

Unearthing the Tramp
by
Nicholas Priore

UNEARTHING THE TRAMP

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UNEARTHING THE TRAMP

*For all my friends and family, mentors and cohorts at The
Actors Studio Drama School...past, present and future...and in
loving memory of those we've since lost...*

*...Chris Presley
...Steve Nicholas
...Lawrence Sharp
...Elizabeth Kemp
...James Lipton
...Mekeva McNeil
...Edward Allan Baker*

May this list grow no longer...

UNEARTHING THE TRAMP

Characters:

GANTSCHO GANEV, Polish refugee, 38, big and burly, with a heavy heart and stone face that never smiles or laughs...right-handed.

ROMAN WARDAS, Polish refugee, 24, thin and nimble, with a light heart and animated face that is rich with smiles and laughter...left-handed.

Setting:

Corsier-sur-Vevey, Switzerland, March of 1978

Place:

A cemetery in the hills over Lake Geneva

Time:

Twilight

Music:

A collection of specified songs written by Charlie Chaplin

Note:

The tone of this story exists somewhere in-between the absurdity of the situation, evident in the more comical nature of one character, and the very real circumstances that have led to it, evident in the more tragic nature of the other character...with a certain musicality of language that is to be naturalized by all the physical activity.

A brief intermission may be placed between Scene 1 and Scene 2 if necessary, but it all plays well in one sitting.

UNEARTHING THE TRAMP

Unearthing the Tramp was first produced off-Broadway as part of the 2010 Actors Studio Drama School Repertory Season at Dance New Amsterdam Studios in Manhattan, NY, kicking off the entire event, with the following team...

Director:

Norma Medina

Cast:

GANTSCHO...Beau Berglund

ROMAN...Anthony Cotto

Set Design:

Shawn Lewis

Lights:

Matthew Bright

Props:

Meghan Buchannon

Costumes:

Ciera Wells

Sound:

David Pinkard

Fight Choreography:

Ron Piretti

Stage Manager:

Joseph Onorato

Photography:

Scott Wynn

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Promotional Services:

Samuella Becker

Production Mentor:

Elizabeth Kemp

Company Manager:

Peter Dean

Special thanks to my wonderful Mother and Grandmother for introducing me to the glory of storytelling...and for everything...

And thank you, as always, to NSP...

UNEARTHING THE TRAMP

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SCENE 1

Curtain rises. “Candilejas”, from Chaplin’s “Limelight”, plays as moonlight graces an ocean of fog that makes an island of the hilltop where a lone headstone rests, with an engraving of an angel and a holy cross over a name that is somewhat obscured by dirt. GANTSCHO and ROMAN both stand in a shallow hole near the stone, at about eye level with it, digging up dirt from the grave...they will dig themselves deeper and deeper during this, speaking through action and exhaustion. Both men are wearing caps that they will take off from time to time, wiping sweat and dirt from their brows. There is a supply bag on the ground close by with some rope spilling out of it. A flickering white light frames our characters, chopping up their movements to simulate the texture and frame rate of a silent picture, over the clicking hum of an old film projector. Roman is apparently frightened, startled at various noises of the night, looking over his shoulder with caution every so often. After a bit, the clicking slows to a stop and the white light flickers out as we settle into the reality of our story. “Candilejas” begins to fade when Roman, out of breath, stops and leans on his spade to rest...Gantscho takes notice.

GANTSCHO. Why do you keep stopping?

ROMAN. My arms ache so bad.

GANTSCHO. *Keep digging and stop stopping. (Roman is startled once again by some noise or other, clutching his spade as a weapon as he looks out into the darkness.)* Keep your head down and get back to work...eyes on dirt and dig.

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ROMAN. (*Ominously.*) Eyes...all eyes on us...

GANTSCHO. It *does* all lie on us, no other allies...

ROMAN. No, *all* eyes on us...rows of onlooking eyes in the darkness...

GANTSCHO. (*Looking outward.*) Those are just *your* eyes playing tricks.

ROMAN. ...it feels like we're being watched.

GANTSCHO. No one is watching.

ROMAN. How do you know?

GANTSCHO. Because we haven't gotten caught, why would anyone care enough to just sit quietly and observe our behavior?

ROMAN. Maybe they find it amusing, they could be waiting to see how this all plays out.

GANTSCHO. Are we that special?

ROMAN. To command an audience? Maybe...you always say how important our story is.

GANTSCHO. To us...that doesn't mean it matters to anyone else...no one wants to hear a real human story...humanity is of little interest anymore, only silly surreal celestial nonsense.

ROMAN. Silly and surreal feels closer to real life than anything else these days.

GANTSCHO. (*Beat.*) Maybe so...either way, no one cares, now less discussion and more...

ROMAN. (*Listening closely.*) Cicho ("*Quiet*".)! You don't hear that?

GANTSCHO. (*Listens.*) I hear nature at nighttime, now ignore it and dig.

ROMAN. But someone should look out for...

GANTSCHO. (*Stops digging.*) Alright then (*Roman has a short-lived triumph.*)...I'll go look around while you finish up, how does that sound?

ROMAN. I had thought that maybe *I* should...

GANTSCHO. You what?

ROMAN. I just thought...

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GANTSCHO. Don't think, just dig...you're so afraid someone might see us, so stop looking around and keep your eyes on the ground...sooner we're done, the sooner we're gone.

ROMAN. But what if someone comes before we finish?

GANTSCHO. Then we're undertakers, so make like one and dig...

ROMAN. One hell of an undertaking.

GANTSCHO. ...and who comes to a cemetery at night anyway?

ROMAN. You mean *besides* us?

GANTSCHO. Exactly, there is nobody here but us.

ROMAN. (*Looking around at distant graves and then down at the one beneath him.*) Does that not depend on what you mean by *here*?

GANTSCHO. (*Holding his spade threateningly.*) I will *bury* you inside another man's grave!

ROMAN. But I *cannot* feel my *arms*!

GANTSCHO. I thought you said they were aching...if you can no longer feel your aching arms, then they no longer ache, now dig.

ROMAN. *Wait...what?*

GANTSCHO. Continuous suffering is self-defeating so long as you don't give in to it and live in it long enough to grow numb...taking all these breaks to relax before it maxes out only makes it worse and renews your sense of agony, allowing the pain to wax and wane all over again, so stop whining and complaining and *keep on*...

ROMAN. *Wait.....what?*

GANTSCHO. (*Massaging his temple.*) You simple, simple man...just take my word for it and dig.

ROMAN. But my arms are about to fall off.

GANTSCHO. If they do, then you can stop, how's that? (*They both return to digging. Roman starts to grunt in pain and frustration.*) All that grunting makes you sound like a disgruntled little runt of a bitch's litter, stunted and bitter.

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ROMAN. Vocalizing helps to localize the discomfort in some sort of way.

GANTSCHO. Which is fine by me...utter all the guttural noises you need to, just be careful not to soil yourself.

ROMAN. I packed a spare pair of underwear in our supply sack.

GANTSCHO. At least you came prepared.

ROMAN. We should have brought a lantern, it's so dark out here.

GANTSCHO. Calls too much attention to itself...and we can't turn back now. I chose the night of a full moon for a reason, that's all the light we need.

ROMAN. (*Looking up at the full moon.*) I like it better as a crescent.

GANTSCHO. Just like your adolescent mind...barely showing itself, now give it a rest.

ROMAN. (*Stops digging.*) Oh, thank god.

GANTSCHO. Give your *mind* and your *mouth* a rest, as for the rest of you, get on with it before we get arrested for trespassing.

ROMAN. (*With a sign of the cross...resumes digging.*) Forgive us our trespasses as we pass the point of no return.

GANTSCHO. Save your prayers for a savior who actually cares about us and our bad behavior...if this is all too sinister for you, then have a minister administer a stern penance, but not until after the deed is done.

ROMAN. This menacing deed is indeed a sinister one...but confessing your sins absolves you of nothing.

GANTSCHO. As long as it solves our finances, I can purchase a new soul.

