

A brief course in:

Hypnosis for Salesmen

by Daniel Kessler

e. danieltkessler@gmail.com / daniel@sfplayhouse.org

c. 617.645.0189

a. 1331 Green Street, San Francisco, CA

CHARACTERS

Walter Penbrook
Penny Glass
The Salesman

30s. The cup is half-empty, when it's full it's overflowing
30s. A mind of sheet metal, a gut of aluminum foil
50s. The sharpest dress in town, the briefcase is everything

PLACE AND TIME

Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961

STAGE LOCATIONS

bus stop, endless blackboard, Victorian home

AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Inspired by an encounter with Arnold Furst's
1960 sales manual, "Hypnosis for Salesmen"*

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NEW BEGINNINGS

*The bench at the bus stop
at the end of the world.*

*Walter stares at a speck in the sky,
beside a suitcase of worldly belongings.*

The sidewalk is littered with dead bees.

*A man with a briefcase appears.
He pretends to wait for the bus.*

SALESMAN

It's rude to stare. They'll get self-conscious. Then they'll never come out.

WALTER

Maybe I lost something.

SALESMAN

Nothing expensive I hope. It's a far ways to go losing something.

WALTER

Careful. There's a bee—stuck on its back.

SALESMAN

Maybe it's given up. Colony Collapse or whatever.

WALTER

Never heard of it.

SALESMAN

It's not from around here.

WALTER

Well. It's spreading.

SALESMAN

What goes up must come down. What goes down must come up, one of these days. Mind if I sit?

WALTER

You gonna sell me something?

SALESMAN

You buying?

He sits.

At the cost of your mortal soul.

WALTER

What goes up must come down, down...

Salesman looks where Walter looks.

SALESMAN

How I wonder where you are.

WALTER

I wish I was squashed by a falling star.

SALESMAN

Well don't step on a public bus talking like that.

*Salesman sticks two cigarettes in his mouth.
He lights them and hands one to Walter.
Walter holds it like the embers of life.*

I don't see a hive around here.

WALTER

Maybe somebody moved it.

SALESMAN

Good way to get stung. I prefer the finer things. Beautiful music. Beautiful food. Beautiful wine and beautiful women.

WALTER

All sorts of ways to get stung. Take your pick.

SALESMAN

What about that girl I always see you with?

*Walter tries a drag.
He coughs it up.*

WALTER

Must have transcended. Must have found God or something. But you know how it is. The finer things.

Beat.

You're from the office.

SALESMAN

Visiting. You'd be surprised the things you notice just passing through places. Walter, right?

WALTER

You're in the wrong neighborhood.

SALESMAN

I'm at a bus stop and you say I'm in the wrong neighborhood. Next you're gonna say cause I have an umbrella in this briefcase, I think it's gonna rain.

WALTER

Do you?

SALESMAN

It's a matter of fact.

Walter picks up a bee.

Bees have stingers you know.

WALTER

This one's dead. The others' gonna worry.

It stings him.

SALESMAN

I gave fair warning. Want me to pull it out?

WALTER

Leave it.

Beat.

You know she has the tiniest hands... Right now it's like they're blown up ten times and squeezed around my throat... Company's downsizing.

SALESMAN

Outsourcing. Don't paint stripes on a horse. Those slobs don't know what to do with a good salesman if he hit 'em in the face with a wad of their own stinking money, and that's the truth. Your balls are too big. No shame in that. What you need is new pants.

Beat.

Salesman offers a hand.

Well, I hereby enter you into my employ, Walter. Service till death, as they say.

WALTER

You know, I never found jokes very funny.

SALESMAN

Nothing funny about it, friend. It's a civic duty. Lady Luck ain't got nothing on me. Lady Luck, meet Mister Luck.

Walter's invested in a bee he's picking apart.

You listening, Walter?

WALTER

You come across a body on the street—looks like your father, or your brother—you'd wish it was indistinguishable.

SALESMAN

They're gonna die soon anyway.

WALTER

Just looking for a place to sleep.

*Walter puts the bee on the ground.
He closes his eyes and leans back.
He squashes his foot down and shimmies it.
He checks his shoe.*

I got another one.

The Salesman laughs.

SALESMAN

It must be a wonder to have that mind of yours. Bet it works great. Bet it could make a lot of money.

Walter picks up the two bees, stares a moment, then rubs them into a paste in his hands so they become one bee.

So what do you say? You want a job or don't you?

Beat.

WALTER

Thanks. No thanks.

SALESMAN

You don't know what you want and you know it.

Salesman opens his briefcase and a brilliant light pours out. Maybe a serenade of Heaven and Hell.

Walter nurses his cigarette, his mind elsewhere.

The briefcase closes.

And while you're at it—take this too. Helped me out when I was in a spot.

WALTER

“Hypnosis for Salesmen.”

SALESMAN

It's sort of a self-help book.

Walter opens and reads.

