

To Those Who Haven't Stopped Thinking

by Cristina A. Bejan

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

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TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING was first produced at the Burton Taylor (BT) Theatre, Oxford, UK 2003, and directed by Lucy Burns. The play's run was SOLD-OUT and according to the BT Theatre manager at the time it was "the most successful play in the history of the Burton Taylor Theatre."

CAST: 1W 1M 6 Any

HANNAH 20s, a young female philosopher from the Beyond
VLAD 35-40, an older male teacher from the Beyond

PEOPLE OF THE UNIVERSE – Six Actors are required to play the Citizens and Givers, each role can be played by any gender

THE CITIZENS OF THE CITY: Bebop and Rocksteady (Guards); Politician; Prostitute; Helper; Beggar; Waitress; Customers

GIVERS OF THE NOT-CITY: Giver Man #1; Giver Man #2; Giver Boy; Giver Girl; Giver Woman; Giver Grandmother

All roles can be played by any race or ethnicity.

TIME: Contemporary

PLACE: A desolate post-Apocalyptic land called "The Universe"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: *asta e* is an expression used by the Citizens, meaning "that is just the way it is" (the direct translation from Romanian)

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A play about philosophy, love and saving the Universe.

ACT I

SCENE 1: GATES TO THE CITY OF THE UNIVERSE

Lights up on The City. It looks like a nuclear attack hit: black, charred and burnt-out. There are heaping piles of broken glass and rusted metal bolts and bits at various places on the stage. A broken rusted barbed-wire fence lines the back wall. There is a layer of black soot everywhere, even on the people who live there. HANNAH runs onstage and calls out.

HANNAH. I am here! Don't worry, I have arrived! *(Her voice echoes throughout the empty space. She waits expectantly for a response. None comes. She is puzzled and looks around. She picks up a shard of glass lying in a heap and examines it tentatively)* What? *(Hannah walks around slowly, looking at the devastation. She is in awe, horrified and amazed.)* What happened to the Universe? *(To herself.)* Did I miss my chance? Now what? Where is the Help Brigade? Where is the government? Where are all the people? *(She yells.)* What the hell is going on?!?! *(Exasperated and upset Hannah looks at her watch, only to find none sitting on her wrist. Confused, she looks at the other wrist. No watch is there. She checks frantically checks her pockets, desperately searching for it. As she searches, suddenly BEBOP pops up from behind a heap of metal.)*

BEBOP. You there! Halt! *(Bebop jumps out from behind the heap and shines a red-pointer light at Hannah. ROCKSTEADY appears from behind another heap, but he doesn't speak.)* What are you? Why are you? Do you need? GO AWAY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! *(Hannah winces but is not afraid. She is relieved to see somebody.)*

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HANNAH. Oh, hello! I knew someone must be around. I am so sorry, excuse me, but do you know where the members of the Help Brigade are? They are expecting me.

BEBOP. Why give you information? What are you? What do you want with us here?

HANNAH. I have only good intentions, I promise-

BEBOP. Good? Hah, funny you. To speak of goodness in a land of fear. I don't understand!

HANNAH. I mean, I don't mean you or the Universe any harm.

BEBOP. I don't care what you mean. And harm is welcome. Harm is what we know.

HANNAH. What?

BEBOP. I don't know you, I don't welcome you.

HANNAH. But I am here to help. I just didn't expect to find the place so deserted.

BEBOP. Expect? Where you come from? A land of expectation? I can tell, you don't speak our language. Not good. What do you speak? What are you?

HANNAH. I am from the Beyond.

BEBOP. The Beyond? I heard it once. Unreachable, unattainable. We can't get there.

HANNAH. Yes, I know you can't.

BEBOP. Why you come here? Beyond, big, better, wonderful.

HANNAH. Yes, I know it is. But I came to help. I want things to get better here, in the Universe.

BEBOP. Haha, you are funny.

HANNAH. And the Help Brigade? They have plans for me-

BEBOP. Extermination of the Help Brigade, miss, that is what happened. It was. It is not anymore. Although I heard a bit about new Helpers popping up here and there, after the Fall.

HANNAH. I came to help them do good.

BEBOP. Well, that is a silly idea.

HANNAH. That is why I am here.

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BEBOP. That is why you are? How odd. The Help Brigade was not to do good. It was to.

HANNAH. Well, what was it then?

BEBOP. Another effort to remain what we all are.

HANNAH. Yes, and that is?

BEBOP. Survivors. You don't know survival? We are all. Being a Helper is one way to survive. Why many new Helpers not surprising. People still need roles to play, after the Fall, many roles invented roles. Survival.

HANNAH. Ok, well, do you know where any of these Helpers are now?

BEBOP. No, I say what I know. I don't know that. I said.

HANNAH. Where we might look for them?

BEBOP. They?

HANNAH. Helpers?

BEBOP. I can show you people.

HANNAH. Well, that is a start.

BEBOP. You are a survivor too, are you not?

