

Living in Concussion

By Jeff James

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CHARACTERS:

DAVIS, a 20ish young man who never goes outside

ANTONELLI, a 50ish man who is the super of Davis' apartment building

MIKE, a mysterious 30ish man

A SEVERED HEAD, formerly a 20ish young man

A veiled WOMAN / MRS. ANTONELLI'S VOICE / BETH, all played by the same actress

SETTING – Davis's apartment.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

(We are in a dimly lit room, naked with cheapness and bursting with clutter, but not the kind of clutter that attracts flies. Clutter as a filing system. To one side of the room is a man sleeping on a bed whose sheets have fallen off onto the floor. Across the room against the back wall is a giant set of authentically distressed wooden cabinets with doors and drawers of all sizes; one particularly large cabinet has a lock on it. Right next to this is a window that has been poorly covered by a sheet. Moonlight and nighttime seep through a part where the sheet has fallen. Front and center is a small, square table flanked by two chairs. There is a front door on one side and a bathroom through another door on the other side.

This moment breathes for a few seconds and then the room subliminally fills with colors that grow until they become primary and absurd; along with this comes the swell of music, perhaps something like “Life Goes Off” by Jim O’Rourke. The light from outside the window pulses and grows in intensity until it becomes clear that the sheet covering the window is moving.

We realize that the man sleeping on the bed has awoken and is slowly sitting up as though he is in a dream. He sits and watches the lights in awe but then becomes fixated on the window when he sees that a long, feminine leg has begun peeking out from behind the sheet. We watch as fingers and a hand slowly follow the leg around the curve. Just as it looks as though the woman is about to peek her head around the sheet everything is interrupted by a knocking sound that rattles the whole apartment and seems to come from all around.

The man claps his hands to his ears, the woman disappears behind the sheet again, and the colors in the room begin to pulse with menace. The knocking grows in intensity and the furniture begins shaking. The man shakes his head back and forth violently but finally can take no more; he leaps from the bed as though to run from the apartment.

However, as soon as he steps foot on the floor, the spell is broken. Suddenly it is a quiet and very dim daytime. The man looks around warily, but sees nothing. The sheet has fallen off the window, so he and goes to fix it. He peeks behind the sheet and we can see that nobody is there, so he tacks it back onto the wall.)

Scene 2

(Suddenly, someone knocks on the front door to the apartment and the man nearly jumps a foot. Then he realizes where the knock came from and goes and opens up the door. As soon as the door is cracked, a large gentleman wearing work clothes – this is MR. ANTONELLI - sweeps past him and sits down at the table.)

ANTONELLI

Your rent is due, Mr. Davis.

Can't you let some light in here?

(Davis closes the door and walks around Antonelli to flip a switch on the wall. A single light flickers on. Davis sits in the other chair at the table. Pause.)

ANTONELLI

Sunlight is good for the soul, Mr. Davis.

(Pause. Antonelli sighs, then pulls out a cigarette and holds it in his mouth expectantly. Davis gets up and fumbles for a lighter, finds one, lights Antonelli's cigarette, and then sits down still clutching it. Davis declines the offer of a cigarette for himself.)

ANTONELLI

Well?

DAVIS

Hmm?

ANTONELLI

Can you?

DAVIS

...What?

ANTONELLI

Pay your rent.

DAVIS

Oh. No.

(Pause.)

ANTONELLI

I don't know what I'm going to do with you, Mr. Davis. I just don't know.

DAVIS

Kick me out?

(Pause. Antonelli laughs and then breaks into a coughing fit.)

ANTONELLI

Very funny, Mr. Davis! I'll have to tell my wife that one!

DAVIS

Tell your wife?

ANTONELLI

...Well, it's just that... You know... You haven't been outside in... how long has it been?

DAVIS

I don't keep track.

ANTONELLI

Well, a long time. ...I was just imagining you... *(Laughs.)* ...Well, you get the picture.

(Long pause.)

ANTONELLI

(Coughs.) Well, anyway... I know you're good for the money.

DAVIS

But I don't have...

ANTONELLI

(Stops him.)

No, no! Shh! Let's say... next Tuesday? How does that sound? I know you can get it to me. Next week my wife and I are going to have a little mixer for all the new tenants that have come in this month. You should come down.

(Davis starts to protest, but Antonelli cuts him off.)

ANTONELLI

Yes, yes, I know, but this'll be very small. Intimate, even. You'll think about it. Okay?

DAVIS

Is that all?

