

## **SUB-GENRE**

A Play For Stage

1 Act, 6 Characters

**by**

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## **SUB-GENRE**

(Snapshot)

A husband searches for his missing wife in an abandoned hospital. On his journey he meets a cryptic guide, a sex-crazed girl, a competing suitor, and a pioneering doctor who decapitates his patients.

A horror story of double-crossing nightmares and the potential for rat-run surgical enhancements.

## **THE CHARACTERS**

MICHAEL ROWAN, *a man*

KRISTEN ROWAN, *a woman*

FIERSGAARD, *a man*

CASSANDRA BLESSING, *a woman*

JOHN QUAKER, *a man*

THE DOCTOR / MAN'S VOICE, *a man*

ACT I

SCENE 1

An apartment.

A dim table-light rises on MICHAEL ROWAN, his tie yanked, his shirt untucked, at his desk.

The apartment door opens by itself.

MICHAEL rises to shut it.

At the door appears KRISTEN ROWAN. She is pale and disoriented. MICHAEL backs away as she enters the apartment.

MICHAEL

What's wrong?  
                  (Pause)  
What's wrong?

KRISTEN

I've been killed in a car crash. A man's coming to tell you about it.

MICHAEL

What?

KRISTEN

About thirty minutes ago, driving home from work.

MICHAEL goes to her, but she takes a step back to the door. He slows, and then stops.

KRISTEN (Continued)

I want you to know. I love you very much, Michael. You've been a wonderful husband.

MICHAEL

Don't talk like that. Come here. Sit down.

MICHAEL pulls out the chair he was sitting on. She does not take it.

KRISTEN

I was thinking...as I drove...that we've never had any children. And that we should. I was ready for that now. And then the truck turned. I believe I've lost my head.

MICHAEL

You certainly have. Sit down. Please.

KRISTEN comes forward and mechanically sits on the offered chair. MICHAEL shuts the door then kneels in front of her.

MICHAEL (Continued)

You don't look hurt. Not a scratch. How did you get here? I didn't hear the car. Did someone drop you off?

(Pause)

Couldn't they see you're in shock? Tell me again about this truck. You must have just missed it.

KRISTEN

I don't know how I got here.

MICHAEL

Well you didn't *walk*. The highway's --

KRISTEN's voice becomes booming, odd.

KRISTEN

(Effect mic)

A man is coming to see you.

MICHAEL

Man? What man?

KRISTEN

(Effect mic)

He says he works for the hospital. He tells people when someone's been killed.

MICHAEL rises to look down on his wife.

MICHAEL

Is this a joke?

KRISTEN

(Effect mic)

His name. Is Fiersgaard.

Pause. The effect mic stops.

KRISTEN (Continued)

I'm sorry, Michael. I didn't know what I was doing.

MICHAEL

I don't care about the car. As long as you're all right.

KRISTEN

My tongue feels strange.

MICHAEL

Here, let me have a look.

KRISTEN opens her mouth, wide. As MICHAEL stares inside his wife's mouth, a deep bass rumble begins, growing, as an approaching storm. MICHAEL stumbles back. KRISTEN closes her mouth and the sound stops.

KRISTEN

It hurts.

MICHAEL

How did you do that to your mouth? How did you get that...that...thing inside.

KRISTEN

I think the doctor put it there.

MICHAEL

What doctor?

KRISTEN

The one at the accident scene. They let him drive off with my head.

MICHAEL

Stop it, stop it. You're scaring me.

MICHAEL tucks in his shirt and grabs his coat from the rack.

MICHAEL (Continued)

Come on. I'll drive you to the hospital in my car. Something's obviously wrong.

As she stands, he stops, just inches from holding her arm.

KRISTEN

I'll miss you.

He watches as she moves to the door, opens it, and then pauses in the doorway. Without her touching it, the door shuts.

MICHAEL races to the door and flings it open. His wife is gone.

Instead, there is a MAN.

He wears a featureless clown mask and suit.

This is FIERSGAARD.

FIERSGAARD

Mr. Rowan?

(Pause)

You are Mr. Rowan, aren't you?

(Pause)

I'm afraid I have some rather distressing information.  
There's been an accident. The hospital has sent me.

(Pause)

Would you please sit down? I'm afraid, Mr. Rowan, that  
it's tragic news.

MICHAEL walks backwards into the empty  
chair, sitting. FIERSGAARD moves a few  
paces inside the apartment. Gingerly,  
he shuts the door.

FIERSGAARD (Continued)

You are Mr. Rowan, aren't you?

MICHAEL nods, hesitantly.

FIERSGAARD (Continued)

It's your wife. She's been killed.

MICHAEL

How?

FIERSGAARD

In a plane crash.

MICHAEL

(Confused)

A plane crash?

FIERSGAARD

We recovered only parts of her. But she's almost certainly  
been identified. Kristen Rowan. Age thirty-three. Do you  
have a photograph of her?

MICHAEL looks around. He fumbles for a  
photograph on the desk. He holds it



out for FIERSGAARD, who bends to look but does not take the photograph.

FIERSGAARD (Continued)

A lovely creature.

