

“THE NAKED AND THE DEAD”
[EXCERPT FROM UNPUBLISHED
1942 PLAY]

N O R M A N M A I L E R

Editor's Note: Following is a scene (Act 3, scene 3) from the play, never before published, that Mailer wrote from August 31 to September 14, 1942, in Boston. The manuscript of this play is in the Mailer Papers in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas in Austin. Mr. Mailer has generously granted permission to publish this scene, and the assistance of the Ransom Center staff is gratefully acknowledged. “Boston State Hospital: The Summer of 1942” by the late Robert F. Lucid, which appears in this number of the Review, details the circumstances of composition and deftly summarizes the preceding action. The only changes made to the original text, which Mailer typed himself, are the corrections of typographical errors and two brief, bracketed, explanatory interpolations.

- Act 3, Scene 3. (The scene opens in the Hydrotherapy Ward, the next day. Two of the tubs are still occupied by the patient of Act 2, scene 1, and Sandy. Miss Gannon and Ray Cobb are talking at the right. Gannon is seated at the chair before her desk, and Cobb is perched on the desk.)
- Cobb. I wonder when they're gonna send Holm down?
- Gannon. I don't know. In a little while.
- Cobb. LaPlante is heartbroken, they're still putting Jackie Cadigan together.
- Gannon. Well, I think you're too hard on LaPlante. After all, we all have our pets, and Holm deserves to come down here after beating Cadigan up.

- Cobb. I'm glad you think so.
- Gannon. Why?
- Cobb. Cause LaPlante doesn't like you. He thinks you're gross.
- Gannon. He thinks I'm what?
- Cobb. Gross.
- Cannon. Why that little fairy.
- Sandy. Get me a glass of water, will ya, please, I'm thirsty, I'm thirsty as hell, please get me a glass of water.
- Cobb. You want water, do ya? How many times have I told you to shut up?
- Sandy. Ray, please.
- Cobb. I'll give you water all right. (He crosses to the exit behind the tubs, comes back with a cup of water) Gannon speaks in his absence.
- Gannon. Sandy, take it from me, don't ask him for water.
- Cobb. (Standing over Sandy's tub.) Here, I'll give ya some water, (He throws the water in Sandy's face.)
- Sandy. (Screaming.) That was hot, hot.
- Cobb. You're damn right it was hot, now I'm telling you to shut up, don't open your mouth.
- Sandy. All right, all right, don't hit me, please.
- Cobb. (Crossing back to Gannon.) The guy brings out my sense of humor.
- Gannon. Yeh, you're a wit all right.
- Cobb. Not just a wit, I'm smart.
- Gannon. Yeh, you're as smart as a whistle ... I can get one for three cents.
- Cobb. You're almost as funny as I am ... I wish Land would come, I'm hungry.
- Gannon. He's supposed to relieve you.
- Cobb. Yeh.
- Gannon. You can't depend on him for anything. I heard he's ready to quit.
- Cobb. Yeah? Well, I hope he don't quit till after I eat.
- Gannon. I knew he'd quit, the men were saying today that he was going to after that night. Do you know what they meant?
- Cobb. I know, but you won't, Iris.

- Gannon. That means you'll tell me if I'm willing to ask you for long enough. Well, it's not important enough.
- Cobb. All right, what are *you* getting at?
- Gannon. I say these college kids aren't tough enough. You really got to be hard to stay.
- Cobb. Hughson's a college kid.
- Gannon. Well, I didn't mean him. There's been a couple of others here that quit; if they didn't go to college they were too soft. It all comes down to the same thing. You got to be hard or you quit.
- Cobb. Well, did Land quit yet[?] If he did, how am I gonna eat, then ... Jesus to die of starvation with nothing to eat but three tubs.... Two of them occupied.
- Gannon. It's all right, he's still here, but he won't be long. I'm telling ya, you got to be tough to stick here, like in a....
- Cobb. In a...?
- Gannon. Well, in a concentration camp.
- Cobb. Naw, you got it all wrong, Iris. It's just that they come out in the open over there. They make hitting a good thing, that's all. It's the same as if you buy a war bond here. What d'ya expect when they take a healthy kid—like me, for instance—and tell him to hit a Jew, go ahead, it's a pass to heaven. Well, he hits the Jew that's all, what's more he enjoys it.
- Gannon. Well, you enjoy it, too.
- Cobb. Yeh, but they don't say it's a good thing around here, not openly anyway. Course it all comes out to the same thing.
- Gannon. You hit Jews. I saw you hit Cohen in the tubs when he was down here a couple of weeks ago.
- Cobb. That's cause he was hitting back. I got to practice, I'm going into the navy you know.
- Gannon. I heard it enough.
- Cobb. (Completely forgetting his thesis.) Well, do you know when?
- Gannon. No.
- Cobb. I got my orders two days ago. I ain't had a chance to talk to you. You know, I won't be seeing you after next week, Iris.
- Gannon. You won't? Goodbye.
- Cobb. (Taken aback.) Don't you care?
- Gannon. You were a good kid ... I guess.