WALTER

“It would be dangerous for the hypnotist to attempt to use hypnosis in a wrongful manner . . . Hypnotized persons will feel a strong willingness to please due to the feeling of rapport established in the first step . . . serious risk of . . . condemnation”? What is this shit?

SALESMAN

Don't joke about that, kid. That's black magic.

WALTER

You sure it works?

SALESMAN

Pixie dust. Dreams and wishes. If it doesn't work, you're not using it right. But don't you worry about that. I'll teach you the steps. You'll be my apprentice—something. It's foolproof. Couldn't be broken by a fool.

WALTER

Hey. There's a shooting star.

SALESMAN

Make a wish.

*Walter closes his eyes and makes a wish.
He opens his eyes, disappointed.*

WALTER

I'll think about it.

SALESMAN

Well you know what that means, don't you?

See you soon, Walter.

*Salesman disappears.
Walter feels the corners of the book.
The bookmark is a fifty-dollar bill.*

WALTER

The twenties called. They want their three-piece suit back!

*Walter finds he's alone.
Silence as he stares at the bill.
He licks some bee paste off one hand
and spits furiously.*

*Lights change.
Walter straightens up and grabs hold of a
briefcase.*

WALTER MEETS PENNY

Walter practices in front of a mirror.

WALTER

Good evening. My name is . . . Good ev-en-ing. My name . . . Would you be interested in some make-up? . . . Would you . . . You might be interested to . . . in-ter-es-ted . . . You'll be interested to hear . . . You'll be happy to know . . . You'll love this . . . You'll just love this . . . Good evening. My name is Walter Penbrook. I sell make-up and magazines. Might I interest you in some fragrance? . . . Good evening. My name is Walter Penbrook. I sell fine things for fine people . . . My name is Walter Penbrook . . . buy this. Want this. Need this . . . Blah blah blah . . .

Beat.

He finds his resonance, a newfound swagger and pride.

He knocks on a door. Penny appears.

Afternoon. My name's Walter Penbrook. I'm not here to sell you anything. Just passing through. I noticed the sign out front.

PENNY

Sign?

WALTER

See for yourself.

She looks.

PENNY

I don't see anything.

WALTER

Well it is right there. Says something about a cup of tea. Earl grey. You see, it's my favorite.

PENNY

Do you normally invite yourself into strangers' homes, Mr.—

WALTER

Penbrook. And ordinarily not. But you see, what the sign really says is there's something you need. I'm here to give you that thing.

PENNY

Whatever it is?

WALTER

Call me Mr. Luck.

PENNY

Well, in that case...

*Penny welcomes him in.
Walter settles with his briefcase.*

WALTER

I couldn't help but notice, Mrs. ...

PENNY

Glass. Mrs. Penny Glass.

WALTER

I couldn't help but notice, Mrs. Glass—you don't seem to be wearing any make-up today.

PENNY

I don't like the way it makes my skin feel.

WALTER

Excuse me for saying so, but you do like the way it makes your skin feel.

PENNY

I do?

WALTER

Make-up is like baby powder—a thin layer of only the softest ingredients. Not only does it provide color and complexity, but it also benefits your skin's natural texture—which is more like silk than one might think. If you don't mind me asking, what really turned you off to it?

PENNY

My mother didn't wear make-up. She was poor most her life. She couldn't afford it.

WALTER

Would she have bought make-up if she could?

PENNY

I suppose, yes.

WALTER

May I go one step further?

I won't sell you any make-up today. In fact if you ask me to buy make-up, I'll outright refuse. There's nothing I'd like to sell you today because, looking at you, looking at this house, there doesn't seem to be a single thing you need in this world—other than companionship.

PENNY

Companionship?

WALTER

Yes. And I don't sell companionship.

Walter laughs at his own joke.

Call me divine intervention and I'll get you your golden chariot. Help me help you. Your husband's gone most of the day—I can see that, this place is so clean. You're working all day and when your husband comes home at night he's already ready for bed. What I'm saying is I know what it's like, because my parents were the exact same way... There's something you want. I know that. There's something your life is missing and I can see that from the look on your face. You're thin, but healthy. You're beautiful, and without the help of make-up. You're smart, smarter than most young ladies I've met by far. So what is it you want? What is that one thing?

PENNY

I've always wanted to smoke a cigarette.

WALTER

You've always wanted to smoke a cigarette...

Walter reaches into his pocket.

Your husband smokes, doesn't he?

PENNY

He does.

WALTER

He smokes in this room?

PENNY

Yes.

*Walter withdraws a pack of cigarettes.
He sticks two in his mouth.*

WALTER

Chesterfields are for the workingman. I don't smoke Marlboros because they're for market managers and those men in the offices all day. I assume that's what your husband smokes?

PENNY

I'm afraid I'm not sure.

WALTER

I'm a man who uses his feet. I need a cigarette made through modern means, with machines and such.

Walter lights it.

Yes, ma'am. One foot in the present and one in the future.
Progress. Nothing quite like it.

Beat.

How does that smell to you?

PENNY

Like love at first sight.

