?

CLAIRE

Normally no, but in that outfit—

ROSE

People don't get stuck in the basements of corporate buildings for nothing. And I'm guessing you didn't chain yourself to that desk...

SEGIS

Things could be worse. Things could break. My machines, for example. I didn't always have to push staples through stacks of paper with my thumb.

ROSE begins cracking up.

ROSE

What kind of idiot is chained to a desk pissing into a drain and thinks it's part of his JOB?

Abruptly, SEGIS hurls his broken stapler across the room. It smashes against the wall, leaving a dent.

The women jump a little.

SEGIS

Every moment you remain unharmed in my presence is a moment I am giving you. That's a choice.

ROSE

Wow. You are INTIMIDATING.

CLAIRE

Rose.

ROSE

No really. I am INTIMIDATED right now. Aren't you INTIMIDATED, Claire?

CLAIRE

Yes! Fire exit! Where?

CLAIRE searches desperately for a fire exit.

Suddenly, SEGIS grabs a pair of dull scissors from his desk and slams them into the lock on his chain. The lock breaks.

He then pries his body from his chair with a roar. As he stands, slowly and painfully, every vertebra in his back cracks one by one.

Standing at full height, he is menacing. He drags his chain closer to the women, gripping his dull scissors.

CLAIRE cringes. ROSE steels herself.

Much to the women's surprise, SEGIS lays back on his desk, motionless for several moments.

CLAIRE ferrets out their escape, while ROSE studies SEGIS carefully.

After a long pause...

SEGIS (cont.)

Do you have a cigarette?

ROSE
(a lie)

I haven't smoked since I was seventeen...

SEGIS sniffs the air near ROSE's bag.

SEGIS

Check your bag.

ROSE checks her bag. She pulls out a pack of Lucky Strikes as Claire inspects the room.

ROSE

Hey! Look at that. Claire?

CLAIRE

(waving it away)

I'm getting my share of pollution from the asbestos, thanks. Ho, a dot matrix!

ROSE hands a cigarette to SEGIS. He sits up (with difficulty, he's still cramped) and places the cigarette between the fingers of his claw hand. She lights it. He inhales it reverently. He coughs.

SEGIS

(re: the cigarette)

I've only ever read about these....

What's on your head?

ROSE

I'm a bike messenger.

SEGIS

What's that?

ROSE

I ride around on a bike delivering packages.

SEGIS

I thought MY job sucked.

CLAIRE

A mimeograph... mama...

SEGIS

What are you delivering today?

ROSE

Nothing. My honor. Whatever. It's none of your business.

CLAIRE begins reading the newspaper clippings on the walls and floor.

SEGIS

Careful with those...

CLAIRE

"April 22, 1984... After Fierce Dispute, Erratic Corporate Tycoon Bill Basil Clinches Five Billion Dollar Takeover"... "June 5, 1998..."

SEGIS

"Basil Bulldozes Competition Once Again"...

CLAIRE holds up another clipping. SEGIS recites it from memory.

SEGIS (cont.)

"January 7, 2002... What Makes Bill Basil Tick?"

CLAIRE

You're good.

ROSE

What are those?

SEGIS

Blueprints.

ROSE

For what?

SEGIS

For becoming the most powerful man in the world.

ROSE

A goal of yours?

SEGIS

A dream, one might say.

ROSE

I don't see much opportunity for growth in your department...

SEGIS

Isn't that the point of dreaming? To visualize the fantastic, the implausible?

Abruptly and viciously, SEGIS sits up and begins to beat the ancient fax machine with the arm of a broken swivel chair. He works into quite a frenzy.

ROSE and CLAIRE are startled.

Finally, he stops. He's in a lot of pain from the exertion.

SEGIS

They have detectors for the smoke. They're coming.

ROSE

Who?

CLAIRE

Rose...

CLAIRE points to the freight elevator. The wand is slowly climbing down from the 77th floor.

SEGIS moves to a stack of papers and begins chewing holes into the corners.