ANTONELLI

My wife wanted me to tell you about that. She said if I did one thing today, I had to tell you about that. She worries about you, you know. I tell her it's none of her business, but...

(Long Pause.)

ANTONELLI

Whiskey?

DAVIS

What?

ANTONELLI

I said, 'Whiskey?'

(Pause.)

DAVIS

Are you offering?

ANTONELLI

Do you have any?

DAVIS

No.

ANTONELLI
(Conspiratorially)

I bet you do.

DAVIS

No, I'm pretty sure I...

(Antonelli gets up and goes towards a pile of clutter.)

What are you doing?

(Antonelli goes straight for one pile and sticks his hand down in it. He rustles around and, after a few seconds, comes up with a flask full of sloshing liquid. He then goes and picks up two of the cleanest looking glasses from one pile. He sits back down at the table.)

ANTONELLI

Whiskey?

(Cuts off Davis.)

Sure you do.

(He pours a few splashes into the glass in front of Davis and pours a bigger helping for himself, which he immediately swigs.)

Cheers!

(Laughs. Pause.)

ANTONELLI (cont'd)

I suppose you're... Well, I... You see, the wife doesn't... um... so I... I thought you wouldn't mind. She's much happier when she can pretend she doesn't know.

(Pause.)

So, uh... your cable working all right?

DAVIS

Don't have a TV.

ANTONELLI

Oh.

Well, it's been acting up for some of the tenants. All they get is 42 channels of paid advertisements, all the time. Not even the same advertisements on all channels, mind you, but they're still complaining. I tell 'em it's not my fault the TV companies don't put good programs on anymore.

(Pause. Points at the glass in front of Davis.)

You drinkin that?

He doesn't wait for an answer, but reaches over and picks up the glass, which he swigs down quickly and refills.

ANTONELLI

Come on, it takes the hair right off your chest. Or puts it on, I don't remember how it goes.

(Long pause.)

ANTONELLI

Any leaks in the plumbing?

DAVIS

Uh...

ANTONELLI

I know how it is with me. Drip drip drip keeps me up all night, tossing and turning. I got this one pipe that keeps on dripping no matter how much I tighten it. I think it hears me coming, and stops when I get too close and then starts back up again when I'm not looking.

DAVIS

No. My sink works just fine... Look, Mr. Antonelli, I...

ANTONELLI

(Cutting him off.)

Any banging noises in the walls?

DAVIS

(Shocked.)

What? I uh...

ANTONELLI

(Laughs.)

Mrs. Rabinsky up on the third floor hears noises coming from the walls and she's trying to tell me that her place is haunted. Wants me to pay for some kind of... what d'yacallit... "exorcism"

ANTONELLI (cont'd)

or something. She doesn't know what the hell she's talking about. I told her it's just that young couple next door going at it like dogs, but she won't listen to me.

(Pause.)

ANTONELLI

Have you seen that girl?

DAVIS

Which... uh... who?

ANTONELLI

That girl up on the third floor. Girl of my dreams. I like 'em with dark hair like that, and those eyes... look like they could cut diamonds and draw blood from a turnip. I tell you, if I was a younger man...

You know, I don't think I've ever seen you with a girl, Mr. Davis. You've lived here... I don't even know how long, and I've never seen hide nor hair of a girlfriend. Not even a little bit of something... you know... I mean, I was in the war, so I know how it goes,

but... You must sneak 'em in when I'm not lookin'... Or maybe you're datin' somebody in the building, some little girl down the hall. You can tell me, Mr. Davis.

I mean, I get to know pretty much everybody in this building, and if it wasn't for the missus there's a couple I got my eye on, if you know what I mean...

(Suddenly the phone rings. Davis gets up to try and find it, but can't seem to figure out which pile it's under. After three or four rings, Antonelli pulls out a cigar, which he lights.)

ANTONELLI

Are you going to get that, or what?

(The phone continues ringing. Antonelli puffs on his cigar. Finally Davis finds a phone cord, which he starts following around the apartment. It seems to be endlessly long and wrapped around everything in sight. Davis continues searching while Antonelli talks.)

ANTONELLI

You shoulda seen the missus before we got married. She was always strong-minded, but when she was young there was something girlish about it, you know? And seein her was like seein the sunrise in spring. Wakin up and it's perfect weather.

She wasn't the first girl you'd look at in a crowd, though. Fact is, before I got to know her I had a crush on her best friend, Betty Ann, for the better part of a year. But that didn't go too well...