HANNAH. *(Thinks a moment.)* Well, I suppose, yes I am.

BEBOP. There are rules you must follow now when you are here.

HANNAH. A list of rules? A constitution?

BEBOP. The politician made the rules after the Fall. The people agree to these rules. Could not survive without rules.

HANNAH. So, what are they?

BEBOP. The rules? Many. Two very important. Two the most necessary: err . . . I can never remember how to say them. But two words that mean the rules, two words that make me behave rightly. Exploit and Evil.

HANNAH. Um, I am not sure I understand exactly.

BEBOP. Worry not, you will see the rules soon. *(He motions around him. Bebop and Hannah walk around in silence a bit. Hannah gazes in intent interest at the Universe. Bebop tries to look cool and in control. In the middle of the stage stands the POLITICIAN on a box, frozen in a pose of oratory.)*

HANNAH. This isn't how I thought it would be.

BEBOP. What you mean?

HANNAH. The Universe, this is not what I expected it to look like.

BEBOP. Remember, no expect.

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HANNAH. Yes, I know, but, I just can't believe it.

BEBOP. First time in Universe?

HANNAH. Yes, I have never been here before. But I heard about it, all the time.

BEBOP. How?

HANNAH. My family is from the Universe. My ancestors lived here.

BEBOP. Family?

HANNAH. Yes, my parents were born here, they grew up here.

BEBOP. You meet your family here? How you come from the Beyond? Confused. Very.

HANNAH. My parents left the Universe.

BEBOP. How?

HANNAH. They escaped.

BEBOP. Before the Fall?

HANNAH. Yes.

BEBOP. *(Totally amazed.)* Wow. Impossible. *(Slightly angry and defensive.)* No one ever leaves.

HANNAH. Well, they did. They made it to the Beyond. They started a new life. They had me. My parents told me all about the Universe, about the Fall, when it happened, in the Beyond. They loved the Universe. And I wanted to see it for myself. I knew things were wrong here, and I wanted to help make them right. That's the story.

BEBOP. Right, wrong, makes no sense. I don't understand.

SCENE 2: STREETS OF THE CITY, THE UNIVERSE

Politician is in the middle of the stage, standing on a box. He is gesticulating violently and speaking loudly. Bebop and Hannah enter.

POLITICIAN. And if we want the Universe to flourish, we need everyone to play a role! And as a Person, I believe we each have a part to play in our cosmos. If every man plays his part, which is only his, then we will have order! Order and dependence on that order is security! Survival! After the Fall, we can't risk falling again. Remember I know the world and what the world demands of man! We all must use each other and in using

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each other, we will survive. No man is sufficient on his own! No man is independent! He will perish who tries. He alone does not have the resources. Everyone's resources lie in everyone else. And we need people to allocate the resources, manage the resources, manage the people in the universe! That is the role of the politician! That is my role! That is why I am!

BEBOP. He is Politician.

HANNAH. Yes, I got that.

POLITICIAN. You listen to me! About your future! About your whole life! About the Universe! Because I possess the answers! Why do I possess the answers? Because I make laws. I make laws to decide how the Universe will work. Without laws there would be chaos. The Fall was chaos.

BEBOP. Chaos, disaster.

HANNAH. Was it?

BEBOP. Why, yes. People totally free, running around without direction, everyone thinking and wanting and doing new things. Scary. The politician makes the plan. He creates the order. Necessary. *(The PROSTITUTE appears from offstage.)*

PROSTITUTE. Yo, Bebop, need a fix?

HANNAH. What?

BEBOP. Not now. Busy you see. *(He points to Hannah.)*

PROSTITUTE. What's your role?

HANNAH. Me?

PROSTITUTE. Yes? You hook? You cook? You book? You look?

HANNAH. I plan to help.

PROSTITUTE. You plan? Haha. She is not a person, Bebop.

BEBOP. She comes from the Beyond.

PROSTITUTE. Oh, I could tell from the outside. Not from the inside. Not the Universe.

HANNAH. What is your role?

BEBOP. She is Prostitute.

PROSTITUTE. Yes, I hook, you see.

HANNAH. *(Shocked.)* Sex?

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PROSTITUTE. The sex I give to society. It is my part. I provide it for those who need.

BEBOP. She, very good at her role.

PROSTITUTE. No better than others at theirs. Bebop, excellent guard.

HANNAH. Oh, so you are a sort of police man?

BEBOP. Guard, yes, I guard. Security.

HANNAH. Ok, and you?

PROSTITUTE. Yes?

HANNAH. Are you happy? Do you like this job of yours?

PROSTITUTE. I don't know like. I know role. I do my role. I don't know happy either. You see? If I don't do my role, who will? What will I do then? People need to hook. There are needs in the Universe. A system of needs makes survival. I solve a need.

BEBOP. Necessary. *(During this talk, the Politician has been silently gesturing and "speaking." Then he steps off his podium and calls the Prostitute over.)*

POLITICIAN. Prostitute?