ROMAN. (*After a bit, stops digging.*) Are you sure this makes any sense at all?

GANTSCHO. You ask me that now?

ROMAN. I'm just a bit confused as to...

GANTSCHO. Were you listening when I first explained all this?

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ROMAN. You were talking very fast and excited...I...

GANTSCHO. Then why were you nodding along like you understood?

ROMAN. Because you always either get mad or make fun when I don't understand right away...

GANTSCHO. Jesteś żałosny ("*You are pathetic*")...plain and simple.

ROMAN. ...in a good mood, you make fun, in a bad mood, you get mad, but neither makes me happy...and it was just easier to trust that it made sense than try to fully understand...

GANTSCHO. Why do I bother?

ROMAN. ...and when you asked if I can dig, I wasn't sure if you meant the act of digging, or if I can dig what you were saying...so I just said yes.

GANTSCHO. Since when do I speak like an American jazz singer?

ROMAN. Slang is as much a part of language as...conjugation.

GANTSCHO. Big word, congratulations.

ROMAN. I thought you were trying out some new lingo...and that was step one of this long, extended process...

GANTSCHO. Suspended in limbo...

ROMAN. ...so I had to assume the rest of it would all work out in the end...

GANTSCHO. It will if we make it.

ROMAN. ...but now that I actually *think* about it...

GANTSCHO. Don't think, just dig!

ROMAN. But why *this* guy...who the hell is he?

GANTSCHO. It says right there...just read the engraving over the grave.

ROMAN. (*Looks at the stone and then back at Gantscho.*) You know I can't do that.

GANTSCHO. (*Stops digging.*) Tell you what...if you can read the name on that stone, you can go sit down while I finish up on my own.

ROMAN. You really mean it?

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GANTSCHO. Hurry up and sound it out. (*Roman sits on the edge of the hole and scoots over toward the stone, clearing it of dirt to reveal the name "Chaplin". He focuses hard on the engraving and begins to slowly sound out the name, vocalizing the most obnoxious vowel and consonant sounds that are not even close to matching the corresponding letters. Gantscho cringes at the unnerving sound coming from Roman's mouth until he cannot take it any longer.*) Alright, that's enough. (*He pulls Roman back into the hole.*)

ROMAN. Nie lubię Cię (*"I don't like you"*).

GANTSCHO. (*Massaging his temple.*) Boli mnie głowa (*"I've got a headache"*)...my head now aches because of you.

ROMAN. And my arms ache, so let's just take a break.

GANTSCHO. You've been resting every other minute while I've taken the brunt of all the grunt work, you weak little *cun-* (*Calming breath.*) continue your work...we're almost there, so just keep digging until we hit something. (*They both return to digging.*)

ROMAN. (*After a bit, still digging.*) I may be a simple man, but at least I am kind and empathetic.

GANTSCHO. It's good you can admit that.

ROMAN. Thank you...wait, admit what?

GANTSCHO. That you're kind of pathetic.

ROMAN. No, I didn't say *I'm* pathetic, I said *empathetic*.

GANTSCHO. Oh...emphasis on pathetic.

ROMAN. This plight of slight after slight is more than slightly upsetting.

GANTSCHO. (*Raising a fist.*) How about a slight of *hand*?!

ROMAN. And those fighting words are quite unsettling. This is no way to treat a person.

GANTSCHO. I'll treat your body like a fourth wall and break it.

ROMAN. If you only had a heart.

GANTSCHO. If you only had a brain.

ROMAN. Your rusty metal armor has no shine to it...

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GANTSCHO. Climb down off your wooden cross and go *stuff* yourself.

ROMAN. Belittling me just shows how little you can be...it must be a lot easier to humiliate a man than to show a little humility...

GANTSCHO. You humiliate yourself.

ROMAN. ...you can let go of that ego at any time.

GANTSCHO. As soon as you let go of that trusty old, musty security blanket.

ROMAN. I lost it a long time ago.

GANTSCHO. I'm talking about the imaginary one you cloak yourself in to ward off any sense of our dark and cold reality while you happily suck on your thumb.

ROMAN. You're extra salty tonight...

GANTSCHO. And you're still just tasteless...

ROMAN ...almost ritualistic in your insults...

GANTSCHO. Just wait until I finally go ballistic and break you down into another sad statistic.

ROMAN. ...Is it a part of your cultural heritage...do you rehearse all these disparaging remarks?

GANTSCHO. They come naturally and in large supply...a surplus reserve, plus some more.

ROMAN. And always manage to do some damage.

GANTSCHO. Then act your damn age...somehow, your bad spark plug and faulty wiring still have me firing on all cylinders...

ROMAN. Well put it in reverse and stop messing with me...you can be so ugly and smug.

GANTSCHO. Proficiency without efficiency can be a blessing and a curse, for better or worse.

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ROMAN. From my vantage point, it is most certainly a disadvantage, and only hinders our progress...taking all these digs at me is no way to make me dig any faster.

GANTSCHO. Must you lament and agonize over every antagonizing comment? I'm just venting my pent up...

ROMAN. Pardon me, but I have yet to grow numb to your relentless ridicule.

GANTSCHO. Then stop being so ridiculous...whether you're numb to the pain or just plain dumb, it doesn't seem as though my shots even land half the time anyway, they just fly right over your head...

ROMAN. Unfriendly fire...

GANTSCHO.so what's the harm in some verbal abuse if it helps to curb the disturbing, unbearable burden of collaborating with you on this elaborate plot to a parable without a lesson, (*Taking in a deep breath.*) as well as lessen the incessant urge to satisfy and purge my aggression by deliberately obliterating that pretty little face of yours while also liberating that thick head from your skinny little neck?

ROMAN. *Wait...*

GANTSCHO. (*Short of breath.*) I'm too tired, irritated and irate to reiterate.

ROMAN.*what?*

GANTSCHO. (*Massaging his temple.*) And there you have it...blissfully oblivious.

ROMAN. I *let* you believe that...

GANTSCHO. (*Sarcastically.*) Obviously...

ROMAN. I know you purposely use convoluted vocabulary to confuse me and amuse yourself.

GANTSCHO. (*Stops and scowls at Roman.*) Do I ever seem the least bit amused?

ROMAN. (*Beat.*) No...never.

GANTSCHO. Just a little rhetorical acrobatics (*Stretching and flexing his arms.*)...these fresh oratorical muscles need the occasional flexing.

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ROMAN. Not very impressive.

GANTSCHO. (*Back to digging.*) As for that perplexed expression, it doesn't need some long-winded, winding railroad of complex, unnecessary words on a local train of thought in order to find its way to your face, it takes the disoriented express route and gets there with ease.

ROMAN. (*Beat.*) With these what?

GANTSCHO. (*Indicating Roman's confused expression.*) See, right on time...Confusion with a *capital C*.

ROMAN. Hey...just because I can't read, it doesn't mean you're smarter than me.

GANTSCHO. It means that most children are smarter than you.

ROMAN. Well I learned English fairly well, did I not?

GANTSCHO. (*Beat.*) Remarkably well...like a toddler.

ROMAN. Thank you...

GANTSCHO. Oddly enough, you can learn as much from American pictures as you can from American literature...

ROMAN. At least in terms of the way they speak.

GANTSCHO. ...but regurgitating terminology like a parrot is not very original.

ROMAN. And there it is, all stick and no carrot...

GANTSCHO. Grin and bear it until we inherit our due...

ROMAN. What else can I do...and if anything, I am a pigeon.

GANTSCHO. Call me pigeon-holed, but I still prefer the old silent pictures...actions speak more clearly than words, and they still hold up to this day.

ROMAN. Sure, but only the talkies can teach you how to talk like them...and thanks to their own paranoia, we were treated to a nice little blacklist of outcast actors and directors to choose from...

GANTSCHO. You were quite the inaccurate curator.

ROMAN. ...even a lyricist or two...

GANTSCHO. I hate musicals...*yippy*, another song and dance!

ROMAN. ...mostly writers though...

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GANTSCHO. Rightfully so.