Anyways, one day I finally noticed her, sittin in the back with her favorite turtleneck on. Funny thing is... I couldn't see anyone else, after a while.

But now... everywhere I look...

(Pause. He pours another whiskey and drinks it. Finally, Davis finds the end of the phone cord, which he lifts up triumphantly, and then stares at because there's no phone attached... and yet the ringing continues. There is nothing but stillness and ringing for a few seconds, and then the ringing stops.)

DAVIS

Uh... I've got to take this, um... so if you don't mind... uh...

ANTONELLI

Oh, of course, son. Sorry to impose on you. I'm sure you don't want to hear the ramblings of an old man, after all.

(Antonelli returns the whiskey to its hiding spot and gets up to leave.)

ANTONELLI

The money next Tuesday. And don't forget about the mixer.

(Pause.)

...Have a good day, Mr. Davis!

(Antonelli leaves. Davis stares balefully at the phone cord, then coils it up and places it carefully on top of a random pile.)

Scene 3

(Davis plops down on the bed and sits quietly for a moment. He begins rubbing his forehead as though something is bothering him. Suddenly the room pulses with dark, colorful menace, and he winces in pain as his headache becomes unbearable. Just as suddenly the lights return to normal. He is shuddering and gasping. He gets up and goes into to the bathroom, where he splashes water on his face.

When Davis returns from the bathroom, he freezes, staring at his piles of clutter. He moves, then, like a man possessed, rounding up several parts of a strange looking device constructed equally of electronics and household objects. He also picks up a handheld tape recorder, a pad of paper, and a pen. He clicks on the recorder and begins speaking into it.)

DAVIS

Day 31. Time... inconclusive. Set down as “mid-day” for the purposes of this record. The only clock I can find is broken, and the only clock I can’t find is somewhere in one of the piles I haven’t looked in yet. Must set aside two hours of time to go through stacks from left to right until in correct alphabetical order and all items are accounted for.

I had another attack today. The attack was either longer in duration or more intense... I can’t tell which. Estimated time was anywhere from five seconds in length to fifteen minutes. Time seems to stretch and bend depending on where I stand in the room.

Intensity was a seven out of ten, if the attack on St. Patrick’s Day sets the standard for a five and a brain aneurism followed by death is a ten... but maybe I’m exaggerating. It felt like someone was drilling holes in my forehead with dull spoons covered in acid. No, no. That’s even worse...

(Pause. He stares down at the collection of items on the table for a few dull seconds, and then shakes himself out of his stupor.)

I've been seeing things again. Or I've been dreaming with my eyes open. Which isn't the same thing, but is. Are these things real, or am I making them up in my head?

...I see... I see her. Whoever she is. I've never seen her face, but it's like if... if I just could turn my head a few more inches to the side...

Dammit. A fucking... pointless tangent.

Experiment number seven, initial attempt.

(He clicks together the pieces, tightens the joints, maybe oils them a little. Once he is satisfied, he turns around and picks up a plastic bag full of peaches, one of which he pulls out and places in the machine. He squints at the machine for a second and then remembers to put on some goggles, which he pulls from another pile. He takes a deep breath, rubs his hands together, counts to three, and turns it on.)

DAVIS

Ignition!

(He waits expectantly for something to happen, and it slowly does. The machine seems full of parts which have no purpose but that begin rotating and squeaking. Finally it looks like it's going to do something to the peach... and then it flings the fruit across the room, making an awful mess. Davis turns it off.)

DAVIS

Results... inconclusive.

(He clicks off the recorder, throws the goggles aside and slumps onto the table.)

I just don't get it! I mean... I don't even know what the fuck I'm trying to do here!

Scene 4

(Davis is still lying on the table. After a few seconds, a woman slowly walks out of the bathroom. She is veiled from head to toe with a loose, slightly see-through cloth that only lets us see her silhouette. As she enters, unearthly music fills the room. Davis slowly sits up, but does not look at the woman. He is somewhere else. While he talks she hovers in the background, a still but insistent presence.)

DAVIS

For some reason I can remember this time when I was watching TV - because there was a time when I owned one - and I was watching it late at night. I liked sitting and letting reruns of Cheers and Dick Van Dyke wash over me like so much lukewarm bathwater. This time, though, it was so late that everything was for sale except for on the public access channel, where four men dressed in chicken suits were performing a pitch-perfect version of the Beatles' Abbey Road in track order and everything. All you could see through the masks were their lips moving to the words, and then the camera started zooming in onto the mouth of the one doing all of John Lennon's parts, and it got so close that all you could see was teeth and gums, until it zoomed right back out and the men in chicken suits were gone and in their place was this woman with wavy blonde hair and too much eye makeup and lips that took up half of her face. I couldn't tell if she was somebody famous or just looked the part.