PROSTITUTE. Oh, a call. Bye. Yes? *(The Prostitute trots over to the Politician, he pulls her towards him and starts groping her all over. She stands up straight and still. She is calm and motionless as he gropes and kisses her body. He starts taking her clothes off when she stops him, takes him by the hand, like a little child, and leads him offstage.)*

BEGGAR. Spare any change, miss? *(All this time the BEGGAR has been huddled in a plastic bag, against one of the heaps of waste on the stage. The Beggar is dirty, covered in coated mud and soot. Hannah checks her pockets for her wallet. She can't find it, she is a bit frantic and confused.)*

BEBOP. What you look for?

HANNAH. My wallet. I can't find it. This is so odd. I had it. I had my watch too earlier. And now they are both gone.

BEBOP. Taken.

HANNAH. Yes, someone must have stolen them.

BEBOP. Steal? No, a person took. They saw you had and they did not. They took.

HANNAH. Fine, but now I don't have!

BEBOP. You mad. Why? Now you take.

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HANNAH. What is this insane system?

BEGGAR. Have mercy on me, please, give. *(The Beggar is rocking back and forth, holding its palm out from its tattered cloak.)*

BEGGAR. In the need of the other. Please, have mercy.

HANNAH. I am sorry, I can't. *(To Bebop.)* Why is this a role? This is misery.

BEBOP. No, it isn't. No role is misery. This role is because it has to be. Some person has to beg.

HANNAH. Why?

BEBOP. Society needs low and high. Low help high. High help low. Politician necessary. Beggar necessary.

HANNAH. And the Helper? The Help Brigade?

BEBOP. Yes, Helpers help. Oh! *(The HELPER has come onstage and is walking around holding an enormous sign. The sign read, "Help me help you.")*

BEBOP. A Helper!

BEGGAR. Money, now! Show mercy!

BEBOP. No money.

HANNAH. I am sorry, I really don't have any. *(The Beggar grumbles to itself. Bebop and Hannah approach the Helper.)*

HANNAH. So, how does the Helper help? Exactly?

BEBOP. Helper fulfills need. Takes from High. Like Beggar. But Beggar takes from High and Middle. Helper just High. Equalizer of people. Necessary.

HANNAH. So who is the Helper helping?

BEBOP. Everyone.

HANNAH. And how?

BEBOP. I just said.

HANNAH. No, specifically, how does the Helper help?

BEBOP. Helper gives demonstrations. Makes programs that help people. Asks for money from High for programs to help Low.

HANNAH. What sort of programs?

BEBOP. You mean?

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HANNAH. What sort of programs to help people? (*Bebop continues to look quizzical, he turns to Rocksteady. Rocksteady shakes his head indicating that he does not know either.*)

BEBOP. I don't understand. All programs help. That is all. Ask Helper. (*Hannah, Bebop and Rocksteady approach the Helper, who has started chanting, marching back and forth with his sign.*)

HELPER. HELP ME! HELP YOU!

HELP ME! HELP YOU!

HELP ME! HELP YOU!

HELP ME! HELP YOU!

HANNAH. Excuse me?

HELPER. A-chem. I am in the middle of something. (*From this point on, at every chance, the Helper yells, "Help!" as an aside and continues carrying on the conversation with Hannah.*)

HANNAH. Helping?

HELPER. Yes, can't you see? Can't you hear my cry? The cry of the Helper!!!

HANNAH. Yes, I can, and I came here to assist you.

HELPER. Me? Assist? You? Help?

HANNAH. I came to the Universe to give a hand. And here I am. What must I do?

HELPER. Haha, I don't believe. Who you talk to?

HANNAH. I'm just, I just did, I thought, after the Fall, I thought it would be more... I don't get it.

HELPER. Don't have to. It just is. Asta e.

BEBOP. Asta e.

ROCKSTEADY. Asta e. (*All are visibly shocked that Rocksteady has uttered something!*)

HELPER. But why are you here? Why us?

HANNAH. My family is originally from the Universe. I wanted to come back. (*Helper eyes Bebop and Rocksteady, they both shake their heads.*)

HELPER. I don't understand how anyone who left would ever want to come back. (*Thinks a moment.*) So you are here now to help. Want to help me help people?

HANNAH. Yes! That is why I came!

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HELPER. Terrific, when do you want to begin?

HANNAH. Right now would be nice. We've been looking for you for a while now, I am eager to start.

HELPER. Oh, I was busy . . . helping.

HANNAH. Yes, of course. So, where do I begin? How do I start?

HELPER. People. Obvious.

HANNAH. But I don't know people yet, really. Aside from you, Bebop and Rocksteady.

BEBOP. And the Prostitute.

HANNAH. Oh, yes, and the Prostitute.

BEBOP. And Beggar and Politician.

HANNAH. Yes, and them, but no one else yet. I don't know how, I don't know how this works.