ROMAN. ...less discreet, I guess, more outspoken...

GANTSCHO. Defeated, discredited and edited out...without the necessary clout or privilege for their pledge of allegiance to remain alleged...

ROMAN. ...they must have taken all the heat...

GANTSCHO. ...on the edge of their heated seat...

ROMAN. ...while the rest all retreated.

GANTSCHO. ...or over a ledge.

ROMAN. No hedges to bet on breaking their fall...poor bastards.

GANTSCHO. Once again, rightfully so...power of the pen to manipulate cowardly men into followers...mutated words and ideas mutilate and shove as hatefully and as lovingly as serrated swords and shields, and those overrated creators that'll wield them on the field of battle are either to *yield*...or be herded up like cattle, muted accordingly and left utterly broken, hurting, unhealed and unheard from in an unheard of manner...forsaken and deserted by snakes mistaken as their own comrades and party members.

ROMAN. Alto Trombone, for one.

GANTSCHO. (*Beat.*) It's Dalton Trumbo, and don't even name his ill-reputed name, just call him number ten...friend or enemy, a real man stands by his work and his words...imagine naming a film *The Brave One* while behaving like a child and shamefully hiding under some *bullshit* alias...now that's *rich*...

ROMAN. I cried at the end...when the bull gets a full pardon and the boy gets to bring him back home.

GANTSCHO. ...they should have taken that golden statue and shoved it right up his sick old ass...and *then* down his throat...

ROMAN. Oooh, nasty.

GANTSCHO....if he hadn't just died, I would drown him in the bathtub and leave him to fester in his own stew.

ROMAN. Trumbo gumbo...that is disgusting and disturbing...

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GANTSCHO. If those pretentious clowns in tinsel town only knew what it was really like...

ROMAN. They do, in a way.

GANTSCHO. Not to the same degree.

ROMAN. Agree to disagree.

GANTSCHO. Discontent entertainers, greedy for attention.

ROMAN. How disenchanting. I rather enjoyed Spartacus...one for all and all for one.

GANTSCHO. That's *The Three Musketeers*, Dumas.

ROMAN. I'm not dumb, nor am I an ass, now work on your accent, it's thicker than a classic novel.

GANTSCHO (*Massaging his temple.*) No, I said—you've never even *looked* at a book.

ROMAN. And what I mean is...one man can be every man and every man can be one.

GANTSCHO. (*Stops digging.*) Not so fast...

ROMAN. (*Stops as well.*) What?

GANTSCHO. ...that's not what I took from it.

ROMAN. No?

GANTSCHO. Not exactly...quite the opposite, in fact.

ROMAN. How can that be?

GANTSCHO. Selective hearing, I suppose...or viewing, I should say. (*Returns to digging and so does Roman.*) Real propaganda rarely shows its filthy hand, be it left or right...it's not so proper and candid...minimal and subliminal are more effective means of correcting our collective resolve to remove that slave muzzle and solve our *own* puzzles...leaving very little room in the subtext for an eclectic or even objective perspective on a given subject...exhuming our human pride and inviting us out of spite to pick a side, any side, as they divide and conquer by sleight of hand...out of sight and out of our right minds...

ROMAN. Why talk about it when we can sing about it...you sure don't like musicals?

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GANTSCHO. ...storytelling can instrumentally implement and implant all types of mental trickery...we must have seen two completely different pictures on the same screen with similar scenery...two competing perversions in the Colosseum arena, one per version of a narrative no one even knows for sure, compensating for lack of a better world...

ROMAN. It's pretty imperative that we conserve our energy...can we *refrain* from using verses to converse?

GANTSCHO. ...a fusion of ill-fitting visions, one versus another...

ROMAN. (*Looking at the cross on the stone.*) Or a holy trinity in the same general vicinity.

GANTSCHO. ...with a common mission of pitting us against each other.

ROMAN. Speaking of paranoid...

GANTSCHO. No, just annoyed.

ROMAN. Not sure about all that, but it seems to me that what is *thought*, what is *said* and what is *heard* are rarely the same thing...and when it comes to content and commentary, audience appeal will always steal the show.

GANTSCHO. (*Scoffs.*) *Crass* assumptions about class for mass consumption...try to be everything and turn into nothing.

ROMAN. (*Quoting a hypothetical blurb from a typical film review.*) "A mighty tale on a large scale!"

GANTSCHO. "Move over, DeMille...a new kind of movie!"

ROMAN. Funny how the state condones a story of rebellion as long as it's told by one of their own...in the intended undertone of an old, finely-tuned alto trombone...bold as brass.

GANTSCHO. Funny how they spoke English in ancient Rome.

ROMAN. Although I do prefer a nice romantic comedy to a brutal historical epic or a dramatic coming of age.

GANTSCHO. Of course you do.

ROMAN. As for horror pictures, I'm too easily frightened.

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GANTSCHO. Of course you are...such a heightened sensitivity to the dark...

ROMAN. In stark contrast to the light...is that so wrong?

GANTSCHO. ...even after all that's befallen us for so long.

ROMAN. I'm more afraid of what's around the corner...where we might end up (*Suddenly startled once more by some noise or other.*)...and I don't like being startled.

GANTSCHO. A comical philharmonic is more or less the same as a symphony of horror.

ROMAN. Sure...one makes you piss yourself, the other makes you shit yourself.

GANTSCHO. Either way, you're soiled...Nosferatu by F. W. Murnau was the epitome of fear to me...with his long decrepit fingers...it lingered in the pit of my stomach for years.

ROMAN. (*Stops digging.*) Wait...this isn't...we're not...

GANTSCHO. (*Stops digging.*) You're not about to ask me if we're digging up a vampire's coffin, are you?

ROMAN. (*Beat.*) No...

GANTSCHO. Good. (*Resumes digging and so does Roman.*)

ROMAN. ...but that would be a valuable specimen to collect...and it would certainly raise the stakes.

GANTSCHO. If anything, we're the nocturnal ones looking to drain someone for our own gain and sustenance.

ROMAN. I know vampires aren't real...ghosts on the other hand...

GANTSCHO. There's no sense in being afraid of a dead man, only the living can harm you.

ROMAN. That's true, I'm haunted by your taunting every day...

GANTSCHO. And I, by the flaunting of all your foolishness.

ROMAN. Why watch some ghoulish creature feature when there's a monster right beside me at arm's reach? No thank you, I'll stick to my lighter fare.

GANTSCHO. Fair enough.

ROMAN. Roman Holiday was fun...delightful really...

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GANTSCHO. It was abysmal, you just like the title, and it was probably slapped on after the fact...can't even remember who wrote that one...some common no-name commie.

ROMAN. ...cute little love story about exploiting a celebrity...good characters, witty interactions...not the worst way to learn a new language...

GANTSCHO. Behavior is more universal.

ROMAN. ...not sure why you insist we use it so consistently, but as always, I do what you say...how can I resist?

GANTSCHO. It's the language of freedom...

ROMAN. And materialism...

GANTSCHO. ...and opportunity.

ROMAN. ...*and* imperialism...

GANTSCHO. Stop throwing *isms* at me...your linguistic prism is projecting an artistic spectrum of colorful words with little to no definition. (*To Roman's puzzled expression.*) That's a euphemism for you don't know what the hell you're talking ab-

ROMAN. ...*oh*, and a growing schism within a two-party system...a grand canyon of opinion.

GANTSCHO. Unity and liberty can coexist.

ROMAN. We're taking quite a few liberties here tonight.

GANTSCHO. And not with impunity...it's just smarter and safer to communicate this way.

ROMAN. Even amongst ourselves?

GANTSCHO. Might as well get used to it.

ROMAN. And who are you fooling with that accent?

GANTSCHO. I am not about to adopt some generic dialect or transatlantic accent to make the local people feel more comfortable...but until *our* people stop holding their tongue, I will refrain from speaking it...what good is language if they choose not to use it?

ROMAN. Says the man who is always trying to stifle me.