MICHAEL looks at the photo as well before placing it back on the table.

MICHAEL

But my wife wasn't traveling on a plane.

FIERSGAARD

Pardon?

MICHAEL

She works off the highway. As a typist. She answers the phones. She wasn't on any plane.

FIERSGAARD

I'm afraid she was. She told me to tell you something. Look in the desk. She's left her receipt.

MICHAEL slowly opens the nearby drawer of the desk. He pulls out a sleeve of documents. He opens them.

MICHAEL

(Realizing)

This is a flight out of town. Leaving this morning.

FIERSGAARD

Your wife was on that flight. It crashed after take off. It will be in all the papers tomorrow.

MICHAEL stands.

MICHAEL

Wait a minute! You said she told you about this ticket. When? How?

FIERSGAARD

Just before the engine trouble, Mr. Rowan, she leaned over and told me. Let me see if I can get the words straight. "He'll find the receipt when he looks for his reading glasses. By then, I'll be a thousand miles away. It will be the shock of his life, that I've gone and done it."

MICHAEL

You lie you lie! My wife was just here. In this room! She's fine. Now get out of the way and I'll go find her.

MICHAEL tries to barrel past  
FIERSGAARD, who doesn't try to stop his  
exit. As the door is opened, MICHAEL  
hangs out the door, as if tethered.

MICHAEL (Continued)

What happened to her car?

FIERSGAARD

It's parked.

MICHAEL

Where?

FIERSGAARD

I really don't know.

MICHAEL

At...at the airport?

FIERSGAARD

Possibly.

MICHAEL returns inside the apartment.

MICHAEL

Do you know any doctors?

FIERSGAARD

Yes. I'm from the hospital.

MICHAEL

My wife told me that a doctor drove off with her head.

(Pause)

You know what she meant.

FIERSGAARD

I know a doctor whose specialty is the head and neck areas of the body. Yes.

MICHAEL

Then I want to go to the hospital.

Lights down.

ACT I

SCENE 2

Hospital waiting room.

MICHAEL ROWAN enters to find CASSANDRA BLESSING seated behind the reception desk.

CASSANDRA

May I help you?

MICHAEL checks behind him.

He returns to the door and looks out. Confused, he approaches CASSANDRA again.

CASSANDRA (Continued)

(Slightly irritated)

May I help you?

MICHAEL

I was with someone. He seems to have vanished.

Pause.

CASSANDRA

Is this an emergency?

MICHAEL

I'm looking for my wife.

CASSANDRA

(Disappointed)

Name?

MICHAEL

Kristen Rowan. With a "K".

CASSANDRA checks her ledger.

CASSANDRA

(Slyly)

You don't really want her back, do you?

MICHAEL

Pardon?

CASSANDRA

Nothing.

CASSANDRA closes ledger.

CASSANDRA (Continued)

I don't have anyone by that name.

(Pause)

But listen...I'm a single girl in the city. Business is slow. Want to touch me?

MICHAEL

I beg your pardon.

CASSANDRA

Here, under the desk.

MICHAEL

Look, a man came to my house. He told me that my wife was killed in a plane crash and that she's been taken to this hospital. Who can I speak with? Who will verify if this is true?

CASSANDRA

There're lots of people you can speak with. Only a few who will verify anything's true.

MICHAEL

Stop playing with me.

MICHAEL starts to move past the desk.

CASSANDRA rises and blocks him.

CASSANDRA  
You can't go back there.

MICHAEL  
Why not?

CASSANDRA  
You'll need a pass. Or you'll be arrested.

MICHAEL  
How do I get a pass?

CASSANDRA sits on her desk and opens her legs slightly.

MICHAEL (Continued)  
(Desperate)  
I'm looking for *my wife*. Can't you understand that?

CASSANDRA opens her legs slightly more.

Long pause.

At last, she closes them and stands, frustrated.

She removes her badge.

CASSANDRA  
Here. Take my pass.

She pins her badge on his lapel.

MICHAEL  
(Reading)  
"Cassandra Blessing." Won't you need it?

CASSANDRA  
I don't really work here.

MICHAEL

You don't?

CASSANDRA

I came here looking for my girlfriend. She broke her foot. Her name's Kathryn. With a "K". When I arrived, the waiting room was empty. I decided to sit behind the desk, because it was the only chair. I made out a badge in my own name to pass the time. Then you showed up. For all I know, this hospital's completely empty.

MICHAEL

I'm going to find out.

MICHAEL turns to enter the hospital.  
CASSANDRA stops him with her hand on his arm.

CASSANDRA

If you see Kathryn, tell her Cassandra is in the waiting room. If I'm not here, I'll be at our apartment. If I'm not there, I'm at the club. Dancing. Or the bar across the street. I drink there. I drink a lot. I have blackout periods, you know. This might be one of them.

MICHAEL

I won't remember all that. Hadn't you better just wait here?

CASSANDRA

By myself?

MICHAEL

It's not a ghost ship.

CASSANDRA

Isn't it?

Lights down.

ACT I

SCENE 3

Hospital corridor.

MICHAEL feels his way along a dark hallway. Lights rise slightly.