HELPER. Bebop? You help- what are you called?

HANNAH. Oh, me? Hannah.

HELPER. Bebop, you help Hannah help.

BEBOP. Oh, yes.

HELPER. And Rocksteady? (*Rocksteady turns to Helper.*) You help Bebop help Hannah help. You know, help Bebop help, like always.

(*Rocksteady nods his head.*) Hannah, they will show you people. People of the Universe. But it just occurred to me. There is another person. Person of the Beyond, you should meet. Person might help you help. Person might understand you.

HANNAH. Someone else from the Beyond is here? In the Universe?

HELPER. Yes, odd, is it not? But he came to me to help help awhile back. He said the same things you say.

HANNAH. Is he helping?

HELPER. He does AMAZING help.

BEBOP. He thinks he helps. Sometimes he helps. Sometimes he is no help.

HELPER. Bebop! Nonsense! Vlad is among the highest Helpers ever, his helping is the best I have ever seen. The best the Universe has known. Incredible! Fantastic! Help! Help!

HANNAH. I should meet him? Why is he here? How do I find him, what is his name?

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HELPER. He called Vlad.

HANNAH. Vlad. From the Universe or the Beyond?

HELPER. He is like you. He is from both. *(A buzzing noise suddenly occurs, Helper pulls a mobile phone out of his pocket and proceeds to gossip with Banker on the other end.)*

HELPER. Hello, yes, oh hello Banker!

HANNAH. You have cell-phones here?

BEBOP. Hannah. Accept. Yes. Everyone goes mobile.

HANNAH. Everyone? I just thought-

BEBOP. Remember, no think- *(Hannah shrugs her shoulders but is still aghast. Helper is still talking.)*

HELPER. Today. Not tomorrow . . . Today. Yes. No. Yes. Politician? I saw. Giving talk today. Again. Many many promises. No results. Where are the 16000 specialists? Yes, I know. Don't trust, you know. Oh, don't tell, but I saw him with Prostitute today. Again. YES. I know. Does she know? How can she not? Everyone sees. Everyone looks. Everyone talks. Haha! But about ... Yes, I need more. More money. Always, I know. But more. How can I make a project without money? How can I help without support? You are a good friend, Banker, you know that.. I am very grateful for everything in the past ... but I need more. Always more, you see? Our names look great together. Helper and Banker. Like always. What? You can't? I don't understand--- *(Helper continues chatting with Banker. Hannah turns to Bebop.)*

HANNAH. What's going on?

BEBOP. Bank fallen.

HANNAH. What?

BEBOP. Banker collapsed. Bank no more. Helper learning this now.

HANNAH. But how do you know already?

BEBOP. I guard. I know.

HANNAH. But what do you mean Bank no more? What happened to it?

BEBOP. It is what always happens when people take and take and take. Now, no more money to take.

HANNAH. Oh, I see.

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SCENE 3: STREETS OF THE CITY, THE UNIVERSE

Hannah is sitting down at the foot of the Politician's make-shift podium. She is writing hurriedly in a small notebook she pulled out of her back pocket. Bebop and Rocksteady enter.

HANNAH. Bebop?

BEBOP. Yes?

HANNAH. Where is this constitution, this system of rules you live by?

BEBOP. It is here.

HANNAH. Yes, but where, I would like to read a copy if possible.

BEBOP. Read a copy? *(He and Rocksteady look at each other quizzically.)* I no understand what you mean, Hannah.

HANNAH. *(Getting frustrated.)* Well, you said that as soon as I got here that I could see them.

BEBOP. Yes, you can see them.

HANNAH. Where? Where do I get a copy? Where can I see the rules?

BEBOP. All around always. Just look here. Look there. Rules everywhere. Easy.

HANNAH. I don't understand, so there is no constitution? But you said the Politician-

BEBOP. Politician invent rules for survival, yes-

HANNAH. See?

BEBOP. Invent, tell, do.

HANNAH. So, he invented them. He told the people the rules. And the people do, well, follow the rules?

BEBOP. Exact.

HANNAH. So where can I see these rules then?

BEBOP. Told you before. Told you now. Look at people everywhere, they show rules. They live rules. I live rules!

ROCKSTEADY. I live rules!!!!!!

BEBOP. Come, Hannah, I show you people. Many people. We help you help and show you people. You watch. You learn rules. *(Bebop and Rocksteady take Hannah away.)*

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SCENE 4: BAR

Bebop and Rocksteady take Hannah to a bar, which is just nothing more than the barren wasteland of the Universe with a make-shift counter to serve as the bar. Everyone is there, having a drink, socializing, relaxing after a hard day.

BEBOP. Bar good place to see people.

HANNAH. Yes, even in the Beyond.

BEBOP. Not so different here?

HANNAH. Well, that depends on what exactly you are looking at.

BEBOP. Want a drink?

HANNAH. Oh, yes, please.