GANTSCHO. Never seems to be a deterrent...try saying something worthwhile once in a while...you're inherently incoherent, if you weren't already aware.

UNEARTHING THE TRAMP

ROMAN. I'm not the one constantly ranting and raving on one tangent after another, rather than saving his breath...cut me some slack and be a little more taut about expressing your thought process...especially while suppressing mine...I'm not just some depository for your suppository storytelling, with no apologies for all of these abundantly redundant anal orgies and *total* orgies.

GANTSCHO. (*Beat.*) Okay, I'm not positive...

ROMAN. Not at all.

GANTSCHO. ...but I suppose you mean expository, analogies and...tautologies?

ROMAN. To hell with spelling and pronunciation...and it's *like* a suppository, the way you're shitting out all this self-righteous babble.

GANTSCHO. (*Beat.*) What can I say...when you're right, you're right.

ROMAN. Really? I guess we are in agreement.

GANTSCHO. Either we are or we aren't.

ROMAN. No argument there...no wonder you're never wrong...would you mind saying that again in different terms?

GANTSCHO. Who taught you about tautologies and exposition?

ROMAN. I learned by observation...from the same man who brought me on this expedition into perdition and put us in this awkward position, distraught and fraught with contempt, attempting to monopolize the conversation with polarizing declarations along the way.

GANTSCHO. I will not apologize for choosing to monologize when the moment calls for it...

ROMAN. It's all very uncalled for.

GANTSCHO. As long as I keep digging while doing it, I'll reprise any motif that, in my belief, bears repeating.

ROMAN. Abusing and beating it to death with a staff...as if the physical labor is not adequate enough, you have to belabor as well.

UNEARTHING THE TRAMP

GANTSCHO. Can't help it...we have more to offer than just...dirty hands and broken backs. (*Roman stops briefly, wiping the dirt from his hands and rubbing his lower back, and then resumes digging.*) We have our voices...and the choice of either using them, or letting the ellipsis eclipse all the words on our lips...no one can take that away from us...

ROMAN. Are you sure?

GANTSCHO. ...so for now, we keep our voices and our heads down, concentrate on this labor of hate...and when the time comes to speak up one day, we will have one hell of a story to tell...

ROMAN. Sounds incriminating.

GANTSCHO. ...The ending may be uncertain, but at least we stepped out from behind that curtain of irony...rather than waiting for it to rise on us.

ROMAN. Nothing scarier than a forbidden barrier...I'd rather watch it fall.

GANTSCHO. Along with that graffiti-ridden wall in Berlin.

ROMAN. And who are we off to see about that...the wizard of Oz or Merlin?

GANTSCHO. Our eyes may never see the day...and in the meantime, we cannot continue to sit and rot inside this putrid neutral shell of a country...especially after tonight. This was only ever meant to be a *temporary* backdrop.

ROMAN. Yet here we are...still in a state of isolation...nothing is ever meant to be.

GANTSCHO. What kind of army uses a dull knife as a weapon anyway? The kind without any fight, that's what...no edge whatsoever.

ROMAN. (*Pulls a Swiss Army Knife from his pocket.*) More of a tool than a weapon really. (*Hands it to Gantscho.*) Here, look at all the different functions. (*Gantscho feigns interest for a sarcastic moment, pretending to examine the knife before throwing it into the darkness.*) Hey, that might have proven useful!

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GANTSCHO. A blade without a point is pointless.

ROMAN. That is true.

GANTSCHO. (*Indicating their spades.*) These are the only tools we need right now. (*They return to digging.*)

ROMAN. (*After a bit, still digging.*) So...if we won't be staying here, then...what's the next installment in our little adventure?

GANTSCHO. We head out west after this.

ROMAN. I see...all the way?

GANTSCHO. That would probably be best.

ROMAN. I'm not so sure...might be more of the same...or possibly even *more* wicked than the east.

GANTSCHO. We can be who we are there.

ROMAN. And who might that be?

GANTSCHO. (*With a thought and then a shrug.*) Anyone we want.

ROMAN. Not necessarily.

GANTSCHO. How would you know?

ROMAN. I know more than you *know*.

GANTSCHO. You will never know more than me!

ROMAN. No, I meant that I know more than you know that *I* know...more than you think, I mean.

GANTSCHO. (*Beat.*) Okay then.

ROMAN. But I *am* a better mechanic.

GANTSCHO. Who *trained* you? Who took the hopeless illiterate under his right wing so you could learn to work with those little hands?

ROMAN. Right, and taught me everything you know.

GANTSCHO. No, I taught you everything *you* know...and let me tell you, I know a hell of a lot more than anyone gives me credit for.

ROMAN. (*After a bit, still digging.*) Well people like me better.

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GANTSCHO. People love a simple man to make them feel that much smarter and this insane world seem a little less complicated...

ROMAN. That's *right...and* I'm better looking.

GANTSCHO. You're just *younger...*let another fifteen years weigh you down, and then see...

ROMAN. It *has* weighed you down quite a *bit...*better loosen that belt buckle, Fatty Arbuckle.

GANTSCHO. Shots at my weight, how witty of you to pick such low-hanging fruit.

ROMAN. (*Laughing.*) Let's not talk about low-hanging fruit, I've seen those droopy crab apples of yours...do they get all wet when you sit on the toilet for a shit or what?

GANTSCHO. So very vulgar...

ROMAN. I'm sorry, is crap less offensive? How about pooppy?

GANTSCHO. ...vile and juvenile.

ROMAN. Too bad the banana doesn't hang as low...is that why you're so angry?

GANTSCHO. Keep on pecking, little woodpecker, this wood is *impeccable*.

ROMAN. (*Laughing even harder.*) Better a little woodpecker than a little peckerwood...see how your poor choice of words only sets me up for another low blow?

GANTSCHO. That is so low-brow...simple humor for the simple man.

ROMAN. I'll admit, I'm not nearly as layered as you are.

GANTSCHO. (*Agitated.*) And back to that again...

ROMAN. A distended man should not throw condescending stones when his own stones are constantly descending.

GANTSCHO. You're about to be floating face down on the surface of Lake Geneva.

ROMAN. Even a cadaver on the water is not as bloated as your face.

GANTSCHO. *Hey...*let me tell you something, little boy, when *I* was your age...

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ROMAN. Okay, okay, calm down, old man...

GANTSCHO. Don't *call* me that! Who just dug this entire hole by himself while you kept stopping to cry about it? I may have more years behind me than you, but I'll bet I got more ahead of me too.

ROMAN. Not unless you (*Stops laughing, suddenly assessing the situation.*)...you *actually* plan to *kill* me...

GANTSCHO. (*Massaging his temple.*) What?

ROMAN. (*Sneaking suspicion.*)...lure me out here just to bury me inside this grave like you said!

GANTSCHO. These are all empty *threats*. (*He rubs his temple harder, digging his knuckle into it.*)

ROMAN. (*Afraid, clutching his spade for protection.*) I should have *known*...

GANTSCHO. What *exactly* would I have to gain by that?

ROMAN. Who cares? What does anyone have to gain by anything?

GANTSCHO. (*Outward.*) The philosopher, ladies and gentlemen.

ROMAN. What impact would it have if you knocked my head off right now?

GANTSCHO. *Quite* an impact.

ROMAN. *Really*...you would bury me on top of this guy, where nobody would ever think to look...that is if anyone would think to look at *all*...if they'd even notice.

GANTSCHO. Would you *stop*, we don't have time for...

ROMAN. You tell me who is here to notice...you said it yourself, no one cares about us.

GANTSCHO. Our families do.

ROMAN. My *family* is back home.

GANTSCHO. That's right, and they're *waiting*...and don't ever let me hear you call that place home.

ROMAN. It *is* my home, and there's no place like it.

GANTSCHO. (*Growing angry.*) I said, don't *call* it that, Dorothy!

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ROMAN. Our blood runs ruby red, the same as theirs.

GANTSCHO. Not *my* blood, maybe yours, shall we find out?

ROMAN. Those emerald green eyes were unable to recognize what we already had.