Who? Who is coming??

ROSE

Is there another way out? Trapped, are we trapped?

CLAIRE
(panicked)

Ms. Nicotine, Ms. Asbestos, thank you so much for your call, we appreciate your business.

SEGIS

Stop that!

ROSE

We appreciate your business, please call again.

SEGIS

No windows! Can't breathe!

CLAIRE

Tell us what's going on.

ROSE

Please call again have a nice day.

SEGIS

Shriek of gears, etc. The freight elevator door opens. FRED CLOTALDO emerges with two security guards. FRED immediately gags from the smell.

A wall of stench... No smoking, okay. Is that so diffic--

FRED CLOTALDO

He spots ROSE and CLAIRE.

Who...

FRED CLOTALDO (cont.)

I'm a messenger. Look.

ROSE

She shows him her bag.

FRED CLOTALDO

This is not a public, the lobby is the--

ROSE
I hit the wrong button.

CLAIRE
She hit the wrong button.

ROSE
I was trying to get to the 77th floor. I have a package.

FRED CLOTALDO
Who's it for?

ROSE digs into her bag and pulls out a padded mailer. She reads the name.

ROSE
A mister "Aston Martin."

He holds out his hand to take the package. ROSE doesn't move.

ROSE (cont.)
It says "deliver in person."

FRED CLOTALDO
Give it to me.

ROSE
(re: Segis)
What's he doing down here? Why was he chained to the desk?

FRED CLOTALDO turns to his SECURITY GUARDS.

FRED CLOTALDO
What happens when you go out for a moccachino? Hm? Exhibit A. So, thank you. Thank you for this headache. Arrest them.

The SECURITY GUARDS arrest ROSE and CLAIRE.

ROSE
This is SO illegal, okay.

FRED CLOTALDO casually gestures to the NO TRESPASSING sign.

FRED CLOTALDO
I'm assuming you can read.

ROSE
It was an ACCIDENT.

SEGIS

Let them go, Fred.

FRED CLOTALDO

Oh look, you have language again. First time you've said something real to me in months. Anything more to add?

SEGIS says nothing.

Well that's fine. Month after month I come down to this stinkhole with books, magazines, articles... I GAVE you that language, mister.

He finds SEGIS's cigarette.

A WHOLE CIGARETTE? You are just SOPPING in treasures right now, aren't you? I don't suppose you'll need that new Swingline any more...

SEGIS looks desperate.

SEGIS

I--

FRED CLOTALDO

Hm?

SEGIS

Thankyousomuchforyour business, we'llbehappytoacceptanymajorcreditcards.

FRED CLOTALDO

Thought so.

FRED CLOTALDO kicks at the lock to SEGIS's chain.

Put that back on.

Obediently, SEGIS returns the lock to his ankle.

Thank you.

SEGIS nods and continues biting holes in the corners of papers.
FRED hands him some books.

Brought you some more reading. *Plato's Republic. Identity and Rhetoric. The Times, the Post, the Weekly*, and a 'zine. Enjoy.

Beat.

You're a good kid. Sorry I yelled, son.

SEGIS

I'm not your son. I don't have a father.

FRED CLOTALDO freezes a moment, hurt, but decides to say nothing. He hits a button to call the freight elevator.

FRED CLOTALDO (cont.)
(to the guards)

Take them to central booking. I have a meeting.

CLAIRE

That's the clink. Is that the clink?

ROSE

But my package....

CLAIRE

I've never been to the clink before.

ROSE

It's urgent. He... Mr. Martin...

FRED CLOTALDO

I'll see that he gets it.

CLAIRE

CLINK! The sound the door makes when you lock it.

FRED CLOTALDO holds out his hand for the package. ROSE digs into her bag again.

ROSE

... need to write a note...

FRED CLOTALDO

Quickly.

ROSE produces a velvet case, from which she conspicuously and cautiously unsheathes an astonishingly ornate pen.

FRED CLOTALDO is instantly captivated.