Standing at the end is FIERSGAARD, still in suit and clown mask.

MICHAEL jumps.

MICHAEL

There you are, Fiersgaard. I thought I'd lost you. Where did you go? You dropped me at the door but didn't come inside.

FIERSGAARD

I wasn't needed. I had other hospital business. Sudden business.

MICHAEL

Take me to my wife.

(Pause)

Take me to her.

FIERSGAARD

There's a man called John Quaker. He arrived about five minutes ago. He's asking for your wife as well.

MICHAEL

John Quaker? I don't know any Quaker.

FIERSGAARD

He's bright. Attractive. Taller than the two of us.

MICHAEL

I told you I don't know him. Now take me to Kristen.

FIERSGAARD

Perhaps you should speak with this Mr. Quaker first.

MICHAEL

Why? He's nothing to me.



FIERSGAARD

Are you certain?

(Pause)

What if he has something to say that distracts you from your goal?

MICHAEL

Nothing will distract me. Not even you. Get out of my way.

FIERSGAARD

She not in this wing.

MICHAEL

Ah -- you know about it then? You know where she is?

FIERSGAARD

I do. I have all along. But first the matter with this Mr. Quaker.

MICHAEL

I don't *know* him! Aren't you listening?

FIERSGAARD

I've put him in Intensive Care. He's reading a magazine. "Common Politics," I believe it's called. I've seen him nod his head. He agrees with the sentiments. But he's getting...antsy, Mr. Rowan. I don't believe he'll sit still for long.

(Pause)

The room is right past here.

FIERSGAARD gestures to a curtain.

FIERSGAARD (Continued)

It may be worth you time.

MICHAEL

But my wife.

FIERSGAARD

I'll confirm she's where I last saw her. This will improve your time. No need to wander the corridors.

MICHAEL hesitates, thinks, and turns toward the curtain.

MICHAEL

All right. I'll find out who this Mr. Quaker is. But I don't want to be stuck reading magazines, either, hear me? I've waited long enough. Five minutes and I want to be taken to Kristen.

FIERSGAARD

Five minutes. Five of them.

MICHAEL approaches rear curtains,  
passes through...

Lights down.

ACT I

SCENE 4

Intensive Care.

MICHAEL enters to see JOHN QUAKER, as described, sitting and reading a magazine. There is only one chair in the room.

QUAKER

Who are you?

MICHAEL

Are you Mr. Quaker?

QUAKER

Yes, who are you?

MICHAEL

I'm Michael Rowan. Kristen's husband.

QUAKER

Kristen's husband? She doesn't have a husband.

(Pause)

Wait, this some kind of joke. You work with the hospital. Trying to prank me so I'll leave? John Quaker's staying right *here*. I tell you *that*. You'll hafta have the police yank me outta here.

QUAKER puts his magazine in front of his face.

MICHAEL

I don't work for the hospital.

MICHAEL comes closer. QUAKER doesn't budge.

MICHAEL (Continued)

Are you listening?

(Pause)

Hey!

(Pause)

Put down that magazine.

(Pause)

I said, put down the fucking magazine.

MICHAEL takes quick steps to QUAKER and knocks the magazine from his face. The man is weeping.

QUAKER

(Through tears)

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'll go.

QUAKER rises and starts to exit.

MICHAEL

Wait, wait. You need to give me some information first.

QUAKER

I filled out tha goddamn papers. I gave them to that Cassandra chick in the waiting room. She's got everyt--

MICHAEL

She's not an employee of the hospital either. She's looking for someone, too.

QUAKER

But I showed her my identification. I gave her a deposit. She even let me...never mind. Point is, she seemed qualified for her position.

MICHAEL

She told me she's lying.

QUAKER

Yeh, well maybe it's you who's the liar.

MICHAEL

I'm Michael Rowan, Kristen Rowan's husband.

QUAKER

(Tears returning)

Liar! Liar! Kristen isn't married. She told me that ten thousand times. She has this phobia of commitment. Doesn't want a house, a kid, a dog, nothin'! Here, I bought her this, and, and...

QUAKER pulls out a ring box, opens it.

QUAKER (Continued)

She turned me down cold.

MICHAEL examines the ring inside.  
Tight-lipped, he puts it back.

QUAKER (Continued)

She said she was too young.

MICHAEL

No. She wasn't too young. She was already married. *To me.*

(Pause)

So you were lovers?

QUAKER

Lovers? Heh. No. We were co-workers.

MICHAEL

You wanted to marry her and you never --

QUAKER

Hell, no. I wish. She didn't even want to commit to that. Once she let me kiss her, but when I leaned in to her she just put Wite-Out on my nose. See, we typed beside each other.

MICHAEL

She never mentioned you. And she answered phones. She wasn't a typist.

QUAKER

And she never mentioned you either. And she answered phones and typed both. She was multi-talented.

MICHAEL

She wore a ring.

QUAKER

No she didn't.

MICHAEL

Every day.

QUAKER

Then she must have taken it off before getting to work.

MICHAEL falls away, confused. QUAKER returns the ring to his pocket.