She was staring straight into the camera and there was more sex in that one look than in a thousand pornos... and then the camera pulled back. She was completely dressed – normal clothing, nothing see-through or with leather or spikes or anything, but thing is... she had this... gun in her hand. This little revolver. And she was stroking it like it was covered in velvet. She gave the camera this knowing look, like I knew exactly what was going to happen. Or what I wanted to happen.

She slowly brought the gun close to her face, and sighted down the barrel, stroking it the whole time... and then she put it to her lips and kissed it.

What happened next, though, nearly made me jump out of my skin... She smiled at the camera, the kind of smile always glued to Vanna White's face, but something about it made me shudder... and then she took the gun and put it in her mouth and my heart stopped and I nearly choked to death on my own tongue because she started moving the gun in and out of her mouth and moaning theatrically.... And I realized what she was doing.

DAVIS (cont'd)

I don't know how long this lasted, but the whole time I sat there every part of my bones and all my muscles and the skin on the inside back of my eyelids were all screaming for me to get up, throw up, break the TV or throw it out the window, but I was frozen, paralyzed, speechless, deaf and dumb. The thought occurred to me then to wonder what would happen when the gun "got off" and I nearly vomited then because I was so frightened of being turned on...

And then just like that the channel switched back to the men in chicken suits, who were just finishing the last part of the last song with a little flourish.

I turned the TV off and never turned it on again. I tried to sleep that night, but it would not come, and I didn't sleep then or for a long time after.

(Davis slumps back down on the table. The woman walks up and kisses him on the back of his head and then leaves through the bathroom. The room returns back to normal.)

Scene 5

(Antonelli walks in the front door with a bottle of whiskey in a brown sack and two shot glasses. He pours a shot for himself, sets it down, and then pours another and slams it down in front of Davis, who shoots up awake.)

ANTONELLI

You're not keeping up.

DAVIS

Sorry.

(They pick up the shots, salute, and then take them, Davis with a painful grimace, Antonelli with stoicism.)

ANTONELLI

You should have seen them yesterday. I swear they get off on people watching them.

DAVIS

Who does?

ANTONELLI

Oh come on, you know! I told... I know I've told you about them before.

DAVIS

Humor me.

ANTONELLI

The couple that sits out on that bench in the park across the way. I see them... pretty much every day. They're all over each other. Every time.

(He goes to the window and pulls back the sheet. Davis squints because of the daylight.)

ANTONELLI

(Pointing.)

They aren't there right now, but it's that bench there.

(He waves for Davis to come over, and he does, although a bit unsteadily.)

ANTONELLI

She's a gorgeous girl... I don't know what I would do if I ever ran into her in the supermarket... might not recognize her without her boyfriend stuck to her face!

DAVIS

How can you even tell? I can barely see the bench from here.

ANTONELLI

Ah, the wonders of modern technology!

(He laughs and indicated binoculars in front of his eyes.)

My wife used to like bird watching. I can stare down a sparrow from 100 yards.

(Antonelli goes to pour more shots while Davis keeps staring out the window apparently lost in thought.)

ANTONELLI

(Handing Davis a shot.)

Bottoms up!

(Antonelli drinks. Davis stares his down and works up the nerve, then does it and grimaces. Antonelli walks over and starts poking at the pieces of the “experiment”.)

DAVIS

Don't touch that!

(Davis rushes over and gathers up the pieces, which he sets to one side and starts clucking over.)

ANTONELLI

Sorry... what is it? Looks broken.

DAVIS

It's not broken. It just doesn't work yet.

ANTONELLI

Right. Well... what's it supposed to do?

DAVIS

I haven't finished it yet, alright?

ANTONELLI

Right, but what do you want it to do?

DAVIS

Stop fucking asking me, okay? Can you do that?

ANTONELLI

Didn't realize it was a touchy subject! *(Before Davis can protest.)* I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

(After a few seconds of work, the experiment is reassembled and Davis steps back. Pause.)

ANTONELLI

It certainly is an interesting piece of machinery. Is that...

DAVIS

Chicken wire? Yes.