FRED CLOTALDO

That implement...

ROSE

What about it?

FRED CLOTALDO

It's... very special...

FRED holds his hand out for the pen. Sceptically, ROSE hands it to him. He brandishes it with great flair.

ROSE
You hold it like you've held it before.

FRED CLOTALDO
Not possible.

ROSE
Why not?

FRED CLOTALDO
There's only one.

Beat. ROSE grows suspicious.

FRED CLOTALDO (cont.)
Sorry, where did you say you--

ROSE
A gift. From a woman. My mom.

Flabbergasted, FRED CLOTALDO turns to ROSE.

FRED CLOTALDO
Your mother.

ROSE
Yeah. It belonged to my deadbeat dickhead asshole deserting dad.

They eye each other, examining one another's features, looking at one another's hands, posture, hairline, etc. They are both panicked at their findings.

Finally. The screech of the freight elevator. All look at it expectantly.

The door opens. It is empty. Inside, it glows, beckoning.

SEGIS
Have a nice day.

Lights out on the basement.

STELLA and ASTON appear in different elevators (squares of light?). They are both ascending to the 77th floor. They both wear good suits.

ASTON is texting on his phone. Projected (not spoken):

"U R SOOO F-ING HOT
CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT U
THE SHEEN OF YOUR HAIR MOCKS THE DAYLIGHT

YR GLIMRING EYES SHAME THE STARS
YR BREASTS ARE TWO RIPE...."

He thinks a moment, contemplating the size of her chest.

"...FIGS
WHICH MORTIFY ALL LESSER TREE FRUIT
I LONG TO STRIKE YR DEWEY SKIN..."

He corrects the word "STRIKE" to "STROKE".

"WHEN WILL U OPEN YR PETALS TO ME AGAIN?
HEART, ASTON"

He sends the message. STELLA's phone beeps. She reads
ASTON's text, then thumb-types a reply. She is much more deft
than he is.

"WHEN HELL FRZS OVR."

She sends the message. ASTON's phone beeps. He reads, then
replies.

"R U STILL ANGRY?"

He sends. Beep. She reads and replies.

"WHAT DO U THINK??"

She sends. He replies.

"HOW MN Y TIMES DO I HAVE 2 APOLOGIZE?" (It takes him a
while to spell "apologize" correctly.)

He sends. She replies.

"ONCE WD BE FINE."

She sends. He replies.

"I'M SRRY."

He sends. She replies.

"NOT THRU YR PHONE, MYBE???"

She sends. He replies.

"U WON'T TALK 2 ME IN PRISON." He corrects "prison" to
"person".

The office is an enormous, gorgeous, sleekly designed space with enormous floor to ceiling windows and a tremendous view. The furniture is sexy and hyper-modern, but absurd and non-realistic.

One huge abstract painting hangs on the wall; it is of BILL BASIL, but barely.

BILL BASIL stands with his back to ASTON and STELLA. He wears an incredibly expensive, well-tailored suit.

Various ACCOUNTANTS also stand by, also wearing suits. They are busy and austere. They hold accounting devices, and make constant calculations, conferring silently with one another.

BILL BASIL does not turn around immediately.

ASTON
(charming)

Good morning Bill how are you doing, is that a new shirt? Hey listen. Our stocks are still on the decline.

STELLA

We're thinking about dropping our Con-tel and Inter-core shares. Con-tel fell 5.3 percent last month. Inter-core fell 5 percent.

ASTON

No need to panic but it's getting a leeeetle bit sticky / with the recent

STELLA

We have a net loss of a dollar thirty-one per share.

BILL BASIL
(to accountants)

Kill them. Now.

The ACCOUNTANTS react to this, speaking quietly into their cellphones and text-messaging folks.

BILL BASIL (cont.)

In their place?

ASTON

Well we have our eye on a bold little outfit called e-Village.

STELLA

It's hot.

ASTON

Scorching, really.

STELLA

But quiet.