QUAKER (Continued)

Look, pal, I'm just as concerned as you about all this. She left the office and, and then I heard on the radio. About the crash. On the highway. I knew it was her.

MICHAEL

The highway! Yes. What more do you know?

QUAKER

I flew out of there as fast as I could. Then I saw her car, all smashed up along a pylon. Ugly stuff. The police said they had already taken her away. This is the nearest hospital. I assumed it's--

MICHAEL

Do you know a man named Fiersgaard? He works here.

QUAKER

Yes, he sat me in this chair. The one in the mask?

MICHAEL

Mask?

QUAKER

Wears a clown mask. And a suit. Him, right?

MICHAEL

Maybe. I don't know anything about a mask. Look, my wife, she -- never mind, anyway, I know about a car crash, but this Fiersgaard fellow tells me it was a plane crash. And then there are these receipts and I don't know who to trust. As far as I can tell, this place is a morgue. I haven't seen a single white coat, have you?

QUAKER

Yes, several.

MICHAEL

You have?

QUAKER

At least ten. Maybe fourteen. All very busy. Runnin' around like chickens.

MICHAEL

That's strange. I walked a dozen halls before Fiersgaard told me about you, and I--

QUAKER

He told you about me?

MICHAEL

Yes. He wants me to find out your game.

QUAKER

Look, no game. I just want to find Kristen. She's important to me. Co-workers you're in love with don't go missing everyday. She's been hurt. I wanna know that she's bein' taken care of.

MICHAEL

Show me one of your white-coats. I want to see what you see. I want to ask a few thousand questions.

MICHAEL takes QUAKER by the arm and starts to drag him out of Intensive Care.

At the final step, Fiersgaard appears, in mask.

Lights down.

ACT I

SCENE 5

X Ray Room.

MICHAEL and QUAKEE stand behind scrims,  
only their heads, hands, and feet  
visible.

MICHAEL

When will he be back?

QUAKER

Probably never.

MICHAEL

I don't like waiting in this room. I'm cold. I don't need  
an X-Ray. I wish they'd listen to me.

QUAKER

This is what you get when you ask to see a doctor.

MICHAEL comes out from behind the  
scrim.

MICHAEL

I'm not waiting anymore. I'm gonna--

QUAKER

What? "Bust out a' this joint?"

MICHAEL

No. Find my wife. That's why I'm here. That's why you're  
here. Though she's not your wife.

QUAKER

Don't remind me.

MICHAEL

You were really fixated on her. Weren't you?



QUAKER steps out from behind the scrim.

QUAKER

In a strange way. Yes. I just liked it better when she was around. I'd go home each night from work and I'd miss her. Spent a lot of time getting' my courage up. It's not right to want to be a work, which is usually the drudge, so you can see a girl. It's not right.

MICHAEL

No. It's not.

QUAKER

But I got to the point where--

A MAN'S VOICE comes over a loudspeaker.

MAN'S VOICE

(In static, over speaker)  
Stand behind the machines, please.

Irritated, MICHAEL and QUAKER walk back behind their scrims.

QUAKER

(Lower)

I got to the point...where I would skip out on my breaks to either masturbate or buy her flowers.

MICHAEL

Ewww. Don't tell me that.

(Pause)

Did you ever give her the flowers?

QUAKER

Nuh uh. But I once put a bit of my sperm--

MICHAEL

Enough!

A light flashes in the room, the machines going off.

QUAKER

Did you have a good marriage?

MICHAEL

Yes. Of course.

(Pause)

Why? Did she talk about us?

QUAKER

No, remember? I didn't even know she was hitched.

MICHAEL

It was a fine marriage.

(Pause)

Sometimes, though, I got the feeling... Oh, I shouldn't even be telling you this. Sometimes...I got the feeling that she's like things better if I wasn't around. She'd come home every night and not say a word. She'd just come into the room, throw her coat over the chair, and make herself dinner. She wouldn't even notice me sitting at the desk. Wouldn't kiss me. It was nearly eight o'clock before she said hello. And that's usually because I had switched on the television.

(Pause)

I should keep my mouth shut. I don't want to give you any ideas.

QUAKER

Ideas is all I have.

Another flash of light.

MICHAEL

We only made love five times a year. Every couple of months. Usually on my pressing. Very obligatory on her part. Mildly boring and horribly guilt inducing. It's strange to feel like you're raping your own wife. When we first went out, I could touch her anywhere. And then, slowly, sort of unnoticed, she began to chip away at things. "I don't like it when you kiss my neck," she'd

(MORE)

MICHAEL (Continued)

start. "I hate my ass, could you not touch me there?" Whittle, whittle, whittle. Pretty soon she stopped being on top. Then didn't like me to kiss her nipples. Lovemaking was reduced to a perfunctory in-out just before bed that lasted all of ten minutes.

QUAKER

Ewww. Now you're making *me* uncomfortable.

MICHAEL

Sorry.

A third flash of light.

MAN'S VOICE

(In static, over speaker)

Thank you. We have what we need.

The two step out from behind the  
scrim.

MICHAEL

Strangest admittance process ever. I think I'm going to write a letter to the hospital administrators when all this is over. It isn't right.