- Cobb. (Desperate.) Well, now that Dicky is ... gone upstairs, ... ah ... why don't you give ... us ... a kiss for the armed forces. (Starts to kiss her, when Land unlocks the door and enters right.)
- Land. My how Dicky has changed. (But it is a feeble attempt at humor. He looks more drawn and tense than ever before in the play.)
- Gannon. (Suddenly.) Kiss me, Ray. (He does.)
- Cobb. (Good-naturedly to Land.) Hello, Land, you're as fast as ever relieving, aren't you? Don't you care if anyone else eats?
- Land. (Looking around.) Where's Thomas Allen?
- Gannon. Your boy-friend was moved to solitary. (The buzzer rings, Cobb heads for the door.)
- Cobb. I suppose they want me to bring him down now. (As he is about to exit.) I never eat, I absorb food through my arm pits. (He exits.)
- Land. I think you're going down, Iris.
- Gannon. Oh, you do? How?
- Land. Dicky was a couple of notches above Cobb.
- Gannon. Then you minded my kissing him.
- Land. Me? No. Why should I mind?
- Gannon. You can go to hell.
- Land. Why?
- Gannon. (She does not answer.) I'm surprised you are still here.
- Land. Why, was I supposed to leave?
- Gannon. That's the general idea.
- Land. If it is, I've been getting it steadily for the past three days now.
- Gannon. Oh, sure you're pretty smart, but you won't be able to last in here.
- Land. I'll stick.
- Gannon. I don't think so. I think you're ready to break any minute now—look at your hands! (Grasping them suddenly.) You're nervous. I don't think you're going to last through the day.
- Land. (Has pulled his hands away.) Look.... What happened to Dicky? ... Does he still have his money?
- Gannon. Of course, he's still got his money. (She is trembling a little.) But that doesn't matter right now. You're no good.... You're a squealer with a college education, so you call it something else.

Well, I despise you. I think you're kinda small.... I don't even wanta be in the same room with you.

Land. What's the matter, Iris?

Gannon. I said, go to hell. (She starts to cross to the exit.)

Land. Where are you going?

Gannon. I feel like leaving, I want to eat. If you think I'm doing something that would hurt the patients, go ahead,—squeal:

Land. (Realizing suddenly.) I can't help it if I don't click ... the way you click.

Gannon. (Turns.) You can't? (She is trying to hold herself in.) No, I suppose you can't.

Land. I'm sorry, Iris.

Gannon. No, *I'm* sorry.... Look, you're going to need this. (She crosses to her desk, opens the flat drawer, and hands him a length of rubber hose.) It came in handy once for me.

Land. What do you mean?

Gannon. Use it! You'll see. If he makes trouble, ring the alarm. The men won't answer it, but maybe Hughson will. I'll tell him to.

Land. What are you talking about?

Gannon. They told me to leave when you came down. I'm no fool.... Come with me.

Land. That's what they want. I'd get sacked for leaving this ward open.

Gannon. All right, then stay.... Only.... Be careful.... I dunno, I always liked them dark.

Land. I'm not worried about you.