GANTSCHO. Whatever I had is already unrecognizable to me.

ROMAN. Well *I* had a *life* there.

GANTSCHO. That was living?

ROMAN. And *this is*? We are living in exile.

GANTSCHO. We exiled ourselves...*willfully*.

ROMAN. The devil sought refuge from heaven, you see how well *that* worked out.

GANTSCHO. We are not the devil and that was not heaven.

ROMAN. So what is this, purgatory?

GANTSCHO. Better than a living hell.

ROMAN. No wonder they call it asylum, I'm losing my goddamn mind!

GANTSCHO. Not much of a loss...pretty sure you can find it where the sun doesn't shine.

ROMAN. Doesn't shine very much at all...not on us. We may be *allowed* here, but we sure as hell are not *welcome*...face it, we are unwanted guests that they can't turn away but do *not* have to embrace, and if you think they ever will, then you're as simple as you say that I am. No matter how far west we go, it's the same old story and you know it.

GANTSCHO. I know it all too well...so they don't like us, to hell with them! To hell with *socialization* and to hell with *naturalization*, it's unnatural in *any* nation.

ROMAN. I'm *nobody* here.

GANTSCHO. You were somebody *there*?

ROMAN. I had a purpose...a station.

GANTSCHO. Imposed upon you. Every last individual is nobody where we come from.

ROMAN. So how come I still feel that way *now*?

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GANTSCHO. It's been deeply rooted since you were born and never once disputed...also, *you did* nothing to refute or disprove it.

ROMAN. How can I with your disapproval looming over me?

GANTSCHO. Not with passive aggression (*Scooping up some dirt and heaving it over his shoulder.*)...with a massive upheaval...

ROMAN. You leave no room for improvement.

GANTSCHO ...now is your chance...*our* chance...

ROMAN. For what?

GANTSCHO. ...to enhance our social status...

ROMAN. Ooh, fancy...

GANTSCHO. ...and advance in this evil world.

ROMAN. Look at us! Is this what you call forward movement? We're heading toward a wall...

GANTSCHO. Better than a dead end...

ROMAN. Your passion for crashing and burning is even more concerning than your lack of compassion...we came to earn some cash, not become ash inside of an urn.

GANTSCHO. Can't even afford one...if you died, I would stash you in an ashtray...and then, I'd dump it in the trash after a day or two.

ROMAN. Wonderful...so maybe they're right after all.

GANTSCHO. (*Angry.*) Wypraszam sobie ("*I beg your pardon*".)?!

ROMAN. Maybe I'm just *nobody*...let's call a spade a spade.

GANTSCHO. (*Indicating his spade.*) *This* is called a spade, now use it!

ROMAN. If *you* used it to knock my head off and bury me over this guy...nothing would ever come of it. Even if you laid me out and displayed me for all to see, no one would ever bat an eye about it. So what do I really matter in...what would *change* in the world if I disappeared?

GANTSCHO. Well, for *one*, the bell of intelligence would shift dramatically—

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ROMAN. So *you* then...what do *you* matter...*anyone*...what does any *one* person matter in the world?

GANTSCHO. Depends on the person, if everyone's a star, then no one is...we can't all be remarkable, or make lasting marks, but we should all be able to carve out a life of our own...

ROMAN. Or starve to death.

GANTSCHO ...and try our best not to leave a scar.

ROMAN. (*With a shrug.*) What difference does it even make?

GANTSCHO. (*Stops digging.*) Oh, I see, this is not just about feeling insignificant and sorry for yourself...you really believe that a man alone does not matter...that he's nothing more than a gear in the machine, is that right? A tool to be used for the supposed greater good and then disposed of when it breaks. Well if that's the case, then maybe you should just go on back and blend in with all the rest of the blind and the bland...but make sure not to stand out, because you know what happens if they happen to notice you.

ROMAN. So why did we have to leave in the first place?

GANTSCHO. Wypraszam sobie!?

ROMAN. Now we can never go back.

GANTSCHO. To that hellhole...that pit full of pitiful souls...you would if you were able to?

ROMAN. (*Hesitant.*) Yes...I would.

GANTSCHO. Jesteś żaloszny.

ROMAN. Were you expecting some *mass exodus*?

GANTSCHO. No, I'd say this is adequate enough.

ROMAN. Really?

GANTSCHO. (*Massaging his temple.*) An exodus is, by definition, massive, just as adequacy is already enough...we went through all this before.

ROMAN. I guess your repetitive nature is rubbing off on me.

GANTSCHO. Too bad it's not my competitive nature, you might be able to keep up.

ROMAN. And that's just semantics.

GANTSCHO. So what? (*Indicating Roman.*) *These* are just

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some antics.

ROMAN. A last resort after so many nasty retorts...the final recourse of a frantic man with no remorse, whose logical clock is running out. Well I haven't lost my place in our discourse as of yet, and I'm not letting you throw me off course.

GANTSCHO. Of course not.

ROMAN. The unprofitable prophet, talking down to me because he'll never be able to address the aggressive masses...well guess what, Moses, even if you *could* part that red sea, it eventually closes, and even still, it poses the question...is everyone just as miserable as you are?

GANTSCHO. (*Beat.*) They don't know any better...do I really need to justify and defend why we *must* defy that system?

ROMAN. Was it so terrible? (*Reaches into their bag and pulls out two apples.*) Were we ever hungry? (*Bites into one and holds out the other for Gantscho, speaking with a mouthful.*) I never knew what it was to be hungry until...

GANTSCHO. (*Swats the apple out of Roman's offering hand and gets back to digging.*) You've always been so simple...I would rather fend for myself and drown in the deep end than have to depend on...

ROMAN. But why? By the weekend, I'm too weakened even to enjoy it, we are painfully employed.

GANTSCHO. I will not be *undermined* by a feeble mind...keep on shoveling shit if that's how you like it, see how it sticks.

ROMAN. And what do you call this?

GANTSCHO. (*Beat.*) Well why the hell did you come along in the first place?

ROMAN. (*Picks the apple up out of the dirt.*) Because I always figure that you know better than me (*Wiping off the dirty apple.*)...you've always done all the thinking for the both of us. (*Breathes on it and wipes it off some more.*) When you asked me to leave with you, did I even ask what your plan was? (*Examines the apple and offers it to Gantscho again.*) What did

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I ask?

GANTSCHO. *(Stops and looks at the apple for a moment, then down at the hole, and then submits to accepting the apple.)* You asked me how much time you had to pack. *(He takes a bite.)*

ROMAN. Even *now*...knee-deep in dirt, digging up a corpse, and not until this *very* moment did I ever question the idea...just followed along as we hollowed out this hallowed ground...never even asked his *name* until now and *(Beat.)*...tell me his name. *(Gantscho steps out of the way and indicates the engraving, inviting Roman to sound it out again. Roman concentrates briefly on the engraving and then looks back at Gantscho.)*

ROMAN. Nie lubię Cię. For a man who presents himself as resentful of an oppressive environment, you sure do seem obsessed with keeping me in my place...

GANTSCHO. Where would your tormented spirit be without my structure and form keeping it grounded?

ROMAN. Let's see...maybe flying over the Swiss Alps, free in the atmosphere, where it's not so crowded...or at most, orbiting the sphere without fear of falling or biting my tongue.

GANTSCHO. Your head is already in the clouds.

ROMAN. And where would your sunken structure be without my young, drunken energy?

GANTSCHO. Still stuck here in the sludge of our own drudgery.

ROMAN. And about to collapse...well it's about time for me to trust my own clouded lapse of judgment...instead of always believing that I'm as simple as you say...I should be leaving now.

GANTSCHO. Do you want to see your family again?

ROMAN. Not like this...I don't *like* this. Raiders in the night, invading a dead man who has been read his last rites and laid to rest in the cultural rights of some poultry...

GANTSCHO. Sepulture...

ROMAN. ...like a couple of lousy vultures, and here I am

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aiding and abetting instead of getting the hell out of here.

GANTSCHO. And where would you go?

ROMAN. What's next, we pillage a small, pleasant village of benevolent peasants?