WALTER

You like the smell of these?

PENNY

I do.

*Walter removes the cigarette from his mouth
and offers it to Penny.*

WALTER

Try this out for size. Don't be shy. It won't burn you unless you put the wrong end in your mouth. But you're too smart for a thing like that.

She smokes it slowly.

PENNY

My husband would never let me smoke.

WALTER

You let your husband make your choices for you?

PENNY

Well, no, but... Oh, heck, I'll take a pack. I'll take two packs.

WALTER

That's my girl!

Opens his briefcase.

Now listen, I can only sell you one pack for now. It's not every day somebody wants to buy such sophisticated cigarettes. You were lucky I had this box on me.

PENNY

Now I can smoke these around the house.

WALTER

Not just the house. Around the whole entire world. Listen, take a lesson from me: use your feet, and use them often. I know your husband's out all day and it seems like he doesn't care when he comes home at night and just sits right in that chair over there. I know this. It's the pride of every man in the country. What he needs is an active woman who can bring him energy when he comes home at night. These will only help.

She hands him money.

PENNY

You're the sweetest man, Walter.

Brief pause.

She kisses his cheek out of excitement.

Walter touches his heart.

WALTER

I'm enchanted. Bless you, Mrs. Glass.

Walter puts his hat on.

And miss?
Smoke often.

PENNY

Yes, Mr. Penbrook.

Walter winks and exits.

Lights change.

WALTER LEARNS HIS TRADE

Salesman appears, covering an enormous chalkboard with graphs too complex for human comprehension. Walter lands in an old-fashioned schoolhouse desk. He daydreams into a notebook.

SALESMAN

Sell me something.

WALTER

Sorry?

SALESMAN

Straighten your back. Puff out your chest. You look like a frackin' idiot... Cigarette?

Salesman lights a cigarette.

WALTER

I don't smoke.

SALESMAN

Yeah you do.

The salesman hands Walter a cigarette and offers him a light.

SALESMAN

Come on, sport. If you can't smoke a cigarette, how the hell are you gonna get them to?

WALTER

I sell make-up and magazines.

SALESMAN

Everything—you sell positively everything. You want to open that briefcase of yours and have those people think you're a veritable magician. You want that thing to weigh as

much as a person. C'mon, man. You need to see the joy in life. You need to see the fun in it.

WALTER

Aren't these bad for you?

SALESMAN

Only if you think they are, Walter. But you don't think that.

WALTER

I don't?

SALESMAN

You think they're the best damn thing since they invented masturbation.

*Walter puts the cigarette in his mouth
and the Salesman lights it.*

They call it hypnosis, but it's really just a state of mind. You get someone to think they're out of control. Get 'em to think they don't know what they want, and that you do. Then they want it. Then you've made the sale.

Draws a stick figure on the board.

This is you.

Draws another stick figure on the board.

This is someone else. Now, this person has something. Has something you want. In this box. Here.

Draws a box in their hands.

How do you get the box?

WALTER

You ask them for it.

SALESMAN

They say no.

Pause.

WALTER

You trade them for it.

SALESMAN

Now you're talking. Okay, I'll be me and you be you. I've got something in this briefcase and you want it. What do you do?

WALTER

What do you want in exchange for your briefcase?

SALESMAN

Let me stop you there. You never tell the customer what you want from them. You never let them *know* that you want their money—*briefcase*. In fact, don't even say the word money. Don't tell them how much a thing costs until they ask. Then make it sound like the most insignificant cost anyone's ever heard of. Make it sound like if they don't buy it, there's something wrong with them.

WALTER

There's something wrong with them . . . Got it.

SALESMAN

They say it's all about the customer. It is. You're just the guy that's between them and what they want. You want to seem like an obstacle without actually being an obstacle. In truth, you're more like the gatekeeper. You're the one with the briefcase. *You're* the one with the box full of things *they* want to buy.

WALTER

Right.

SALESMAN

It's about them and what they want. But it's actually about you and what you want. And what you want is the same thing as what they want. You're friends, you and them. Never make enemies unless they make enemies first... Then it's all-out war. You destroy them before they destroy you.

WALTER

Right.

SALESMAN

Any questions?

WALTER

Yeah. What do I do if—

SALESMAN

No questions.

WALTER

No questions?

No questions. SALESMAN

Pause.

No questions. WALTER

Pause.

It says here there's this thing called reframing.

You're a woman, Walter. SALESMAN

Excuse me? WALTER

Tell me you're not a woman. SALESMAN

I'm not a woman. WALTER

You are a woman, Walter. SALESMAN

Pause.

That's reframing. SALESMAN

I don't know about this. WALTER

No, no, NO. You're supposed to tell me to go suck myself. Walter, you're not trying to sell me into the ground, and if you're not trying to sell them, you're trying to tell them to get the hell away from you and leave your manhood alone. You get me? SALESMAN

Leave my manhood alone. WALTER

Good. SALESMAN

WALTER

Suck my dick.