BEBOP. Rocksteady, drinks! *(Rocksteady heads to the bar to order.)*

BEBOP. See? *(He points to people around the bar.)* People from today.

HANNAH. Yes, I recognize them.

BEBOP. Talk more? Interview people?

HANNAH. Well . . .

BEBOP. Talk again. But now with drink! Always better! *(Rocksteady returns with drinks for the three of them.)*

HANNAH. Thank you. Ok, well let's get started. *(Hannah, Bebop and Rocksteady approach the Politician, who still has his arms all over the Prostitute.)*

HANNAH. Ummm, hello, my name is Hannah, I saw you giving a speech earlier and I met you, Prostitute, this afternoon. I was wondering, if maybe, I could ask you some questions-

POLITICIAN. Hello, I am Politician. Questions about what?

HANNAH. About your life here in the Universe-

POLITICIAN. Well, let's see, my life?

HANNAH. What are the rules exactly, I am-

POLITICIAN. The rules? Oh! Easy-

I fuck the bitch and my wife doesn't know

She doesn't ask when I give her the blows

I beat her and beat her, give her a smack

And Prostitute, damn, what a nice rack

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No wonder my eyes stray to what's ripe
And this whore, hey, she don't put up a fight (*The Politician smothers the Prostitute with sloppy kisses. While he does that, the Prostitute addresses Hannah.*)

PROSTITUTE. Hi, Hannah- It's simple,
Horny rich men come and knock at my door
They cum on the bed, they cum on the floor
I don't really care, so long as they pay
And maybe my life will know a good day
When the High gives me a retirement fund
A vacation on the beach, in the sun (*Hannah, half-shocked/half-amazed looks around. The Beggar and the Helper are sharing a drink nearby and have overheard the conversation.*)

HANNAH. And you? The rules?

BEGGAR. Me? It's rather straightforward, dear,
People walk on by, I beg on the street
I try to look scraggly, dirty and meek
Hey! Alms, alms for the poor I beseech ye!
Give the damn money, have pity on me!
And if you do not I will still have won
'Cause down the block begs my two-year old son

HELPER. And myself? Surely you can learn:

I create programs that should improve life
Help programs to erase hunger and strife
But does it ever come to fruition?
Or is it my self-centered ambition
To raise money for the weak and needy
That I pocket 'cause I am so greedy

HANNAH. And you guys? Bebop? Rocksteady:

BEBOP and ROCKSTEADY. (*In unison.*)

Bebop, Rocksteady enforce every rule
Bebop, Rocksteady not friendly or cruel
Universe functions according to us
That's why there is never much of a fuss
We do our job, we like right, we love wrong

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We like hot pants, a lot, love skirts and thongs

HANNAH. What?!

POLITICIAN, PROSTITUTE, BEGGAR, HELPER, BEBOP and ROCKSTEADY. *(In unison.)*

In the misery of the Universe we could reach for the Beyond

In vain we would struggle

But we don't

We choose not to

Why? Because,

It's just easier that way

Asta e

Asta e

Asta e (They all seem very resigned and solemn, looking at one another in apathetic agreement.)

PROSTITUTE. Who wants to go dancing?! *(The group erupts in agreement.)*

SCENE 5: DISCO

Lights out, flashing strobe and colored lights. Insane mad disco, everyone is dancing, flailing about to the throbbing beat. Bebop enters, followed by Hannah, followed by Rocksteady.

BEBOP. *(Shouting over the blaring music.)* THIS *(He motions around him.)* DISCO!

HANNAH. Alright!

BEBOP. People come! Dance!

HANNAH. All people come here?

BEBOP. ALL PEOPLE! DANCE! Good place! Watch people! Learn rules!

HANNAH. I don't know if I want to learn any more rules! *(Rocksteady, Hannah and Bebop observe for a bit and watch. Prostitute is dancing around a pole, and begins stripping.)*

HANNAH. *(Pointing to Prostitute.)* WHAT IS GOING ON?!

BEBOP. What you mean?

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HANNAH. Is this a strip-club?

BEBOP. DISCO!

HANNAH. But the Prostitute?!

BEBOP. BEAUTIFUL!

HANNAH. (*Horried.*) Beautiful?

BEBOP. Human body! Beautiful! You no like?

HANNAH. It's not that I don't like it, it's just that, well, she is TAKING HER CLOTHES OFF!

BEBOP. YES. Of course. Very nice. (*Admiring the Prostitute's performance. Rocksteady and Bebop look at one another and nod.*) Now dance!

HANNAH. Us?

BEBOP. YES! (*Bebop and Rocksteady go straight to side of the dance floor and stand there, watching the Prostitute, leaving Hannah stranded alone. Hannah starts dancing on her own. Tentatively at first, but little by little she gets into it and finds herself going all out, dancing like she has never danced before. She loses all inhibition. Suddenly she finds herself in the middle of the crowd, surrounded by everyone else. Gradually everyone begins to dance in one large circle around Hannah. As they dance around circling escalates into a climatic furry.*)

POLITICIAN. Wealth, Hannah!