GANTSCHO. We aren't violent men.

ROMAN. That is irrelevant and *this* is irreverent...we have begun our descent into a new identity as perpetual traitors and perpetrators...not a fair trade.

GANTSCHO. You don't think I would rather stay honest and decent...wholesome and upstanding and not standing in some hole? I sat down recently and did the math...we will die very old and lonely before earning the kind of money we need...this path only gets darker and more obscure.

ROMAN. Are you sure?

GANTSCHO. Unless we pitch a tent or sleep in a ditch, every red cent is spent on rent and nourishment...nearly a year now and we're still in the hole...

ROMAN. *I'll* say we are...

GANTSCHO. ...haven't earned even a fraction working here as mechanics, we can barely afford to live, let alone flourish. There's no time for decency...not for us...not today.

ROMAN. Not to overstate my distaste for disaster, but we may be starting a faster chain reaction of even more devastating conditions.

GANTSCHO. Common courtesy is not currently a form of currency...you can't smile and curtsy your way into affluence.

ROMAN. You're a bad influence.

GANTSCHO. No more distractions or abstract questions obstructing our tunnel-vision, you follow my instructions and we stay the course of action to finish the mission and demand satisfaction from our benefactors.

ROMAN. You're not factoring in the sad fact that we are in no position to demand anything.

GANTSCHO. Not yet...

ROMAN. ...better off panhandling for a hand-out or selling a

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pound of flesh.

GANTSCHO. If only our flesh and blood were worth a damn to anyone but us...these people are *professionals* and they *guarantee* a safe delivery, but their *services* are *expensive*.

ROMAN. Well that's refreshing...what is this, a hostage extraction?

GANTSCHO. Could be...and they do not accept homage as payment.

ROMAN. (*Scoffs.*) Professional *smugglers*...what an ugly profession...and how can they *guarantee* that?

GANTSCHO. This is not the time or place to scrutinize the...

ROMAN. But what if...

GANTSCHO. (*Abruptly.*) Listen to me very closely...we're in a grave situation here...

ROMAN. *I'll* say—

GANTSCHO. Stop that! By leaving the country, we made targets of everyone we know there.

ROMAN. What targets...for what? *We're* the indecent ones who left...they're *innocent*.

GANTSCHO. Do you really think that what we've done will go unpunished just because we are not around to pay the consequence? (*Beat.*) Someone or other has to suffer...hence, it will fall upon the heads of those we love unless we get them out of there right away...and there will be no trial, only tribulation.

ROMAN. Are you sure? That doesn't sound right.

GANTSCHO. Of course it's not *right*...

ROMAN. No, I mean...

GANTSCHO. You seem to think we have time to discuss this...the longer it takes for us to get the money, the less of a chance they have...this is our only option and we need that money *now*...unless you want your loved ones having to escape on their own the way *we* did. (*He discards his apple and returns to digging.*)

ROMAN. Through a mountainous landscape, like the von Trapp singing troupe...

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GANTSCHO. Unprotected from potential traps.

ROMAN. But...how do you know they'll punish our families?

GANTSCHO. I just *know*.

ROMAN. But *how?* (*Sudden thought.*) Is *that* what happened to...

GANTSCHO. *Enough...*

ROMAN. (*Realizing.*) That *is* what happened to your...

GANTSCHO. I said *ENOUGH!*

ROMAN. (*Beat.*) But that was...you were only a *boy*, it...it's been so *long*...

GANTSCHO. I know how old I am.

ROMAN. (*Dreadfully.*) You're telling me that sort of thing still happens? Secret police and all that?

GANTSCHO. They're there.

ROMAN. Thank you, but that's not very comforting.

GANTSCHO. No. *They are there*...everywhere you don't look.

ROMAN. And what happens when you see them?

GANTSCHO. It's no secret.

ROMAN. Tell me...

GANTSCHO. (*Sighs, stops digging.*) *First*, they cut off your rations...

ROMAN. They cut off your *what*?!

GANTSCHO. (*Massaging his temple.*) Your food supply (*Back to digging.*)...suddenly it starts depleting and you wonder why there's nothing left to eat, but you won't understand until you're older that the feeding hand can also refuse, in fact, it can strike at any time and only leave you bleeding...*anything* it provides can be snatched away at a moment's notice because nothing is ever yours, and so once you're starving, they come and take your house from you...or rather, remove you from it, because it was never your home...now there's nowhere to sleep...and it's cold...

ROMAN. And after that?

GANTSCHO. (*Stops again and looks at Roman with sincere*

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concern.) We have to hurry.

ROMAN. We have to warn them.

GANTSCHO. Too late for that.

ROMAN. You said we were going on ahead to clear a *path* for the rest to *follow*...I would have never come if I knew we were leaving them in any danger.

GANTSCH. That's why I've made these arrangements...

ROMAN. But...but...

GANTSCHO. (*Abruptly.*) My children are starving! As we speak, your sick father is starving! (*Beat.*) There's no going back, so let's stop talking about it and continue executing the plot.

ROMAN. (*Looking down.*) But I still see a very big *hole* in this plot...

GANTSCHO. Yes, and we're standing in it...now can we get this man out of the ground already?

ROMAN. But he's *dead*...how do you threaten the safety of a dead guy...he's *dead*!

GANTSCHO. You were the one who was too afraid to kidnap a *living* person.

ROMAN. That didn't mean I wanted to kidnap a *dead* one instead!

GANTSCHO. It's not *kidnapping*, it's *grave* robbing.

ROMAN. This is almost worse.

GANTSCHO. Not even close...disturbing the peace of the deceased, *trzy* ("*three*".) years at the most, as opposed to kidnapping, which could potentially get us sent back...and in this instance, that is just the same as a death sentence, with or without repentance.

ROMAN. But it just seems *wrong* to me and I thought we were on the *right* side of things...isn't that why we *left* in the...

GANTSCHO. Right or left, high or low, far and wide, there is no right side of things...

ROMAN. Nowhere to run and hide.

GANTSCHO. ...and to think that only confirms how simple

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you really are...dig.

ROMAN. This is consecrated ground!

GANTSCHO. It's *dirt*! Now dig. (*They both return to digging.*)

ROMAN. (*After a bit, stops digging.*) Why won't you tell me who he is?

GANTSCHO. You don't need to know, you need to dig.

ROMAN. Tell me.

GANTSCHO. Sound it out.

ROMAN. That's it, (*Driving his spade into the soil.*) I am now officially numb...to hell with this and to hell with you...I'll save my family on my own. (*He steps up and out of the hole and starts off.*)

GANTSCHO. (*Stops digging, drawing Roman back.*) You already *know* his name (*Roman stops, too stubborn to turn around yet.*)...everyone in the world knows his name (*Roman still won't turn around.*)...people who have never heard the name *Jesus Christ* know *this* man's name.

ROMAN. (*Turns around.*) Just tell me.

GANTSCHO. The greatest star of the silent film era, if not the...

ROMAN. Nice try...why would Buster Keaton be buried in Switzerland?

GANTSCHO. The dead-pan stunt-man? Please, that miserable stone-face bastard was *not* so great...

ROMAN. He was better than Charlie Chaplin...what a circus clown.

GANTSCHO. Watch it! That man is a buried treasure!

ROMAN. Buried treasure? (*Looks down.*) Wait...no...you mean this is (*After a beat, explodes into boisterous laughter.*)...

GANTSCHO. (*Offended and defensive.*) Why is that funny?

ROMAN. (*Speaking through laughter.*) So what *exactly* do we threaten to do then, bring him back to life?

GANTSCHO. (*Speaking over laughter.*) We can say that if they don't pay, then...we'll...dismember the body.

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ROMAN. Too late, we're already Marching our way into April.

GANTSCHO. Not December, *dismember*.

ROMAN. (*Stops laughing.*) You want to...chop Charlie Chaplin up?

GANTSCHO. We wouldn't actually *do* it, just pose a *threat* of it...

ROMAN. And what if they don't pay?