QUAKER

They're just delaying us.

MICHAEL

Well why didn't you say something! You're the one who convinced me to go ahead with all this X-raying. I was making my demands.

FIERSGAARD enters.

FIERSGAARD

Gentlemen.

MICHAEL

It's about time, Fiersgaard. Are we through with all the damn protocol? Can you take me to Kristen now?

FIERSGAARD

Yes I can. She's ready to see you.

MICHAEL

Good. Where is she?

FIERSGAARD

In the doctor's laboratory. She's been asking for you.

MICHAEL

(Elated)

She has! That's wonderful. So she's all right, then?

FIERSGAARD

It's best that you speak with her yourself. She's much better at explaining things than I am. And the hospital, it prefers that patients obtain information only from those closest to the situation.

MICHAEL

Fine, let's go.

MICHAEL exits, thinking the others will follow.

QUAKER stops FIERSGAARD by the door.

QUAKER

(Low)

When are you gonna take off that damn mask? It's a nice touch, but I could do without. So...when's it come off?

FIERSGAARD

When you take off yours.

The give each other a look, then exit.

Lights down.

ACT I

SCENE 6

The laboratory.

There are four pedestals, covered,  
against the back wall of the lab.

A MAN wearing a white lab coat pages in  
front, writing furiously on a pad of  
paper. This is THE DOCTOR.

FIERSGAARD enters, alone.

FIERSGAARD

They're ready to see you now.

THE DOCTOR

Just a minute, just a minute.

THE DOCTOR finishes his notes, and then  
looks up to FIERSGAARD.

THE DOCTOR (Continued)

You know, Fiersgaard...you've done very well. Everything I  
ask, you deliver. You're probably the best administrator  
I've had at this hospital. It's not often you see such  
camaraderie in the trenches.

FIERSGAARD

Thank you, Doctor.

THE DOCTOR

I think you're due for a raise.

FIERSGAARD

I'm not here for money, Doctor. That's quite all right.

THE DOCTOR

Ah! I like it. You're here for the cause. The noble  
cause of the advancement of medical science.

FIERSGAARD

Not quite. I'm here to help. It's what I do.

THE DOCTOR

All right, then. Show the gentlemen inside.

Exit FIERSGAARD, returning with MICHAEL  
and QUAKER.

THE DOCTOR (Continued)

Thank you for coming all this way, gentlemen. Fiersgaard tells me you've been very patient with our little bureaucracy and I'm glad you didn't turn into vandals, as some others have. One time, a guest became so violent he actually tried to strangle poor Fiersgaard here.

MICHAEL

Yes, well, I'm about at my end. Where's my wife?

QUAKER

Where's Kristen?

THE DOCTOR

Mr. Rowan, let me first begin by preparing you for what you're about to see. Your wife has been through terrible physical trauma. I've used every available method to heal her, but there's no denying it. She is changed.

MICHAEL becomes emotional.

MICHAEL

Oh, no. Is she...has she...lost a leg or something?

THE DOCTOR

Something, yes. But you must realize, car crashes of this magnitude and ferocity are--

MICHAEL

(Turning to FIERSGAARD)

So it was a car crash! Not a plane crash.

THE DOCTOR

I'm afraid it was a little bit of both.

QUAKER

What do you mean?

THE DOCTOR

A small twin prop had to make an emergency landing. However, it chose a small stretch of highway. The highway where your wife was driving. The airplane crashed into your wife's car, and she was badly injured. At this time, we're not certain which she was in -- plane or car -- though my theory is that it was the car.

QUAKER

Wait'ah minute. I didn't see the wreckage of any plane on the road. I drove past, saw the car, but no plane. Would there have been a propeller or something? It doesn't make any sense.

MICHAEL

And Fiersgaard here says he was sitting beside my wife on the plane.

FIERSGAARD

That's incorrect. I said she leaned over and told me. I didn't say how far she had leaned.

MICHAEL

(Miffed)

You're nuts!

THE DOCTOR

Let me continue, please.

MICHAEL

But what about the ticket? Fiersgaard showed me where the receipt was -- in my desk.

THE DOCTOR

I think we should have Mrs. Rowan herself clarify everything.

MICHAEL

Where IS SHE!

THE DOCTOR gestures to one of the pedestals. He pulls down a covering and reveals:

CASSANDRA BLESSING, her head separated and sitting on top of the pedestal. Though her head is not connected to her body, she is alive.

MICHAEL

That's not my wife.

THE DOCTOR

She's not?

MICHAEL

No. I just met her today in the lobby. What's wrong with her--

THE DOCTOR

Wrong box.

THE DOCTOR uncovers the adjacent pedestal. Here is the head of KRISTEN ROWAN, separated but alive.

QUAKER

That's her!

MICHAEL

My God. Where's her body?

(Approaching the head)

Kristen, oh no oh no oh no. Are you -- Are you hurt?

KRISTEN

(Effect mic)

Yes, it hurts, Michael.

THE DOCTOR

Just a side effect of the drugs. The pain will wear off.

QUAKER

The drugs, what drugs?