PROSTITUTE. Freedom, Hannah!

BEGGAR. Love, Hannah!

HELPER. Joy, Hannah!

BEBOP and ROCKSTEADY. Pity, Hannah!

POLITICIAN. Trust, Hannah!

PROSTITUTE. Friendship, Hannah!

BEGGAR. Brilliance, Hannah!

HELPER. Faith, Hannah!

BEBOP and ROCKSTEADY. Hope, Hannah!

POLITICIAN, PROSTITUTE, BEGGAR, HELPER, BEBOP and ROCKSTEADY. YOU FROM THE BEYOND

GIVE US LIFE

GIVE US PURPOSE

GIVE US REASON

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

GIVE US HAPPINESS
YOU KNOW THE ANSWER
YOU HOLD THE KEY
WHY DOES IT ALWAYS HAVE TO BE

EITHER HIM OR ME? *(They chant this over and over again. It gets darker and darker. This frenetic insanity explodes and everyone attacks Hannah, like a pack of vultures descending upon her. Each grope, smack and spit on her. They take everything they can, leaving her lying on the ground, in the barest minimum of clothes, with no belongings. The group walks away laughing, joking amongst themselves. Hannah is left, bruised and beaten, crying on the floor.)*

HANNAH. Why did I come here? Bebop? Rocksteady? Why? How could you do this to me?

BEBOP. What? You come. You learn rules. You play game. Or you get out.

HANNAH. And what about helping? *(Bebop looks at her, laughs and leaves. The disco music is still throbbing and Hannah is weeping, alone. Lights down.)*

END OF ACT I

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

ACT II

**SCENE 1: THE STREETS OF CITY, UNIVERSE; ONE MONTH
LATER**

Lights up on Hannah. She dials a number written on a piece of rubbish onto her new cell-phone. She then proceeds to talk into it.

HANNAH. Yes, hello, is this Vlad? Hi, my name Hannah, and I am from the Beyond, but right now I am in the Universe to help. I was given your number because ...So I just figured that I would make the effort myself. Well, I was wondering, if we could maybe meet at some point. Yes, exactly. Well, when are you available? Lunch sounds fine. Great, see you at the Beyond Burger tomorrow. Thanks, bye!

SCENE 2: IN FRONT OF AND INSIDE THE BEYOND BURGER

Hannah stands waiting in front of a cheap fast-food restaurant, imitating the commercialism of the Beyond. The façade is gaudy, over-done and in bad taste. She checks her new watch a couple of times as she waits. At last VLAD arrives, he looks at Hannah from afar, deciding whether or not she is the one he spoke with on the phone. He determines that she looks like she is from the Beyond and approaches her.

VLAD. Hannah?

HANNAH. Yes, I am Hannah. And you are the illustrious Vlad?

VLAD. Haha, I suppose that could be me. *(He takes her hand.)* Very pleased to meet you.

HANNAH. Thank you for meeting with me.

VLAD. Not a problem, a fellow Beyondian is always welcome in the Universe. This place can get to you. The degradation, the humiliation, the way it strips man of his dignity and rips his soul to shreds. *(Shaking his head in disgust. Hannah is taken aback and speechless.)*

VLAD. *(Chagrined.)* So you have talked with the Helper?

HANNAH. Well, yes, of course. Why? Does that bother you? The Helper thinks very highly of you.

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

VLAD. Yes, I know. The people of the Universe. The craziest things impress them. So, you are here to help?

HANNAH. Yes, I hope to.

VLAD. *(With a certain relief and happiness.)* And you come from the Beyond?

HANNAH. Yes.

VLAD. I could tell, the moment I saw you, that you weren't from here.

HANNAH. Is it that obvious?

VLAD. Well, yes, after you have been in the Universe long enough.

HANNAH. How long have you been here?

VLAD. A year just about. I can't even believe it's been so long-

HANNAH. And you came to assist the Help Brigade.

VLAD. Yes, initially. Now, well . . . do you want to sit down? Get a drink? Grab some lunch?

HANNAH. Oh, sure. *(Hannah and Vlad go inside and sit at a make-shift table. There are two CUSTOMERS at another makeshift table, and two other Customers at another table. The Beyond Burger is the most popular joint in the City. The WAITRESS is running around helping everyone and serving. When she has a moment's rest and does not need to serve, she sits and takes a smoke break.)*

VLAD. I still can't get over these Beyond Burgers.

HANNAH. I know, you'd think we were home!

VLAD. Well, except for everything else. That's the Universe for you. *(There is a pause as Vlad thinks for a moment.)*

HANNAH. So, why did you come here exactly? How have you tried to help?

VLAD. Back home I am a schoolteacher, so I came to teach. But before I came, I had no idea how bad it was. How corrupt the system here is!

HANNAH. Well, what do you mean? How is it corrupt?