GANTSCHO. Oh I bet they will...because it's one thing to watch a loved one die, but it's something else to see them dehumanized. (*To Roman's puzzled expression.*) Reduced to nothing but pieces...beyond recognition...no longer resembling a person.

ROMAN. That is disgusting and disturbing.

GANTSCHO. I *said* we wouldn't really *do* it, remember?

ROMAN. But for your mind even to go there in the first place...disassembling a man for parts...if anything, we're demonizing *ourselves*.

GANTSCHO. Dehumanizing.

ROMAN. That too.

GANTSCHO. Would you just get down here *dig*? (*Roman returns to the hole and they both get back to digging.*)

ROMAN. (*After a bit, still digging.*) So why Chaplin?

GANTSCHO. You mean of the many dead celebrities at our disposal?

ROMAN. (*With a shrug.*) First name that came to mind?

GANTSCHO. (*Massaging his temple.*) If anyone on this earth...or *in* this earth...if anyone in the world would have a sense of humor about this...

ROMAN. You think he would find this funny?

GANTSCHO. Laughter can be found in unlikely places.

ROMAN. (*Laughing lightly.*) *Highly* unlikely...

GANTSCHO. "To truly laugh"...not just laugh a little, but "to *truly* laugh...you must be able to take your pain and play with it"...*his* words. (*Digging more furiously.*) You can't just bury what hurts you, it's always there...but you can dig into it and

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mix it up...see what lies beneath all that muck, if anything at all...and with a little luck, maybe unearth *something* of worth...

ROMAN. Buried treasure...

GANTSCHO. ...or find a diamond in the ashes.

ROMAN. Or fashion them into the *shape* of one.

GANTSCHO. No...then you're only left with an ordinary, depressing rhombus...no shine whatsoever, just a square that's somewhat askew, it's not the same thing.

ROMAN. Depending on how you see it...you can briefly suspend your disbelief and pretend it's a diamond...or just tilt your head a bit...and squint until it sparkles in the dark.

GANTSCHO. My eyes remain wide open...and still not a glint of illumination, not even a tiny hint of it...I've been playing around with my pain again and again for a long time now and only ever in vain...always looking for the humor somewhere, it *has* to be somewhere...

ROMAN. It always is...you'll find it someday. Laughing at yourself isn't so hard, I laugh at you all the time.

GANTSCHO. There is nothing funny about my life. I'm holding out hope that it's a comedy in the end, but for now, all I see is tragedy...and if it is a comedy, then it must be some kind of a cruel joke in bad taste that I'm not meant to understand...but I keep trying to laugh.

ROMAN. (*Smiling.*) Until then, I will do so on your behalf...and when you finally do, I'll be right there to join in, and the sound of our joy will be glorious...it all starts with a smile. (*Smile slowly fading.*) I've always wanted to share a good laugh with you...sometime soon I hope...I don't need much...just someone to laugh with once in a while...sometimes you just have to laugh. (*Beat.*) Do you even remember the last time...

GANTSCHO. (*Stopping to reflect and catch his breath.*)
Modern Times...

ROMAN. (*Slightly confused.*) No, no, no, I've known you for a

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long time and *still* have yet to hear...

GANTSCHO. Modern Times, the silent picture...my bratz ("*Brothers*".) and I were watching together...the assembly line scene, that was our favorite part...that's the last time I can remember...one of the last times we were all together...soon after that, we lost our protector, and that was the last of our laughter. The years have affected my memory...for me, it's more and more like an old film projector...with dusty reels that don't spin as well over time...and as that rusty metal wheel slows down, moving pictures start to settle into a series of stills, until eventually, I'm left with just an image or two for the ages...most of those images are unpleasant ones, so it's just as well...but that was a good day...picture-perfect...and even on the bad ones, no one could cheer us up like Chaplin...without any words, that face said it all...it told the whole story...and *our* faces would just light up. His pictures were some of the only government-sanctioned cinema back then, so that was all we had, but...no matter how many times we saw Modern Times or The Kid or City Lights, those old pictures never got old...and we laughed every time...they meant the world to us.

ROMAN. Hmm...so I suppose that settles it...

GANTSCHO. Settles what?

ROMAN. He *was* one of them *after all*...

GANTSCHO. That's all you took from...

ROMAN. ...Why else would they allow his pictures to play?

GANTSCHO. They were classics, don't be absurd...not another word on that...

ROMAN. But...

GANTSCHO. ...digging up dirt on a dead man is undignified...

ROMAN. It sure is.

GANTSCHO. ...especially such a legendary figure.

ROMAN. With a very questionable agenda.

GANTSCHO. He was knighted by the queen, who are you to question his loyalties...or his royal ties?

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ROMAN. He was a knight?

GANTSCHO. That's right.

ROMAN. Then where was his shining armor?

GANTSCHO. These aren't medieval times...

ROMAN. Modern times can seem that way sometimes.

GANTSCHO. ...he was eighty-five years old!

ROMAN. Just a jester, not a jouster...still a nice gesture.

GANTSCHO. And in all his years, nothing was ever proven one way or the other, it was no one's business but his own, we only know what he put out into the world, so *that* is how I choose to regard him (*Beat.*)...and *regardless* of his ideals, the man was brilliant.

ROMAN. *Brilliant*...he stood for everything you stand against, and the man was *brilliant*?

GANTSCHO. He stood for laughter and entertainment!

ROMAN. Who knows, maybe that Hitler mustache was perfectly appropriate.

GANTSCHO. Okay, slow down and grow up...are you debating me or just baiting me? Even *I* know better than to equate those two rotten institutions...that is an entirely separate beast, how can you *not see* that?

ROMAN. So in your opinion, there are *degrees* of...beastiality?

GANTSCHO. (*Massaging his temple.*) Inhumane attempts at dominion by an insane man and his minions being the *main* distinction...mass internment and, in turn, mass interment of millions, on the brink of extinction.

ROMAN. Better check the chinks in your chain-link armor.

GANTSCHO. Despite what you may think, the temperature can always get colder, and warmth, as it turns out, is only a temporary respite...

ROMAN. A brief intermission, in terms of our terminal stages of grief.

GANTSCHO. ...an intermittent relief that can never last, and always burns out faster than our belief in it...and still we poke

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at the smoldering coals that are only emitting smoke for us to choke on as our light disappears in the blink of a tearful eye...you'll learn that as you get older.

ROMAN. Thanks for the warning, I'll be sure to bundle up...maybe steal a ball of yarn from a small kitten so I can knit myself some nice warm mittens to avoid the extreme cost of getting frost-bitten when lost and exhausted in the ice and snow of a below-zero winter.....*or* just insulate my coat with all these hairs you're splitting.

GANTSCHO. That's insulting...I know you're only trying to instigate me, but I'll still split your *crown* wide open...how dare you say that, you of all shitty people.

ROMAN. Now, we both know you don't have to be *totally Arian* to be totali...totali...

GANTSCHO. Totalitarian.

ROMAN. Right.

GANTSCHO. "You need power, only when you want to do something harmful...otherwise, love is enough to get anything done." *Also* his words...

ROMAN. That doesn't sound like something Hitler would say.

GANTSCHO. We are talking about *Sir Charles*!

ROMAN. Sorry, I must have lost my concentration...that was a *lovely* quotation.

GANTSCHO. And for your limited information, he absolutely hated fascism and despised Hitler, just watch *The Great Dictator*.

ROMAN. Oh, and who did he play in that one?

GANTSCHO. (*Stubbornly stifled.*) I wouldn't expect a simpleton to understand the subtleties of satire.

ROMAN. Okay, professor...politics aside, I know at *best* he was a lousy hack, and that's putting it politely.

GANTSCHO. You take that back!

ROMAN. Talk about subtlety...always with that same cartoonish character...

GANTSCHO. Not always.

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ROMAN. Right, when he wasn't playing Hitler, I mean.