ASTON

I got a tip from an old pal of mine from State U. Swell fella. Heck of a dancer. And boy can he barbecue--

STELLA

We need to act quickly.

BILL BASIL picks up his phone.

BILL BASIL

Denise. Send Jerry Saks at e-Village a gift basket immediately. Sopressata, rosemary crackers, the works. And a note: " Let's talk. Bill Basil."

He hands up.

Anything else?

STELLA

That's all for now, I believe...

ASTON

As always it's a total joy to see you. Oh, hey! Thanks so much for those bonuses. Completely unnecessary but so very much appreciated.

A beat. BILL BASIL turns and again faces the window. STELLA and ASTON look at each other quizzingly. They stand to leave.

Finally, BILL BASIL speaks.

BILL BASIL

Question:

What is the use of building an empire if there is no blood legacy to receive it?

A beat.

ASTON

Um...

BILL BASIL

Sit down.

They do. THE ACCOUNTANTS also sit, awkwardly and absurdly, as there are not enough chairs. They continue accounting.

BILL BASIL (cont.)

Would either of you like a coffee? Tea? Seltzer with a squeeze of lime?

ASTON

Hey thanks, I'll have / a

STELLA
We're fine, thank you. What is this about?

BILL BASIL
My intentions.

STELLA
Regarding?

BILL BASIL
The future of this business.

STELLA
You're splitting the office into two heads. Aston as C.O.O and myself as C.E.O.

BILL BASIL
That was indeed the plan.

I understand you are both to be wed.

ASTON
Yes, we're looking at / places near

STELLA
(coldly)
Plans are up in the air.

BILL BASIL
Then you well understand how intentions may be thwarted.

BILL BASIL snaps his fingers. THE ACCOUNTANTS quickly hand him a folded newspaper clipping. BILL BASIL hands it to STELLA, and gestures for her to read it aloud.

STELLA
(reading)
"Home and business collide, Sagitarius, as the Sun's transit of your chart's mid-heaven angle forces you to reflect upon a deep grievance you have with yourself. Planetary oppositions suggest that, if you value your professional reputation, you will give this some serious thought and then act. Lucky numbers 4, 7, 16, 25."

I don't understand.

BILL BASIL walks over to the painting of himself. He snaps his fingers again. With swiftness and efficiency, THE ACCOUNTANTS exchange the painting for another abstract rendering: it is SEGIS.

Then they return to their accounting.

ASTON

Who is that?

BILL BASIL

My son.

ASTON and STELLA are shocked. A knock on the door.

BILL BASIL (cont.)

Yes?

FRED CLOTALDO enters.

FRED CLOTALDO

Bill we've, oh, I didn't—

BILL BASIL

Come in, please.

FRED CLOTALDO

We have a situation....

BILL BASIL

One moment. The inevitable is upon us.

ASTON

When did you get a son?

BILL BASIL

Does the date October 19th, 1987 ring a bell?

ASTON

Wasn't that--

STELLA

Black Monday. The largest one day stock market crash in history. The Dow fell 23% in six hours, roughly \$500 billion dollars. This company almost went under.

ASTON

You clawed your way back from oblivion. It was damn near miraculous.

BILL BASIL gestures to FRED CLOTALDO. FRED CLOTALDO sighs heavily.

FRED CLOTALDO

At exactly 9:34am, Mr. Basil's wife went into labor. The market began its descent precisely one minute after. Mrs. Basil pushed for six hours. By the time the little boy emerged, the economy was a shambles. Tragically, Mrs. Basil did not survive the birth. Mr. Basil had not the tools to forgive the child for taking her from him. So he announced it had died as well. It had not.

ASTON

But... where...

FRED CLOTALDO

The child was placed into foster care until he was old enough to work. After that, we employed him in a position through which we could keep careful watch, though he would be rendered powerless.

ASTON

Not...

FRED CLOTALDO

Customer service.

STELLA

Oh Bill.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

**Contact the author (sheila.callaghan@gmail.com)
to read more...**