SALESMAN

THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKIN' ABOUT. Now tell me I'm a woman.

WALTER

You're a woman.

*The Salesman grabs Walter by the collar
and starts to choke him.*

SALESMAN

Say it again.

WALTER

You're—you're—a—wo—man . . .

*The Salesman releases Walter.
Walter recovers while Salesman enjoys his
cigarette,
looking proudly over the audience.*

SALESMAN

It's a battlefield out there, Walter. You've got to keep your manhood.
Don't get up. That's the first lesson. When you're knocked down, wait 'til their back's
turned. That's when the ball's in your court. . .

People don't trust like they used to. You have to *win* their trust. You do that, and
you're half-way there.

WALTER

What's the other half?

Beat.

SALESMAN

If you can control your voice—your intonation, your connotation—keep your eye on the
mark—the world is yours. So the first lesson's really this: keep your eye on the mark.
Keep your eye on the mark. Keep your eye on the mark.

Example: a girl walks down the street, comes to an old man, tells the old man if he
doesn't give her a dollar she's going to run home and kill herself. What's he gonna
do?

Well he says bye-bye to little Red and walks the fuck home before curfew. Let's say the same girl walks up to the same old man, tells him about her poor mother who hasn't been able to stand straight for seven weeks—how the operation could save her life, could save her marriage, could put her daughter back in school...

Salesmanship is all about incentive. It's about getting a person to realize that they're saving the world by giving you their dollar. And it's true—we do save the world. What we do is God's work. Good for the economy.

Now go save the world.

*The Salesman and his limitless chalkboard
disappear.*

A MASTER AT WORK

*Walter presents a line of objects to Penny.
She's having none of it,
until she comes across a lace handkerchief.*

PENNY

Oh, Walter...

WALTER

It's just a little thing.

PENNY

No—it's lovely. Truly.
How much does it cost?

WALTER

I can't sell you that. I don't make a business out of selling things that shouldn't cost any money. Please.

Penny rubs the handkerchief.

I really should be going. So many things to do. You see with the competition from the catalogs, it's been harder to do the door-to-door.

PENNY

I'm so sorry to shoot you down.

WALTER

No, please. You refresh me. I hope to try again and again, and I know one of these days I'll find the product that's just right for you. It's my solemn obligation as a salesman to find for you that one thing you've been missing all this time.

Beat.

Before I go, allow me to ask—do you have any thoughts on hypnosis?

PENNY

Don't they do that to war criminals?

WALTER

Sometimes, yes. But you're no criminal. No, it's therapeutic—very calming. If you'd like I could perform some work on you.

PENNY

Is it safe?

WALTER

Absolutely. Here. Close your eyes. Put your palms on your lap—facing up. Straight back.

PENNY

Well... I'm a little embarrassed...

WALTER

Don't be silly. Pretend it's a game. Pretend it's not going to work. You'll be surprised that way.

Penny straightens her back and turns her palms.

Walter places a record on the music box. Fitzgerald's "Dream a Little Dream of Me" plays.

Now, this is going to work best if you don't speak until I tell you to. Do you understand?... Alright then. Now keep your eyes closed. Touch your tongue to the roof of your mouth... Release. Again. As hard as you can... Release... Now I want you to concentrate hard. On a memory. Your oldest memory. Now I don't want you to tell me where it is. Just know for yourself. Know the smell of that place. The feeling in your feet. In your knees. What does the air feel like? Is it warm? Is it cold? I want you to stay perfectly still for this, Mrs. Glass. Now, slowly, if you're not already, imagine yourself lying down on your back. Feel the weight of your shoulders falling into the surface beneath you. A feeling of great calm passes over you. It might take on a color, or a sound. You've never felt this before, so you explore it further. It's the feeling of being exactly who you are, in every single way. Perfect, exactly as you are.

Now when I count to five you're going to imagine yourself standing up. You're going to imagine yourself walking outside, if you're not outside already, and floating up into the sun. The next time you hear this song, your dream will be over. Until then, you'll just have to follow my instructions.... When I reach a count of "1" you'll wake up from your dream.

Five... four... three... two...

Walter turns off the music before "one."

WALTER

Open your eyes, Mrs. Glass.
How did that feel?

PENNY

I didn't want to come out.

WALTER

I know they always tell you it makes you sleepy. But really, it makes you very sleepy,
doesn't it?

PENNY

I don't think I remember a thing that happened.

WALTER

That's the magic.
You've barely touched your cheese plate.

Penny takes a nibble.

It's delicious. Isn't it.

*Penny is overcome by a feeling of
deliciousness.
Walter walks over to her.*

I'd welcome you to my house for dinner any night of the week—and your husband, of
course. My mother loves company... It's a temporary arrangement. She's very old.

Walter takes Penny's face in his hands.

What are you doing?

WALTER

I'm looking at your face.

Penny pushes him gently off.

PENNY

I haven't applied my face yet.

WALTER

Your face needs no application.