GANTSCHO. And the *Tramp* was an embodiment of the fallen aristocrat in destitution, forced to cope with life as *we* know it...stumbling hopelessly through an off-kilter existence he was never built to endure, filtering his undesirable position in life through an admirable disposition, and to me, that is very endearing...no matter how dire the situation, he always shook it off and took it with a light heart and whimsical spirit...and a smile. (*Roman spits in the dirt and sticks his finger in the mud, smudging a Chaplin mustache on his upper lip.*) What are you doing?

ROMAN. Let's hear it for the Tramp, watch me now! (*Hops up and out of the hole again and moves about in the animated manner of Chaplin's Tramp, using the spade as his cane.*) Watch how silly I look when I waddle around with my cane! (*He tips his cap to Gantscho.*)

GANTSCHO. Stop that!

ROMAN. (*Dropping the act.*) I'll bet we would get *twice* as much for Buster Keaton's body...*trzy* times as much.

GANTSCHO. We would get *shit* for his worthless corpse...and *wipe* that off your face...let's show a little *respect* for...

ROMAN. (*Laughing down at Gantscho.*) *Respect* you say, while desecrating his cemetery plot!

GANTSCHO. These are special circumstances.

ROMAN. (*Wiping away his mud mustache.*) They certainly are.

GANTSCHO. And honestly...I like to think that he would be happy to help us out.

ROMAN. (*Laughing even harder at Gantscho's expense.*) And I'm simple...you may want to adjust your stance.

GANTSCHO. I truly believe (*Drowned out by the sound.*)...stop laughing! (*Roman speaks through his own laughter while Gantscho speaks over it.*)

ROMAN. Oh, I'm sure he would *jump* at the chance to pull us

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out of our slump if he could.

GANTSCHO. Why would he not want to help us?

ROMAN. Help us steal money from his estate...

GANTSCHO. He doesn't need it anymore.

ROMAN. ...from his *family!*

GANTSCHO. They can spare a small portion of all that good fortune for a pair of poor unfortunate men at the end of our rope...it's a drop in the ocean.

ROMAN. Unfortunately, I'm not sure they care about our...charitable cause.

GANTSCHO. Nope (*As an increasingly amused Roman nods along sarcastically.*)...and that's why we snatch a healthy fistful of that wealth for ourselves instead of calmly asking for alms with an open palm...hope and charity are a lost cause when it comes to the laws of economic disparity...

ROMAN. Oh, so now you *oppose* possession? I suppose it *can be* demonic.

GANTSCHO. ...all we have are despair and desperation, where is the prosperity? Meanwhile, they're over there sitting on a *whole mountain* of money...doesn't seem fair to me.

ROMAN. (*With a shrug.*) It's not...you just have to *own* it...oh, and I thought it was an ocean.

GANTSCHO. Whether you measure the extent of their treasures in height or depth, it's an embarrassment of riches.

ROMAN. (*Still poking fun and laughing at Gantscho.*) This is slightly less embarrassing than your unsightly bare ass.

GANTSCHO. We need it more than them, no comparison...and he's *dead* anyway, so what does it matter? We are standing our ground and taking matters into our *own* hands for once...demanding once and for all...

ROMAN. Oh please, just admit it, your scheme is all rhyme and no reason...springtime is a season for climbing trees, not crime and treason...

GANTSCHO. I never said we committed...

ROMAN. ...that ground is not yours to stand on...and it's

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turning *quickly* into quicksand.

GANTSCHO. (*Justifying.*) Those who choose to stand in the *limelight* are public domain...

ROMAN. Hmm, how very *communal*...

GANTSCHO. ...they lose the right to privacy.

ROMAN. And earn the plight of conspiracy and piracy?

GANTSCHO. Don't blame me, that's the price of fame, it was bound to happen one way or another.

ROMAN. Plundered from underground and then, nowhere to be found, what a profound loss that leaves one to wonder...what kind of a confounded scoundrel could possibly conceive of such an unbelievable blunder?

GANTSCHO. He is safe and sound in our care.

ROMAN. You're the boss...care to articulate? On that last part in particular...your eloquence is astounding tonight, and with outstanding cadence...truly spectacular, and not at all peculiar.

GANTSCHO. You can't see anything without spectacle...

ROMAN. I can see you making one of yourself at the moment.

GANTSCHO. It's been a hectic schedule, but if we stick together, we can tackle any obstacle.

ROMAN. And suddenly optimistic...on the edge of an epic debacle, we are now seeing a new, more practical tactic at work, how unusual...must be a delusion or an optical illusion by a mystic with a crystal ball.

GANTSCHO. Why so skeptical in the midst of it all, when the clock is ticking and the mist is thickening?

ROMAN. Call it septic shock from a dormant, undetected infection...symptoms include poetic inflections, testicular fortitude, intestinal blockage and a bad attitude.

GANTSCHO. That is some disappointing diagnosis, is there a name for that syndrome?

ROMAN. *Assholiosis*...also causes soreness in the joints and tendons, leading to ornery tendencies, and in some cases, chemical dependency.

GANTSCHO. You should make a point to make an

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appointment at a free clinic with a cynical, mediocre medic...

ROMAN. Or at least a coroner after my coronary as a canary in the belly of a beast.

GANTSCHO. ...to be injected with nutrients and then anointed with an ointment or experimental serum on the affected area.

ROMAN. Side effects of topical treatment include an intense aversion to all versions of affection, giving *or* accepting, *without* exception, extreme rudeness, lack of erections and a diluted reflection of oneself.

GANTSCHO. Terrible condition...instead of deflecting, why not try a bit of your *own* introspection, see if those inner workings even pass inspection after all that neglect...

ROMAN. My *interior* is not as deteriorated as yours...way to modify the metaphor, I guess mine was inferior.

GANTSCHO. ...always gazing in wonder at the horizon, staring past the steering wheel, never peering under the hood, not even for your own good, as if you ever would.

ROMAN. Your international irrational gaze is what got us here...so much for eyes on the prize...better wear a helmet with you at the helm.

GANTSCHO. You won't ever get to witness the vast internal realm until the day your eyes roll back, and then all you see is black...as for me, that overwhelming eternal vacuum is all I've *ever* seen from the inside *out*...I am *fully* aware of myself, always *have* been...you're only *self-conscious*...

ROMAN. Says the bully...*totally* full of himself.

GANTSCHO. ...and you're about to be *unconscious* from a concussion when I use this dull instrument to play percussion on that hollow drum of a skull, with no pillow to cushion the blow, ending our discussion with a severe repercussion.

ROMAN. (*All the more amused and not the least bit intimidated.*) Umm...this may be a hard pill to swallow, but your childish regression into idle threats is nothing more than yet another digression without any actual act of aggression.

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GANTSCHO. Go on...keep pushing buttons and pulling levers, you're not so very clever.

ROMAN. We seem to be allowing ourselves to get stuck in some destructive patterns...is that by design, or just bad luck?

GANTSCHO. (*Looking up at the stars.*) Look...we don't all get to be a shooting star...

ROMAN. (*Looking up in that same direction.*) Ooh, is that Saturn?

GANTSCHO. ...but the ones who *do* shine are yours and mine to share and stare up at and reach for, they belong to us all...

ROMAN. That is quite the long reach...and he's not flying up in the sky, he's lying down in the ground.

GANTSCHO. This is why I didn't want to tell you.

ROMAN. Why? Because it made more sense in your own dense head? Sounded less disgraceful? And now that you hear it out loud, it's like a face-full of your own ass...

GANTSCHO. You're so obnoxious.

ROMAN. ...with a cloud of noxious gas.

GANTSCHO. Shut up!

ROMAN. (*Teasing.*) They say never to meet your idols, even if they *are* down to earth, you sure about this? They don't like being bothered, especially while they're at rest, you may be disappointed.

GANTSCHO. (*Reaching up and pulling Roman back down into the hole.*) I already am...now dig. (*They both return to digging.*)

ROMAN. (*After a bit, still digging, laughter finally fading.*) Maybe you're right...he might have found this whole thing completely hilarious.

GANTSCHO. You really believe that? (*And with that, the lights cut at the sound of both spades finally striking the oak casket.*)

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