ANTONELLI

...And...

DAVIS

The gum is only temporary.

ANTONELLI

What's this do?

DAVIS

Don't touch that.

ANTONELLI

Is it the on switch?

DAVIS

I said don't touch that!

(But he does anyway, and the machine turns on and starts whirring and clicking. An arm reaches over and picks up a peach and another part starts violently punching holes in it until it has made an awful mess. Davis manages to turn off the machine mid-punch.)

ANTONELLI

So mostly it just makes a mess, huh?

DAVIS

I told you I haven't finished working on it! Now, Mr. Antonelli, if you don't mind...

(He is interrupted by knocking on the door.)

DAVIS

What the hell...

(Davis turns to the machine and covers it with a sheet. He glares at Antonelli and then goes to answer the door. Antonelli gathers up the whiskey and shot glasses and stows them.)

DAVIS

Who is it?

(The person knocks again. Davis sighs and opens the door. Immediately a tall man bursts into the room. He is wearing business clothes, maybe a little anachronistically out of style.)

MAN

Chris, old buddy! It's me, your pal Mike! I haven't seen you in... why it's been years, hasn't it? Bet you hardly recognize me. I shaved the beard and lost some pounds but it's the same old Mike underneath, if you know what I mean. I was in the neighborhood, thought I'd drop by and see what you're up to these days. Place looks the same as ever... can't you let some more light in here? You'll turn into a ghost, my friend. *(To Antonelli.)* Pleasure to meet you, name's Mike Kelly. Mike is short for Michaelangelo. That's a little joke I tell. No reaction? Maybe next time. Anyways... how ya doin, Christopher?

DAVIS

That's not my name.

MIKE

Course it is, you old kidder! He's a handful, this one.

DAVIS

I'm sorry...

MIKE

Mike.

DAVIS

...But I uh... I'm afraid you're made a mistake. My name isn't Chris and I don't know who you are.

MIKE

You're kidding, right? Please tell me he's kidding! Come on, man! If this is a joke, you're taking it too far!

(Pause.)

Alright then. If your name's not Chris then what is it, huh?

DAVIS

It's uh... it's...

(He is cut off by a woman yelling from the hallway.)

MRS. ANTONELLI

MARIO!

ANTONELLI

Ah, shit.

MRS. ANTONELLI

MARIO ANTONELLI, YOU GET YOUR ASS UP HERE AND FIX THE FUCKING DISHWASHER! RIGHT THIS INSTANT!

ANTONELLI

That's the little lady. I've got to go. Nice meeting you, Mike. *(Pause.)* You know, I recognize you from somewhere. Have we met?

MIKE

I don't believe so, but here's my card. We'll have lunch sometime.

ANTONELLI

Have lunch? I mean, uh, I was just saying...

MRS. ANTONELLI

MARIO!!!

ANTONELLI
(Leaving quickly.)

Goodbye!

(In the hallway.)

Coming, honey bear!

MIKE
Well, I can't stay for too long but I'd sure like to catch up with you sometime.

(He starts to peek at the experiment but Davis stops him.)

DAVIS
I don't think...

MIKE
Look, just take one of my cards. It's got my cell number, my fax and my pager. Don't call the home line, though. I try to save that for emergencies cause the wife works out of the home and she gets cranky if all my buddies start calling to go out drinking when she's still got orders coming in. A hard worker, that's my wife. Give me a call, okay?

DAVIS
But...

MIKE

Still pretending you don't remember me, huh? Well, maybe a coupla beers and a plate of ribs will jog your memory – my treat, any time you want. Anyways, I've got to be going. The wife's expecting me back. Women! Can't leave 'em alone for a second!

(All of a sudden Davis doubles over in pain, clutching his head. The lights flicker and a waterfall of blood starts pouring out from the crack at the bottom of the locked cabinet door.)

MIKE

Looks like you have some kind of plumbing problem there. You should have that looked into. Anyways, I gotta go. You have a good one and you make sure and give me a ring, okay?

Scene 6

(As soon as Mike leaves the room becomes surreal and menacing. Deafening, squalling music starts playing, and the sound of omnipresent knocking fills the room. The lights pulse and throb and Davis thrashes around the room with his hands clamped over his ears, yelling at the top of his lungs.)

DAVIS

STOP IT STOP IT STOP IT STOP IT STOP IT!!!