*Walter kisses Penny.
Beat.*

When does your husband get home?

PENNY

Can you imagine how embarrassing it is to live alone in a big house like this? Family fortunes and all—no dogs—no sisters... He passed away, a couple years ago... I don't have one.

Beat.

WALTER

Kiss me.

*Penny aims for the cheek.
Walter steals her lips.*

PENNY

What about those other women? Those women to whom you sell your make-up—and your magazines... those women think you're their only hope of beauty.

WALTER

Well, it's a marvelous contradiction you bring up. How dare I make a buyer of these women—these poor and lonely women—unloved, you must think—who don't love themselves. How dare I tell them they are not good enough?

But I do not tell them they are not good enough. They tell themselves that each morning, as they're brushing their teeth and they're combing their hair and they look so early-morning—as it is early morning and they can look no other way—"I am hideous." I provide a means to feel less so.

PENNY

But who on earth gave them the idea in the first place?

WALTER

What idea?

PENNY

The idea that they could look hideous—that hideous is a thing one can look?

WALTER

I could look at you for hours and my eyes won't get tired. I see something new every time—learn something new.

Penny kisses Walter.

Again.

Again.

PENNY

Oh, dear—did you swallow your gum?

WALTER

Shut up.

Beat.

The home melts away.

Walter gathers his supplies.

THE BASICS OF MANAGEMENT

*Lights change.
Walter knocks on an invisible door.
The door opens.*

WALTER

Hello. My name is Walter Penbrook. I sell make-up and magazines. Might you be interested in a copy of our—

*The door slams in his face.
Walter exits and re-enters.
He knocks and the door opens.*

Hello. My name is Walter Penbrook. I'm a sales agent with—

*The door slams in his face.
Walter exits and re-enters.
He knocks and the door opens.*

Hello. My name is Walter—

*The door begins to close.
Walter blocks the door open with his foot.*

—Don't you dare shut this door! I'm here on business. I am a good man with good business. Do you hear me? Do you think I'd shut the door in your face?

*Someone's palm pushes his face out the door.
Walter swallows his pride
and knocks on another door.
The Salesman opens it. Walter sits at the school desk.*

SALESMAN

What's a matter? Losing your touch?

WALTER

Shut up.

SALESMAN

A question of conscience perhaps?

WALTER

None of your business.

SALESMAN

Feisty. You know how I like that. Okay. Sell me something.

WALTER

What a lovely fragrance your home has.

SALESMAN

Oh, that's funny, seeing as I'm a man and I live alone. You calling my fragrance *lovely*, Walter? Or are you looking to remind me how I have no woman in my life. COME ON. Get your head in the game.

WALTER

Hello, sir, my name is Walter Penbroo—

SALESMAN

NO. Don't forget what you're here to do. Never show them you're trying to find out how they think. They'll think you're up to something and they'll kick you out the front door. They'll feel attacked or something.

The salesman lights a cigarette.

An exercise in futility. Let's try a different note. Go ahead. Get on the floor. Walter, get on the floor. On your back.

Walter lies down.

Salesman dims the lights.

So the dream is this. You're the captain of the greatest sea vessel ever known to man. You're the guy in charge. What you say is law. What you do goes unquestioned. You've saved more lives than you could imagine there were lives to save. You've buried more treasures than you could imagine the world might possess. The only trouble is, your first mate just got swallowed up by some giant-ass sea serpent, and you need a new one.

You stand the men up in a line. A long-ass line. There are fifty or sixty of them, waiting for your command. Their faces are all fucked-up. They're sailors, they're butchers, they're workmen. Their foreheads are covered in dirt and salt, and some of

them smell almost as bad as you... Their backbones—hunch. Teeth are missing. Fingers and toes... Who's the new first-mate?

Captain?

WALTER

I am.

Salesman laughs.

SALESMAN

You can't be the first mate, Walter. You're the captain. Who's the first mate?

WALTER

What I say is law... What I do goes unquestioned... There is no truth but mine...

Beat.

That's enough... Walter. Open your eyes.
Walter.

*Nothing.
Salesman slaps him across the face
and Walter wakes with a start.*

WALTER

What happened?

SALESMAN

You became a man. Now get out.
Get out. We're done for today.

WALTER

No notes?

SALESMAN

See you next time, kid.

*Salesman exits.
Walter remains a beat.*

6

Walter and Penny watch a black-and-white action film. The sound of the film can be heard as if people talking through water. They drink and laugh, paying little attention to the film.

WALTER

To Penny Glass. May her thighs grow thick and her bottom round.
May her joyous laughter never cease as long as I have a thing to do about it.

PENNY

Oh, Walter . . .

They drink.

WALTER

You'll excuse me. I have coarse humor. . . My father was strict with us—no women in the house. . . I'll make it up to you. How about—a complimentary bottle of lip-gloss.

PENNY

You'd give me lip-gloss if I ask nicely enough.

WALTER

A customer's still a customer, Penny.

PENNY

You'd make me buy lip-gloss from you?