VLAD. Oh, it is any and everywhere, Hannah, believe me. Bribes. That is your ticket to survival in the Universe.

HANNAH. But bribes in schools?

VLAD. Oh, yes! Students bribing Teachers. Parents bribing the Principal. Cheating and dishonesty abounds.

HANNAH. Wow, I had no idea- *(The Waitress approaches the table.)*

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

WAITRESS. Good day. I am Waitress. What can I serve?

VLAD. *(Motioning to Hannah.)* Go ahead.

HANNAH. Um, I would like Number 4.

WAITRESS. *(To Vlad.)* And you?

VLAD. I will have the same, please. Thanks.

WAITRESS. Always welcome. *(The Waitress smiles sickly-sweetly and leaves.)*

VLAD. So, yeah, where were we? Yes, bribes. Well, if you don't take the money, someone else will, and nobody will appreciate your refusal as some sort of moral statement. Life here is just too hard to give a fuck. Lofty principles about good and evil just don't exist. These people are too busy and desperate for that. They are preoccupied with their day-to-day existence, their need to survive. *(He pauses.)* But, to us, it is devastating.

HANNAH. See, this is what I have been learning- *(The Waitress comes with the food and sets it in front of Hannah and Vlad.)*

WAITRESS. Enjoy. *(Both Hannah and Vlad are surprised.)*

HANNAH. Thank you!

VLAD. Yes, thank you very much. That was unexpected!

HANNAH. The most efficient service I have ever gotten in the Universe.

VLAD. Same here. Simply incredible. Wow. So, yes, do carry on.

HANNAH. What was I saying? Oh, yeah, what I have been learning is how truly fortunate we are in the Beyond. How much we take for granted.

VLAD. You know, it's funny, when you are immersed in prosperity, it doesn't occur to you that anywhere can really be that different. Humans are human. End stop. But it's not that simple.

HANNAH. Man is susceptible to living in squalor.

VLAD. And to do everything he can to perpetuate that squalor.

HANNAH. *(Thinking for a moment.)* I know! People play these roles here, and some are just not necessary. And the ones that are necessary are totally twisted. Have I ever seen the Helper actually help? Does she actually care about getting anything done? She just bustles about, pretending to be busy, gossiping about the latest scandal with the Politician. When there are people starving in the Universe! When everyone is unhappy. But being miserable in the name of "survival." I don't care! There are other ways to survive, dammit. Oh, it just makes me so mad.

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

VLAD. And that is just the way it is here. If you don't fuck people over, you're ruined. It's just this interminable cycle of people shitting on each other.

HANNAH. I guess it's just hard to see why they can't just break out of the cycle. Or why they haven't yet. I mean, technically the Universe has been liberated.

VLAD. But the same people still live in this land. The people didn't change when the Universe Fell. The cycle that was started under the Dictators continues and it's hard to break out of that, if that is the only thing that you know. If for your whole life you're treated like shit, the only way you'll know how to deal with people is to treat them like shit. And that's awful, but ultimately it makes sense.

HANNAH. Sure, it *makes sense*. But that still doesn't make it alright.

VLAD. *(He looks at Hannah thoughtfully, and like he just has a realization.)* You're right. It's still doesn't make it ok.

HANNAH. See? This is what I have concluded: that the Universe is this fucked-up world where no one takes responsibility for himself. It is a land of lying, cheating, stealing and waiting. And for what? Waiting for the 16,000 specialists who will never come. Waiting for a better future? But how do you deserve a better future if you make no effort to improve the present? When, in fact, you don't want things to change at all? This has to stop. Man deserves better than this. Man is better than this. Whenever I heard about the Universe, I pictured good people victimized by a few evil men. That was the Universe that my parents left, a Universe full of frustration and belief in the ideals of freedom. That was before the Fall. But now the Universe is free. What the people dreamed of for so long has finally arrived. But instead they enslave themselves to this misery. How is this justice?

VLAD. *(In utmost awe and amazement.)* You know? You are the final chapter to my book.

HANNAH. *(Totally confused.)* What?

VLAD. Hannah, I have gone through this whole year, and thought I was mad for a good part of it. Every day, I was struggling to reconcile what I saw around me and what my conscience was screaming at me from within. I dunno, I got to the point where I thought I was the crazy one. And now,

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

here you are, and, well, it's just incredible. I mean, I've told you what has been going on, and you aren't acting like it is normal behavior! You understand, this is just amazing. Most every person I have mentioned this stuff to has responded with, "Well, what's your problem? This is how things work here." (*Vlad pauses.*) Thank you for calling me!

HANNAH. It feels so good to talk to someone about these things.

VLAD. Why couldn't I meet you a month ago, when you first got here?

HANNAH. (*Shrugs her shoulders.*) Asta e, but now we have met.

VLAD. Yes, yes, we have. (*By this point Hannah and Vlad have finished eating and the Waitress has brought the check. They each get out money to pay for their share, but continue talking. After they leave the money on the table, they get up and head towards the main entrance of the restaurant. They stand in front of the entrance, where they first met.*)

HANNAH. So, what is this about a book? Final chapter?