(The noise suddenly stops, and Davis' final "STOP IT" rattles in the too-quiet room. Another small gush of blood comes from the cabinet and then it trickles to a stop. Davis slowly takes his hands from his ears and turns to the cabinet. He walks toward it as though it might bite him at any moment. He reaches out to touch the lock but flinches back immediately as

though it is scalding to the touch. He then stands still for a moment like he is listening to something only he can hear. He then strides purposefully over to a pile of stuff and pulls out a key ring. He immediately picks out the key he wants and goes and puts it in the lock, which opens and falls off. He seems a little surprised he knew how to open it.)

DAVIS

(Reaching for the door handle.)

Come on, it's probably nothing. I bet I'll find those overdue library books I've been looking for.

(He holds his breath and opens the cabinet. Inside on the shelf is A SEVERED HEAD, a little bloody but otherwise basically intact. Davis slams the door shut and runs across the room.)

DAVIS

Oh god oh god oh god oh god this isn't happening! Please tell me this isn't fucking happening oh god oh god oh shit oh fucking shit oh my god!

(We hear a muffled voice from inside the cabinet. Davis freezes.)

VOICE

Hey!

Hey you!

DAVIS

Who's... there?

VOICE

Me!

Open up!

Open the cabinet!

DAVIS

No. I don't want to.

VOICE

Come on, open the fucking cabinet!

DAVIS

No.

VOICE

Davis!

DAVIS

Oh god!

VOICE

Davis, open the fucking cabinet!

DAVIS

You don't know my name! You don't know my fucking name! You don't exist!

VOICE

Last time I checked, I existed. I fucking exist and its fucking dark and you need to open the goddamn cabinet right now, alright Davis?

DAVIS

This can't be happening. I'm not talking to you.

VOICE

Stop being a pussy and open the damn door! Or do you want me to make it start knocking again?

DAVIS

(He shoots up.)

NO! No knocking! I'll open the door. Oh god. I'll open the door.

(He gets up and opens the door. The head blinks at the light and scans the room and looks Davis up and down.)

HEAD

Took you long enough. Now do me a favor and scratch my left eyebrow.

Come on, I won't bite you.

(Davis does and then snatches his hand back in fear.)

DAVIS

This isn't possible. I'm seeing things.

HEAD

It's such a small-minded failing to get stuck on what's "possible" or not. Nothing's impossible. You just haven't seen it all yet. Now take a good look, cause I'm here and that's not changing.

DAVIS

What... who are you?

HEAD

Oh, that's a good one. I'll tell you all about it later. For now, just call me Head. I know it's not too creative, but I'm trying to keep things simple. First things first, though, go on over to that pile over there, the second one from the left, and get me one of those cigars. I've been dying for one for god knows how long.

DAVIS

A cigar?

HEAD

They're not Cubans, but they'll do just fine. Go on. That's it. No, a little further back.

DAVIS

I didn't know I had these. How did you know about them?

HEAD

I know lots of things. Come on, stick one in my mouth and light it.

(Davis does so, and the head puffs out a huge cloud of smoke with an expression of bliss.)

HEAD

Ogay. Dow gogeddme ad addsray.

DAVIS

What?

HEAD

(Very deliberately.)

Go get me an ashtray.

DAVIS

Oh. Right.

(Davis gets up and then realizes that he has no idea where to find an ashtray. He thinks for a second and then walks over to a random pile and sticks his hand in. Almost immediately he pulls out an ashtray, and looks surprised.)

DAVIS

An ashtray. Who'd have guessed?

HEAD

Yeah whatever, best thing since sliced bread. Bring it the fuck over here.

(Davis sets it on the shelf underneath Head's cigar. Head sets the cigar down so that it won't roll away but he can still reach it with his lips.)

HEAD

Much better. Now, down to business! How's the progress on your invention?

DAVIS

My... I don't know what you're talking about.

HEAD

You're a very bad liar. It's underneath that sheet, isn't it? Show me how it's working.

DAVIS

No. I... don't want to.

HEAD

When most people are frightened they have a fight or flight impulse. You're just being childishly stubborn, which in my book is a poor version of neither. You and I both know that you're stuck and you need help, and you've got nothing else to do right now but work on it. So you can sit there and twiddle your thumbs or you can show me what you've got.

DAVIS

Stop talking like you know everything! Besides, I could close the cabinet and never open it up ever again! How would you like that, huh?

HEAD

You could, but the headaches can get worse. Much worse.

DAVIS

I don't believe you.

HEAD

Fair enough.