WALTER

It's not *buying*—it's not like I'm trying to pull your arms out or anything—not for my *enjoyment* or something like that. It's just a transaction. Life is filled with necessary transactions.

PENNY

My mother would walk down the street and men would give her things. They'd give her flowers—they'd give her kisses—they'd smile at her—they'd look her way. They would give her absolutely everything that any common person could give a stranger. I saw my mother with her charm and her beauty, and things just came to her.

WALTER

She sounds lovely.

PENNY

I like your coarse humor. My father had humor like that. My mother wasn't keen on it, but if it could make a baby laugh—so simple and so right in its ways—it could make a decent grown person laugh. He wasn't very funny later in life. When I was young and didn't know what he was saying, that was when he was his funniest. Then he got old. He was forty-two and already old.

Pause.

Penny rushes out.

WALTER

Penny—

She vomits into the kitchen sink.

Walter rubs her back.

She slinks over and relaxes, her head in the

sink.

She loosens her arms toward the floor.

You'll be all right in no time at all. You'll be dancing and prancing in no time at all. Would you like a breath mint?

He gets a breath mint.

Here you are, a spearmint breath mint. Open wide.

Walter stands Penny upright.

Open your mouth and stick out your tongue.

He places the mint on her tongue.

There you are. Now doesn't everything feel better now?

He rubs her back.

There, there. You like having your back rubbed, don't you? I'll rub your back any day of the week, Penny Glass. I'll rub your back and then I'll tuck you into bed and then I'll hold your hand until you fall asleep. And then maybe I'll fall asleep too, right there next to you—like a good friend.

Penny leans into him.

PENNY

This movie is so barbaric.

WALTER

Maybe you should stay close to me then.

*Walter kisses her on the head
and she melts into his chest, smiling goofily.*

WOMAN ON PROGRAM

I'm pregnant.

MAN ON PROGRAM

You can't be pregnant. We've never had sex.

WOMAN ON PROGRAM

It's not yours. It's someone else's. I—I had sex with someone else. Remember that man who came here to fix the pipes last week? Or that man who came to trim the lawn? Or the man who drops off the mail every day? Or—

MAN ON PROGRAM

Which one is it?

WOMAN ON PROGRAM

How am I supposed to know?

MAN ON PROGRAM

I've turned you into such a liar. Desdemona, you're such a terrible liar.

WOMAN ON PROGRAM

Did I tell you I tried to kill myself?

MAN ON PROGRAM

Shut up.

*Dramatic love music plays.
They both fall asleep.*

As the night rolls on:

*Penny wakes up and goes to the armchair.
She picks up Walter's book on hypnosis.
She flips to the first page.
She flips to the second.
Lights change.*

BUSINESS TERMINATED

*Salesman divides a wad of money,
weighs the piles in his hands,
alters the amounts just so,
and gives Walter hit cut.*

SALESMAN

Let me tell you, man. You're progressing like nobody's business. Just keep in mind, you're my protégé. If someone wants your number, you give them my number too. You're gonna make a great salesman one day, Walter. You'll make your mistakes and you'll learn from them and on and on and there the fun begins.

This is the part when we hug and part ways.

WALTER

Where are you going?

SALESMAN

Chicago. The great lakes of the midwestern civilization. C'mon man. You don't need me. You see that book there? You'll learn a big secret in Chapter seven I haven't even figured out myself. Seriously man, it'll blow your fuckin' mind. From here on out, shit gets real. It's been a pleasure.

*He offers Walter a hand.
Beat. He takes it.*

Oh, and one more thing.

*The Salesman punches Walter in the gut.
Walter collapses, utterly.*

SALESMAN

DO YOU HAVE NO FUCKING HEAD. I saw that woman today. I saw that poor, helpless woman you've been suckling off of. You didn't think I'd found out, you piece of shit.

WALTER

What the fuck did I—

SALESMAN
YOU USED YOUR POWERS FOR EVIL.

WALTER
Is this a fucking joke?

SALESMAN
IT'S REAL, MY FRIEND. You should have read the warning label.

WALTER
What warning label?

SALESMAN
PAGE THIRTY-TWO. "The Dangers of Hypnosis".

He recites from memory.

"There are some unfortunate consequences that may result from the use of hypnosis but these are dependent upon the intelligence of the hypnotist and not upon the use of hypnosis. Children can hypnotize each other and use hypnosis in a foolish manner, such as putting dirty pins and needles into the flesh of their playmates."

WALTER
What does this have to do with me?

SALESMAN
IN THIS CASE—"the danger of infection is present and it is a real danger and certainly must be considered." THAT'S real. THAT'S what the book REALLY says.

WALTER
What does it mean?

SALESMAN
It means—my dearest Prometheus—you shouldn't play with fire. What right do you have of doing that to that poor woman? She had pictures around the house—pictures of you. You've done something to this woman—something this book says never to do.

The salesman waves the book around.

This is our Bible, friend. This is our *oath*. Doesn't that mean something to you?