Gannon. Me?... Listen, I can do everything a man can do, and carry a kid in the bargain. (She exits) (Land looks at the hose in his hand, then lays it down on the desk. He shudders, and the strain of the night before shows in his face. It is completely quiet in the ward. Then, off stage, a bit of sound starts, builds up, grows greater. It takes about thirty seconds for it to reach the door, but by the middle of it, Holm can be heard shouting, I'll kill him, I'll kill him, and Pike and Cobb and Flavin arguing, fighting and swearing at him. Land listens to the noise, then picks up the rubber hose. He is trembling. Sandy croaks hoarsely from the bed, but very quietly this time.)

- Sandy. Could I have a cup of water, please.
- Land. Hmm?... Yes, I guess.... There's no reason why you can't. (He gets one for him slowly, the noise increasing, Holm heard distinctly once or twice. Land comes back with the water.) Only this is the only one you can have.... All right.
- Sandy. The only one.
- Land. Here, drink it slowly, SLOWLY!... I'm sorry I yelled, Sandy.
- Sandy. No more. (A key sounds in the lock, Holm bellowing furiously. The door opens, and Cobb, Flavin, and Pike enter. They fall with Holm to the ground, holding him in an arm lock, Cobb applying the pressure. Pike and Flavin spring to their feet quickly.)
- Pike. We're going Cobb. You coming?
- Cobb. Yeh. You get him into the tubs, Land.
- Land. I can't get him in alone.
- Cobb. (Barely hanging on to Holm.) Sure you can. I gotta eat now. Get ready to handle him.
- Land. I said, I can't do it alone!
- Pike. (From the doorway.) Well, you didn't think we were any good. Now, try playing lone wolf. (Cobb slaps Holm across the face, springing to his feet and dashes through the door with Pike and Flavin. The key sounds after them. Holm rushes toward it, then stops. He turns around and looks at Land.)
- Land. (Walking up to him very slowly, trying to control him.) Relax, Holm, relax ... relax.
- Holm. Get away from me. I don't like you. I don't like you.
- Land. You have to go in the tub.
- Holm. No, don't touch me. You took my wife away.
- Land. No, I didn't.
- Holm. Leave me alone, you goddamn bastard. You're with her all the time. I heard them talking.
- Land. (Walking toward him very slowly.) The tubs are good for you, they're like swimming.... You just lie there, and let the water trickle over you.... I'll make it cool.... I promise.... You'll enjoy it.
- Holm. Go away.
- Land. You'll enjoy it.... Now, come on take off your shirt. (Puts his hand on Holm's shoulder.) (Holm gives him a shove that sends him flying backward for several feet.)

- Land. (Consciously forcing himself to walk forward.) Any other attendant would have hit you for that. Doesn't that show I'm trying to be your friend?
- Holm. I'm not going in. Leave me alone.
- Land. Look, it's my job to get you in. I'm not trying to hurt you.... But, it'll do you good. It'll help you get better that much sooner....
- Now, come on, take off your shirt. (He starts to unbutton it. Holm flings his arm away.)
- Holm. Leave my wife alone, I'll kill you.
- Land. I don't know your wife.... Now, shut up; it's for your own good. (Holm pushes him.)
- Land. Now, stop it Holm.
- Holm. You're Land ... you're Land.
- Land. All right, now take off your shirt ... (Land quickly unbuttons two or three of the top ones, then looks up at Holm's face.) No, Holm, no. (He backs away.)
- (Holm starts for him in a mad rush, and Land avoids him, twists back, and sets the alarm bell off which rings and rings throughout their fight. The inmates in the tubs start screaming and shouting. Holm catches Land at the right corner, up, and pinions him against the wall. Land shouts in pain, reaches up, and pinions Holm's arms in his loose shirt. He pushes desperately, and Holm backs up for a moment trying to free his arms. Land picks up the length of rubber hose, and backs warily away. The alarm-siren is still going. Holm catches Land again, one of his arms loose, and beats him clumsily once or twice. Land shouts, Goddamn you, I've had enough, and starts beating Holm over the head with the rubber length. Holm folds to the floor, and Land drops on him, laughing, and still beating him with the hose. The inmates have stopped but the siren keeps going. Hughson rushes in, sees Land, and runs to him, shaking him by the shoulder in excitement at Land's laugh.)
- Hughson. (Shouting above the alarm.) That's it, David, that's it, you got to enjoy it. (Land hears him, stops, gets to his feet, and turns off the siren. The silence is very strong. Hughson, his face shaking repeats in a trembling voice.)