(Davis screams and doubles over in pain, thrashing around on the floor. The head puffs on his cigar and hums a jaunty little tune. Davis stops thrashing after a few seconds, gasping and twitching on the floor.)

DAVIS

Fuck.

HEAD

Pretty much.

I'm waiting.

(Davis crawls over to the experiment and pulls off the sheet covering it.)

HEAD

Looks pretty rudimentary from here. Why don't you give her a test run for me, hmm?

(Davis sets a few peaches on the machine and flicks it on. Two parts pick up the fruit and start smashing them into each other over and over again, and juice flies everywhere.)

HEAD

Alright, that's enough.

(Davis turns it off and sits on the bed with a dejected look on his face.)

HEAD

Well I don't know what the hell you've been doing, but we don't have much to go on here. I'll have to do some serious redesign to get this little baby off the ground. Find me a pen and some paper, why don't you? I've got to get my ideas out.

(Davis gets them and sticks the pen in Head's mouth. He begins to write and then stops, staring at Davis.)

HEAD

Can I get a little privacy here?

DAVIS

Oh. Sorry.

(Davis closes the cabinet door halfway, just enough that Head still has light to work by.)

Scene 7

(Davis sits on the bed, picks up the tape recorder, and clicks it on.)

DAVIS

Day ...37. Time... half past mid-afternoon. I think that stress has finally caused me to lose contact with reality. I have created an imaginary friend in the shape of a severed head, and for some reason it's doing my work for me. Or maybe I am the imaginary friend and the head is the only thing that's real. If I go to sleep, will he disappear? Or is it when I wake up? Right now I'm willing my eyes to open up as wide as possible, but everything is staying the same and my eyes are just getting dry.

Maybe I need to get out a little bit. I think this apartment is getting to me. Maybe Mr. Antonelli is right. Maybe I need to find a nice girl. She doesn't even have to be nice, really, she just has to be a girl and she has to be willing to talk to me. Except I haven't talked to a woman in... have I ever talked to a woman? I think I have. Except I can't remember. I can't remember anything. I can't remember what I ate for breakfast this morning, or if I ate breakfast.

I keep looking out the window. I don't know what I'm looking for...

DAVIS (cont'd)

No, that's a lie. I don't know why I'm lying to myself. I'm the only one who's going to listen to this tape, anyways. Unless I become famous and someone is doing research for my biography.

No. I'm looking out the window because I'm looking for them. Antonelli told me about them. Every five minutes I check, but I haven't seen anything yet. I wonder what kind of people would do such a private thing in a public place?

Would I ever be caught dead doing something like that?

I don't know. Maybe caught alive, I guess. That saying has never made sense to me. Maybe sometime hundreds of years ago when the first person said that they knew what it meant, but I think as time has gone on and more and more people have said it they've made it mean less and less until everyone who hears it just nods their head like they know exactly what you mean but really they're just nodding their head because they don't want you to realize that they were alphabetizing their shopping list in their head while you were talking.

God, I don't know what I'm talking about. I'm a nervous wreck. Nothing is working right, I can't get any peace and quiet and I can't sleep and now I've just spent half an hour talking to a fucking severed head who smoked a cigar while we talked. My life didn't used to be this weird, I swear.

I'm going to take a nap now.

(Davis turns off the recorder and sets it down, then curls up in bed wearing all his clothes and falls asleep on top of the sheets in fetal position. The lights change as some time passes.)

Scene 8

(Antonelli comes into the apartment without knocking. He is carrying a grocery bag, which he sets down on the table. He goes over to Davis and starts shaking him awake.)

ANTONELLI

Wake up, ya great big lump! Wake up and play some cards with me! I brought some beer and stuff to make dip, if you'd just get the hell out of bed!

DAVIS

I just dreamed the strangest thing...

HEAD

Who's this ass-clown?

ANTONELLI

Who said that?

DAVIS

I thought if I said it was a dream I could make it true. It didn't work. It didn't work, did it?

HEAD

When you were a child... did your mother let you eat paint chips or something?

(Antonelli opens up the cabinet and then gasps in horror and crosses himself.)

ANTONELLI

Jesus Mary Mother of God! What have you done, Mr. Davis? Good lord! What have you done?

HEAD

Well mostly he was being a lazy ass while I was working. Not that he's much help in the first place, mind you.

ANTONELLI

Oh lord! It can talk! You've opened up the gates of hell, Mr. Davis! You'll be eternally damned!

(Antonelli clutches his heart and starts drinking heavily from a flask hidden in his pocket.)