THE DOCTOR

We give all the heads drugs so that we may implant the mechanism in their throat. Believe me, any residual effects are far better than going through the surgery without the drugs. All good surgeries require drugs.

QUAKER

Good surgeries? What are you talking about? Kristen it's me, John. Can you see me?

KRISTEN

(Effect mic)

Yes, John. I see you.

QUAKER

How are you alive?

MICHAEL tries to touch his wife's cheek.

A loud alarm sounds, then stops.

THE DOCTOR

You mustn't touch the heads. They're still very fragile.

MICHAEL

(To THE DOCTOR)

What kind of monster are you? This girl--

(Pointing to CASSANDRA)

She was in the lobby of this hospital. She wasn't in a plane crash. Or a car crash. She was perfectly healthy. She didn't need any surgery.

CASSANDRA

(Effect mic)

I volunteered.

THE DOCTOR

Listen to the head. I'm blameless.

MICHAEL

You volunteered?

CASSANDRA

What else was I supposed to do? You turned me down.

MICHAEL

Don't put this on me.

CASSANDRA

I was told Kathryn had passed away. I really had nothing more to look forward to. Fiersgaard came and...

FIERSGAARD

I hate to be the bearer of bad news. But it is, after all, my job.

THE DOCTOR

And a well done job.

MICHAEL

What did your Kathryn die of? Is she one of these--

MICHAEL lunges towards the second and third pedestals. THE DOCTOR slaps his hand away.

THE DOCTOR

Don't! Those aren't ready yet. And neither of them are Miss Blessing's girlfriend. I'm afraid she was...too far-gone for treatment.

MICHAEL

(To CASSANDRA)

I thought you said that Kathryn broke her foot. How could she die from that?

CASSANDRA

(Effect mic)

The foot is a vital organ.

QUAKER

No it's *not*.

CASSANDRA

(Effect mic)

*Her foot...was.*

MICHAEL approaches his wife's head.

MICHAEL  
(To KRISTEN)  
I'm getting you out of here. This is a madhouse.

KRISTEN  
(Effect mic)  
Look in my mouth.

MICHAEL  
What?

KRISTEN  
(Effect mic)  
Look...in...my...mouth.

As in Scene 1, Kristen opens her mouth and Michael looks inside. The same sounds grow in volume and then cease when she shuts her mouth.

KRISTEN (Continued)  
(Effect mic)  
That's what's keeping me alive.

MICHAEL  
(Stunned)  
It can't be.  
(To THE DOCTOR)  
It can't be.

THE DOCTOR  
It is.

QUAKER  
(To MICHAEL)  
What did you see? Tell me, what was it?

MICHAEL  
It's an electric rat. A large white lab rat made of...of...

THE DOCTOR

Plastic. That's correct. A special kind of plastic. It's in the shape of a rat because we originally tried it with live ones. Something about the oblong shape of a rat's skeletal structure fit perfectly inside the human throat cavity. It was quite an interesting discovery. Isn't that right, Fiersgaard?

FIERSGAARD

Quite interesting, yes, Doctor.

THE DOCTOR

But then the rats began to chew threw vital parts of the brain.

(Smiling)

The tastier bits. And soon, despite some significant advances in the process, I decided that to have an alternate solution. These still have very sharp teeth, but their necks don't reach to the bit of brain that shouldn't be damaged. Plastic machine rats to sustain the--

MICHAEL

Enough. This whole operation is illegal. And disgusting. I'm leaving and bringing back the police.

THE DOCTOR

(Singsong)

She'll die.

(Pause)

That's right. That rat in her mouth is the only thing keeping her alive.

MICHAEL approaches his wife.

MICHAEL

Tell me. Who put the plane ticket in my desk drawer?

(Pause)

You know they're lying. How did you come to visit me? Where you driving or in a plane?

(Pause)

You know...don't you? It's all lies. Who is this John Quaker person anyway? What is this hospital? Tell me, Kristen. Tell me.

(Low)

What should I do?

Stage lights dim.

Spotlight on MICHAEL and the head. The others hold frozen.

KRISTIN

(Effect mic)

I want you to have the surgery, too.

(Pause)

It's the only way you'll know everything.

MICHAEL

I'm not having this surgery.

KRISTIN

(Effect mic)

Michael. They're already preparing the room.

MICHAEL

How do you know?

KRISTEN

(Effect mic)

They have your X-rays. They have your paperwork. They have everything they need to go ahead with it. You've already...volunteered.

MICHAEL

No! I haven't! I haven't done anything but try to find you. Answer my questions!

(Growing emotional)

Please...please, Kristin. Were you going to leave me? Were you running away? Or is Fiersgaard, the doctor, that, that, John Quaker, the girl in the lobby, the rat in your mouth -- all they all a pack of criminals. What's real? Have I fallen asleep? Answer me!

(Long pause)

Answer me.

KRISTEN

(Effect mic)

I have only one suggestion.

(Pause)

Use lots of anesthetic.

Stage lights rise again. THE DOCTOR, QUAKER, and FIERSGAARD grab MICHAEL's arms. He struggles to break free. He screams as they drag him from the stage.