VLAD. Oh, I took a hiatus from 'working' for the Helper, to write a book about my experiences in the Universe.

HANNAH. Oh, I see. (*Vlad's cell-phone rings. He answers it.*)

VLAD. Yes, hello? Oh, hi, Painter. How are ya doing? Good. How'd the job go? Oh, no, I am so sorry. Not tonight. You see, I just met the most amazing woman. (*He smiles pointedly at Hannah.*) But some other time? Great. You take care. I'll speak to you soon. Uh-huh. Bye. (*He hangs up and turns to Hannah.*) Do you have anywhere you need to rush off to?

HANNAH. Well, no, what are you thinking?

VLAD. I was hoping that would be your answer. Do you wanna take a walk? Just for a bit?

HANNAH. That would be lovely. Sure. (*They start strolling.*)

HANNAH. So, when did your parents leave the Universe, Vlad?

VLAD. About half a century ago, our time.

HANNAH. Oh, so, a long time ago, before the Fall, before the Dictators?

VLAD. I am quite a bit older than you are, Hannah. My father is an old man now. I taught in the Beyond for years before I came here.

HANNAH. (*She thinks to herself for a moment.*) So, why aren't you married, Vlad?

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

VLAD. *(Takes a moment to find the right answer and shrugs.)* I just haven't found the right person yet. *(Changing the subject.)* And you? What is your family history in the Universe?

HANNAH. *(Kind of embarrassed.)* My parent's parents were the first to go to the City. They were the first to go to University. They were Doctors. When the Good Times ended they were declared Intellectuals and thrown in prison. My grandmother was quite outspoken against the regime . . .

(Thinks a bit.) Well, and then my parents escaped when they were young, about my age, and came to the Beyond.

VLAD. Wow . . . so what's your trade, Hannah? What are you? What do you hope to be? A politician?

HANNAH. A philosopher.

VLAD. So you are a philosophical helper.

HANNAH. Or a helping philosopher, rather. But truthfully, the 'helping,' the assisting the Help Brigade was an excuse to get over here. *(Thinks to herself for a bit, chooses her words carefully.)* I mean, don't get me wrong. I really do want to help, to make the Universe better, to fix what's broken here. But not only am I here for the Universals, I am also here for myself. I mean, suddenly something inside me was screaming, "Hannah! The Universe needs you NOW, and you need the Universe." And I just knew I had to be here. The Universe gave me my mother and father, and I want to give something back to it. I want to do my part to help mankind, and I came here where my own existence in a way began. As cheesy as it sounds, I came to get a sense of purpose and perspective in my own life, to ground me, to discover my roots and help humanity. *(By now, Hannah is tearing up and crying.)* And now I find, that he just doesn't want to be helped! But there must be something good here. There must be someone good. It's the Universe, there must be. I came all this way, I have held out for so long. I kept telling myself, "Hannah, so long as you get to the Universe, it will all be ok, so long as you get to the Universe"- And now I am here, and, well, just look at me!

VLAD. *(He takes her in his arms and tries to calm her down.)* Hannah, shhh. It will all be alright. You are here. See? You can do whatever you dream you can do. You have made it to the Universe. That is the first step.

HANNAH. Yes, but that hardly seems like an achievement.

TO THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STOPPED THINKING

VLAD. But it is! How many people from the world think about the Universe much less have such a passionate love for it as you do?

HANNAH. Yes, but how does that make things better now?

VLAD. It can make it a lot better, trust me, just your being here is good for the Universe.

HANNAH. I am not so sure anymore. But, Vlad, why did you come the Universe?

VLAD. Well *(Thinks for a moment.)* . . . my family's from here.

HANNAH. Yes, I know that, and? There are a lot of people with Universal blood in the Beyond, who just don't care. I told you why I came. You waited until now to come, why are you here? Now?

VLAD. Well, I am writing a book.

HANNAH. Yes, but before that occurred to you. What inspired *you* to come to help? What was the initial reason?

VLAD. *(Looking sadly off into the distance.)* I don't know, Hannah. *(He looks at her, defeated, empty.)* I don't have the answer. *(They walk a bit in awkward silence. Hannah stops and looks out over the surroundings, thoughtfully.)*

HANNAH. Well, the longer I am here, the more I see how I will entirely have to reconstruct the Universe in order to bring out the best in everybody. But that is why this is so daunting. I mean, I came here to help, not build up society from scratch.

VLAD. You don't necessarily have to do that, Hannah. There is another part of the Universe that you need to see. There is a bit of goodness here.

HANNAH. And that is?

VLAD. Givers.

HANNAH. People who give? I can hardly believe it based on-

VLAD. You will see for yourself. I will show you. Tomorrow we can go to the Not-City, the Country, the Land of the Givers. *(Lights down.)*

END OF ACT II

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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