HEAD

How quaint. A religious fundamentalist and an alcoholic. Forgive me for being crude, but you don't look Irish. Ha. Sorry, bad joke. Couldn't resist.

DAVIS

Wait... you can see it, Mr. Antonelli? That means I'm not crazy after all!

HEAD

Don't get ahead of yourself, now.

ANTONELLI

Of course I can see it. I can see that something horribly wrong is going on here, I can see that. You've been dabbling in things you shouldn't have been, Mr. Davis. Oh Mr. Davis. When my wife finds out about this!

HEAD

Your wife isn't going to find out about anything. Now, sit yourself down and take a few deep breaths. Surely we can make ourselves sensible, can't we?

DAVIS

Ordered around by a talking head! I never!

HEAD

Oh stop your whining and sit. Now, Davis, explain things to the nice man.

DAVIS

Explain? I... uh... explain what?

HEAD

You're completely useless, you know that?

DAVIS

I'd be more useful if you told me what the hell's going on here!

ANTONELLI

You can't trust a thing it says, Mr. Davis! It's a tool of the devil sent here to drag you down into the fiery pits of hell!

DAVIS

Mr. Antonelli...

HEAD

Very theatrical. Now shut your yap, you yammering old gasbag!

Apparently, my good friend Davis, I have overestimated your understanding of the situation. I suppose after seeing the shambles that is your work I should have lowered my expectations, but I have always been a charitable soul.

Davis, go over to your collection of pornography and pull out a few examples.

DAVIS

This isn't the time for...

HEAD

Do me a favor and shut the fuck up until you know what I'm doing.

(Davis goes to a pile and removes the top layer, revealing a large stack of pornographic magazines. He grabs the top few, looks at the titles, and then puts back one he seems embarrassed to own.)

DAVIS

Don't know why I bought that one.

HEAD

Now, open up one to the centerfold.

(Davis does so, and holds it out so that Head and Mr. Antonelli can see.)

ANTONELLI

Ah. Young Girls in Heat, issue number seventeen, pages 40-45. Judy Lynn Johnson, age nineteen, a beautiful young girl until she got a very unnecessary breast enlargement surgery a year or so later. Always a shame when that happens. Fake ones just never look right to me.

(Davis and Head turn and stare silently at Antonelli, who shrugs his shoulders.)

ANTONELLI

What? I'm a connoisseur!

HEAD

Yes, very pretty. Now, open up another one. And another. Gentlemen, we are looking at one percent of one percent of the human population. Freaks of nature. The exceptions to the rule, walking the earth in nylons and push-up bras, selling a little bit of skin and fantasy to all the guys at the newsstand.

HEAD (cont'd)

Wouldn't you like one of your own?

ANTONELLI

A magazine?

HEAD

No, you twit, I...

DAVIS

Wait! Are you telling me I'm creating some kind of mind control device or something? To turn women into sex slaves? Cause if you are I'm not having anything to do with it!

... Besides, I don't think that's what I'm making...

HEAD

Of course not. Why bother? Not nearly ambitious enough, and still too much of a hassle if you ask me. First you have to go to all the trouble of finding a subject and then you have to calibrate the microwaves to her specific brain activity pattern. No, we've got higher goals, my friends. And you, Mr. Antonelli, are going to help us. We need an expert on the female form, after all.

ANTONELLI

Well, I do have quite a sizable collection of pictures...

HEAD

But that would mean collaborating with... what was it, “a tool of the devil”?

ANTONELLI

I’m sorry. I jumped to conclusions. Things were said that should not have been. I apologize. What would you like me to do?

HEAD

That’s a much better attitude, my friend. Sit down and I’ll tell you exactly what needs to happen.

DAVIS

So we’re just supposed to trust you?

HEAD

Don’t you want to know what you’ve been toiling over for the past... I don’t even know how long?

DAVIS

But that doesn’t make any sense! Why would you know what I’ve been doing?

HEAD

I dunno. I could hear through the cabinet door. Now sit down and listen.

ANTONELLI

Couldn’t hurt to hear him out, Mr. Davis. He seems like a pleasant enough fellow, even with the whole “missing a body” thing.

DAVIS

(Sits down.)

Fine. I give up on understanding what the fuck is going on here. Tell me what to do, o wise and honorable severed head!

HEAD

I'll pretend like I didn't detect the sarcasm. Now, gentlemen, listen up...

(The lights go to black. End Act One.)