Lights down.

ACT I

SCENE 7

Operating Room.

THE DOCTOR, exhausted, stands beside a bloodstained surgical table. MICHAEL's body lies headless.

FIERSGAARD stands besides, in suit and mask, hands behind his back.

THE DOCTOR

I'm exhausted.

(Pause)

He struggled quite a bit, didn't he? You know, Fiersgaard, sometimes I have dreams that I'm under that same knife, as healthy as that Michael Rowan was, and I can't get out. The mask. It's over my face. The gas, pushing into my lungs, doesn't have any effect, except that it smells strangely sweet, like, like pans full of blood or copper pennies left in pockets.

(Smiling)

You know me: I always get whimsical after an operation.

FIERSGAARD

Yes you do, sir.

THE DOCTOR

Why is that? Why do I dip into melancholia, even when I've done the correct thing, and the surgery has gone well. I did this one without an assistant, even. Miss Blessing was still nauseous from the rat. I don't blame her, though, Fiersgaard. I, too, would have been woozy if I had to keep that turning plastic rat in my mouth one second too long. And you were a great help. You're surprisingly strong.

FIERSGAARD steps behind the doctor, seated in his chair.

THE DOCTOR (Continued)

I'm glad that you are on my side. You're in my dreams  
(MORE)

THE DOCTOR (Continued)

sometimes, too, Fiersgaard. You're face isn't like I know it. Instead, you're covered by a strange mask. Like that of a clown. And I think to myself, who's behind that mask? Is it my mother? Is it my father -- the windbag, the man of science, the one who taught me my trade? No. It's myself. The better version of me. The one without a scalpel, but with a conscience. The real doctor. Am I--

THE DOCTOR turns, smiling, to find FIERSGAARD directly behind him. FIERSGAARD graphically murders THE DOCTOR.

When the act is finished, FIERSGAARD pushes the decapitated body of MICHAEL ROWAN from the operating table, and then lifts THE DOCTOR into the same spot.

He takes a bone saw from the rack of instruments.

He leans in, to saw off the head.

Lights down.



ACT I

SCENE 8

Hospital waiting room.

Now with her entire body intact,  
KRISTEN ROWEN sits holding JOHN  
QUAKER's hand.

KRISTEN

Guilty.

QUAKER

Oh, darling, you shouldn't. You should feel *free*. He came here of his own free will. The records will show he submitted voluntarily. All the paperwork's in order. His X-Rays were submitted.

KRISTEN

What about yours? You said they took yours as well.

QUAKER

Destroyed. As I asked.

(Pause)

Don't worry, darling. With the help of the doctor, we're together now and that's all that matters.

KRISTEN

I know. I know that. But I feel that I'm in some sort of black, black movie.

QUAKER

It's not a horror film, Kristen. It's what we decided two months ago, come to pass.

KRISTEN

Has it been that long? It seems like years. The script--

QUAKER

Went perfectly--

KRISTEN

As we rehearsed.

QUAKER

Every line.

KRISTEN

More than a horror film.

QUAKER

A zombie film, a ghost story, a slasher stab-the-girl-in-the-throat splinter group. No, no, even better. The *surgical* sub-genre. A hospital film. Long hallways and tracking shots. Red blood on white walls. Beautiful displays of sharp and intimidating instruments -- ones that could equally be used for torture as for healing.

(Shivers)

I'm glad I'm not on the receiving end of it, I can tell you that. The best I can take is a tap on the knees. A reflex test. I've always been scared of doctors. Did you know that?

KRISTEN

(Snuggling)

I learn something new about you every day.

Enter FIERSGAARD, in mask.

QUAKER rises.

QUAKER

I'm very proud of you, Fiersgaard. I'll have to pay you a little extra. You really went to the nines. That suit, that mask. Really disconcerting stuff. Love it, love it, love it.

FIERSGAARD nods. QUAKER shakes the man's hand.

QUAKER (Continued)

Well done. Very, very good. You're fearless. I like that. And how about that Cassandra Blessing chick? Did you -- you let her live, right?

FIERSGAARD nods.

QUAKER (Continued)

(To KRISTEN)

I love this guy. Does things *to the letter*. I was nervous about letting that b-grade stripper go, but she doesn't really know anything, now does she? And I liked her style. That slut thing wasn't a put-on. She was really naughty.

KRISTEN

(Concerned)

I didn't know you knew her.

QUAKER

What's that?

KRISTEN

I didn't know you knew her, John. You said that she was the doctor's friend. His assistant or something?

QUAKER

Oh. Well, she was. I didn't know her from Adam before all this. We just needed a girl to lure Michael into the hospital. So, who cares that she also has a past -- before the medical calling, so ta speak, before this gig here tonight. So she liked to show her boobies. Lots of girls do.

KRISTEN

We shouldn't have let her go. We should have killed her with the doctor.

QUAKER

(To FIERSGAARD)

Do you know where she is?

FIERSGAARD nods.

QUAKER (Continued)

See, honey, we can get her any time. Any time we want. She'll be in dumpster by morning.

(To FIERSGAARD)

What'd you do with the head? Michael's.