WALTER
That's just how she is! Penny just does shit like that.

SALESMAN

You were given something—given a charge—to use your powers for good.

WALTER

Good? Is that what we do? What about selling shit for three times its value sounds *good* to you?

SALESMAN

Hypnosis—Walter. I told you, this isn't some make-believe shit. Pixie dust. Ne'er-dowells would kill for it. The three kings, Walter!

*Punches Walter once more in the gut.
Pause.*

SALESMAN

I needed that...

Enjoy making it on your own, kid.

*Salesman opens the door to go.
Walter comes up behind
and punches him in the stomach.
Salesman keels over.
Walter straightens up.*

WALTER

I'm an entrepreneur... DO YOU FUCKIN' HEAR ME... I'M AN ENTREPRENEUR.

SALESMAN

THAT'S IT, WALTER. THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

WALTER

FUCK YOU.

SALESMAN

FIRE, WALTER. GO FOR THE KILL.

*The Salesman tries to get up.
Walter punches him in the face and knocks
him out.
He takes the wrong briefcase—and after a
silence,
exits.*

8

THE DANGERS OF HYPNOSIS

*A storm brews as Penny prepares dinner.
She hears something and opens the front
door.
Nobody's there, and she returns to the
kitchen.*

Second later, Walter bursts in.

PENNY

Walter, was that you at the door just now?
Where's your umbrella?

WALTER

I just came in.

PENNY

No, before, you—

WALTER

I don't want to hear it, Penny.

PENNY

What happened? Walter.

WALTER

I couldn't make the sale.

PENNY

What are you talking about?

WALTER

I made my regular stops. I sold that whole street. That whole fucking street and then the last house—this old woman, cats all over the place—this cat woman...

He heads toward the bedroom.

PENNY

You should eat something.

WALTER

I'm not hungry.

PENNY

You shouldn't sleep when you're upset. You'll have bad dreams.

WALTER

I've never had a bad dream in my life.
Penny, get out of my way.

PENNY

Or what?

WALTER

I'm going to bed. Move.

PENNY

You want to hit me, don't you?

WALTER

Of course not.

PENNY

If you need someone to hit, you can hit me. It's not a problem. I can see it... You can call me someone else's name if you want.

WALTER

I like your name.

PENNY

I know, but—well, if you wanted to call me someone else's name, I'd understand... It's Martha, isn't it?

Beat.

WALTER

You're glowing. You're absolutely radiant.

PENNY

The doctor said it's just the baby calling me Momma in the womb. When she gets happy and excited about being born I begin to glow. You can tell how happy and excited she is.

Walter sinks into his chair.

You'd hope my imaginings would be sweet and proper. But most the times I close my eyes I dream the most magnificent nonsense. I imagine myself on the brink of the most outrageous disasters... Just now I closed my eyes and I saw myself slipping on the edge of the roof. I was sitting out there, you see, with my cardigan beneath me because the roof was sopping wet from the rain. I stand up to go inside, and—I slip. I'm holding to the gutter that lines the roof. Then just like that—I fall.

WALTER

What happens then?

PENNY

You know, the normal thing that happens when you fall in your dreams. Infinite black. You never quite stop falling.

*Penny loses her balance and collapses.
Walter catches her.*

WALTER

Penny!

*He lies her down.
Walter puts an album on the music box.
"Dream a Little Dream of Me" plays.
He performs hypnosis on the semi-conscious*

Penny.

WALTER

The next time you open your eyes, you'll see just another face.
He was just leaving.
He was just—fixing some of the plumbing.

*Walter's heart breaks.
He goes to pack his things while Penny*

"wakes up."

*Pause.
Penny opens her eyes.
Long beat.*

PENNY

Is someone there?

WALTER

I was just leaving.

PENNY

Would you stay for supper? Stranger as you may be, I can't let you leave on an empty stomach.

WALTER

I should be going.

PENNY

The newspaper says that Michaelangelo's David might collapse soon. It says here they're building a high-speed train across the street.

WALTER

They should move the statue.

PENNY

You can't just ask a people to move their statue. Statues are very important to a people... My grandmother spoke to stones—was spoken to by them. She took a chip off Stone Henge. She took a chip off the sphinx. She took a chip off Buckingham Palace. People like her are why we can't keep nice things.

WALTER

Your tea's going to run over.

Walter turns to leave.

PENNY

There was this man in Russia—this Russian man who sowed dog's heads onto the bodies of other dogs. He eventually led to the development of the first heart transplant... You think they called him a saint? He saved thousand of lives... They never called him a saint. His wife must have left him when the world found out.

WALTER

What does that have to do with statues?

PENNY

My brain must be in my feet. I've forgotten myself.

WALTER

And my heart's in my stomach... Do you believe in the power of dreams, Mrs. Glass?

PENNY

Is that what you think this is, Walter?

WALTER

Wal—

PENNY

Yes, Walter. That is your name, darling, isn't it?

Long beat.

Walter sits.