Hughson. You got to enjoy it ... you got to ... enjoy it.... My, God, David, I have gone far haven't I? (Land drags Holm to a tub, and with a great effort, drops him in, clothed. He fastens the top over him, speaking as he does this)

Land. So you see it finally.

Hughson. (Holding his head.) I saw it for a moment before, David. I saw it, after I wiped Tomasney's face with his own urine stained pants. I forced it back then, David. I thought about it for a while, but it wasn't strong enough.

Land. Wasn't strong enough?

Hughson. No. It's a terrible chain here. You start hitting the men because it's the easiest way usually and the strain is terrible. But, you don't just hit men, and let it go at that. You enjoy it as soon as you get used to it. You would too, David. There's something very satisfying about it. You don't think you would, do you, David?

Land. Yes, I do. In childhood, I used to have the picture of a hated face before me, and I used to think with relish of smashing it and smashing it.

Hughson. I think every man has that face. All I know, David, is that once you get over the idea that striking men is bad, you enjoy it to the full, and you look for opportunities to beat them. The whole scale changes, what was bad is good, what good, bad.

Hughson. (Continued.) David, I'm corrupted.

Land. But you see it.

Hughson. My feelings are all shot. The whole base is gone.

Land. Is it too late?

Hughson. I think so, David, I hate people. I hate them.

Land. No.

Hughson. David, I can't be near them all. Once I was on a crowded subway, and I hated every one of them. They were ugly, they have sores all over them.

Land. Everybody gets that way sometimes.

Hughson. You don't understand. I want to destroy them. I think of how it would be to smash their faces and mangle their bodies. Remember how Pike relished that rape story? It was supposed to

be for you, but I knew when I talked to him, that he enjoyed it. David, there's no love left in us.

Land. Ralph, shake it, it isn't too late, you haven't been here long enough.

Hughson. It's no damn good I tell you.

Land. You've got to leave. Why don't you go to where we went fishing that time? You'll get back the scale then.

Hughson. David, you're coming with me.

Land. Of course not. I have to stay. I admit defeat if I go.

Hughson. David, you have to go. If you stay you'll become brutalized.... Look, how you beat Holm.

Land. That was necessary.

Hughson. You see, that's a change already. Of course it was necessary, but when you first came here, you wouldn't have admitted it.

Land. I can't go.

Hughson. You never had a chance here, David. The whole set-up doomed you to defeat. Don't stay here and slowly slip into a Pike or a Pusher or ... a Hughson. Forget the whole place.

Land. The attendants will be worse than ever, they will have won.

Hughson. So they win, but you save yourself. You can do work, outside an insane asylum, you can help other kinds of people.

Land. I'll go, because you are right.... I never had a chance, but I'll keep fighting. I'll be back some day, some how.

Hughson. You're mad. Forget it. Take a defeat, and let it ride. One defeat isn't anything. It's just a first one.

Land. You got to make your stand at the first one. If the first time an inmate had been hit, someone objected this never would have started.

Hughson. I say you're licked, and you'll take it.

Land. I say it isn't a complete one. (Pause.)

Hughson. Will you come fishing with me?

Land. Yes. (They start toward the door. Just at the exit, Hughson sheds his uniform coat, and then suddenly with hatred hurls it into the corner.)

Land. Now, the pants. (They laugh, and unlock the door.)

Sandy. Give us a glass of water, please, please. (Hughson turns irritably towards him, and then relaxes.)

Hughson. Still?

Land. For a long while. Get him the cup, last official act.
(Hughson crosses slowly, and gives him the cup. When Sandy is almost done, Hughson abruptly brings his free hand up to support Sandy's head.)

Sandy. Thank you.

Hughson. (Crossing to Land.) I feel okay.... We're gonna catch us some fish.

Land. For awhile, but remember I'm going to be back with something to fight with. I'll think it out.

Hughson. And I say you're wrong, and you should let it alone ... but I know you'll be back. (They exit.)

SLOW CURTAIN

THE END

August 31 to September 14, 1942.