FIERSGAARD retrieves a box from the doorway. He holds it up for QUAKER, who crosses and takes it from FIERSGAARD.

QUAKER (Continued)

Oooh. Big and heavy. Thick-skulled jerk. Didn't know a thing, did he? Kristen: want to keep it on the shelf? A memento?

KRISTEN

(Disgusted)

No. Definitely not. Just get rid of it.

QUAKER

Maybe we should have a look.

QUAKER starts to open the box.

KRISTEN

No, don't.

QUAKER

Why not? Don't you want to see the expression on his face?

KRISTEN

Despite what you think, John...I didn't hate him.

QUAKER

You didn't? Coulda fooled me.

KRISTEN

Just get rid of it.

Pause. QUAKER hands the box to FIERSGAARD.

QUAKER

Ditch it. Someplace discreet. Or, better yet, burn it in the ovens in the basement. Heads burn, right? Well, for  
(MORE)

QUAKER (Continued)

the most part I bet. Maybe take it out when it's cooled and smash the skull with a hammer. They'll need one of those specialists from the museum of natural history to piece it back together. Is that right!

FIERSGAARD stands with the box.

QUAKER (Continued)

Well? Go on.

(In stuffy accent)

To the ovens, my dear fellow.

QUAKER dusts his hands.

FIERSGAARD opens the box.

He pulls out the head inside.

It is not Michael's, but THE DOCTOR's.

QUAKER (Continued)

(Taken aback)

Where did you get that!

FIERSGAARD removes his mask.

It's MICHAEL behind.

FIERSGAARD / MICHAEL

From his neck.

QUAKER

(Trembling)

How did you -- they killed you! I know it. I helped them tie you down, I watched until the second the saw touched your Adam's apple, you fucking prick, how DID you DO IT!

MICHAEL

With this.

MICHAEL holds up the plane receipt.

QUAKER

What's that? What is that?

QUAKER comes forward to snatch it from MICHAEL, but stops.

KRISTEN

It's that phony receipt.

QUAKER

(To MICHAEL)

That's not *real*. That's made on carbon paper. Run through a machine for a dime at the print shop.

MICHAEL

It's real. As real as anything else in this hospital. If Kristen can be in two places at once, why can't I? I've been protecting myself all along. My own little guardian angel.

QUAKER grabs KRISTEN's hand and yanks her towards the door.

QUAKER

(To KRISTEN)

Come on, *Kristen*. Let's go back to my house. I've got a revolver with six shots. I'm gonna do this the old fashioned way. Cold-blooded murder with a bullet through the forehead of his fucking clown mask.

KRISTEN looks back to MICHAEL.

She resists QUAKER's drag until he stops pulling her, just by the door.

KRISTEN

(To MICHAEL)

Is that what it took? For you to be strong? It took a rival?

MICHAEL

He's not my rival.

QUAKER

You're damn right I'm not! I'm your killer. Hear me, Rowan?

KRISTEN

(To QUAKER)

Shhh.

(To MICHAEL)

I tried for a long time to see what you were made of. You never gave an effort. You just shrunk and shrunk until you were a microdot. A pinprick. A little pebble in my high heels. Didn't you notice how small you were becoming?

MICHAEL

I did. I noticed.

KRISTEN

You don't seem so small anymore. Even though one of you is a head shorter. Odd, isn't it?

MICHAEL

Is it odd that I came here to find you? You must have known I would have done that. You counted on it. Your whole plan to keep me asleep and cut me in two was based on my obsession with finding you, at all risks, even here. Here in a place that makes little sense. Though I'm beginning to understand the possibilities.

KRISTEN

Like acting as your own guardian angel.

MICHAEL

Like revenge on the two of you.

QUAKER

Revenge? Bah. You haven't got the guts.

MICHAEL holds up the box with THE DOCTOR's head.

QUAKER (Continued)

Ha, that? A one time only bit a' blood. You haven't --

MICHAEL steps forward quickly with the box.

QUAKER (Continued)

Get it away, get it away. I don't want to see that old man's face again.

MICHAEL

If you open this a second time, whose head will you see then? Yours? Or maybe hers? Anything's possible here. Anything at all.

Pause.

QUAKER

I'm leaving to get my revolver. You had better...not... move.

QUAKER tugs KRISTEN to the door and grabs the handle.

MICHAEL

Kristen?

(Pause)

I have only one suggestion.

(Pause)

Avoid the teeth.

Sound grows. Horrible gnashing.  
Stamping little feet.

The door shakes in its moorings and QUAKER backs away from the handle.



MICHAEL (Continued)

I've let loose the plastic rats. There were hundreds of them. They've made it to the other parts of the hospital, including the exits.

QUAKER

I don't believe you.

MICHAEL

It's true.

KRISTEN

It's true.

QUAKER

Bah!

MICHAEL

(To KRISTEN)

Good luck. And yes, I would have liked to have had children. Now it's the rats for you, darling. The rats.

QUAKER puts his hand again on the rattling door handle. He looks back to the other two. After a long deliberation, the sounds growing stranger and louder...

...he opens it.

Blackout.