WALTER

I had a dream last night—Jesus on the cross. Except instead of the cross it was the Star of David, and instead of Jesus being all alone there, bleeding out as it were, there in the corner, by some pretty-looking tree, sat Leonardo DaVinci, sketching... He was sketching the Vitruvian Man. Have you ever seen the Vitruvian Man?

PENNY

I can't say I have.

WALTER

A man strung out in all directions. It's supposed to show the flexibility of form, I think—the perfection of form. But to me it just looks like Jesus on the cross—on this enormous Star of David—bleeding out, as it were—in front of Leonardo DiVinci.

PENNY

You have some lipstick on you, dear.

WALTER

That's impossible.

PENNY

A handkerchief made of lace. Defeats the whole point doesn't it?
Why don't you take it?

She wipes his face with it.

Beat.

You know, the Ancient Egyptians lit their homes with mirrors. You saved a lot of energy that way. I'm joining that "green movement" I think. I could teach at a university, I'm so smart. And clever... Walter, you're going to have to stand up straight. Stop slouching with so much melancholy. You look like someone who's just choked on a peach...

He sits up straight.

You want to do this, don't you, Walter? Because you wouldn't do anything you don't want to do. That is how it works, isn't it. Hypnosis, it doesn't work that way. You only do what you want to do. Only what you'd do otherwise? But you're more willing... more willing to please.

I saw that book. That dreadful book. I read that book, cover to cover. Disgusting little thing. Made my throat crawl.

You could kill me. You could call me someone else's name and it would be like you're killing someone else. I bet you'd like to fuck me while you're doing it. I could call you names, too. You'd really hate that.

Silence.

Your dinner's getting cold, honey! Darling!

WALTER

Who are you talking to?

PENNY

Your daughter, of course. The wedding planner did say there would be children. We even got them their own table.

*A girl of thirteen comes down the stairs.
She sits at the table and eats.
Walter walks around her, a ghost.*

WALTER

Penny...

PENNY

Say hello to your father, Margaret.
Margaret is very shy. Takes after me in that respect.

As a child, my parents brought us to the lakes outside Boston. There was one, Crystal Lake. People laughed because our name's Glass and we were swimming in a crystal lake. It feels lovely. Swimming in a lake made of crystals. You wouldn't know it. You'd think you'd get cut all over.

*The tea begins to screech.
Long pause.*

Why don't you get that, Walter.

*Walter takes it off the stove
and pours a cup for Penny.*

This is the greatest thing anyone's said in their entire lives, Walter. This is a monument. A monument to women everywhere. Do you know what they're saying? Everything that comes out of a woman's mouth has meaning. It's calculated. Like a loaded gun.

We could play on the battlegrounds of our discontent for the rest of our lives. We could play there until the morning and then we can ring some rooster's neck, when it comes out off that farm we had, off off that farm to do what it does. Just call and call. And we can ring its neck and light us another fire like all those fire's we've been lighting and we can just cook us a rooster for breakfast now how about that?

Choke yourself.

Walter chokes himself.

It's a figure of speech.

Walter doesn't stop.

It's a figure of—IT'S A FIGURE OF SPEECH, WALTER.

*Walter collapses, light-headed, but
conscious.*

He regains himself.

You selfish idiot. You were supposed to shoot me first.
No, I'm just kidding. Of course, I was kidding.

Beat.

You look pathetic, dear. Clean off your face.

Walter goes to the sink and washes his face.

Now take off that filthy jacket. We'll have to clean it.

*He hands her the jacket.
She throws it into the trash.*

And your pants. Your pants, too.

He removes his pants.

And your shirt.

*Walter removes all his clothes
except for his socks and undergarments.
Penny removes from the cupboard a jug of
oil,
which she pours into the trash can.
She lights it on fire.*

That's better. Now where was I? . . . You're getting sleepy. Count backwards from three to . . . negative . . . seventy . . .

*Penny snores jokingly and starts to laugh.
Walter curls up on the couch.*

When we got old we'd stare at each other—you know the way old people stare at each other—and we'd ask each other if we still *got it*, if we still had that boyish charm we had. And we'd say: yes, yes, we do, we do. And we'd mean it. We could have done that for the rest of our lives.

I'm never going to grow old. You'll grow very old, Walter. You already have.

Silence.

WALTER

I'll see you in the morning, Penny.

*Walter sinks into an armchair,
turns away, and falls asleep.
Penny goes and lies down on the couch,
watching the sky through a skylight there.*

PENNY

Skylight, Skylight, made of sky
Won't you blink, five minutes by
And won't you dream a lullaby
That only I can hear.

*Walter sees a light from a crack in the
briefcase.*

He crawls toward it. He opens it.

*Brilliant light floods the room.
Maybe a serenade of Heaven and Hell.*

*Penny is entranced and comes to sit beside
Walter.*

They both disappear into the briefcase.

*Margaret materializes. Then the Salesman.
He closes the briefcase and the light
vanishes.*

End of play.