

MAURICE DECAUL

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## Traction

### A play in one act

**C**haracter: Lewis 32. An analyst for a NGO

Notes: The play should not last more than one hour and fifteen minutes. The apartment should be rich with sound, although Lewis does not speak. The apartment should be new with modern fixtures, minimalist in its aesthetic.

It is late afternoon when Lewis returns home with groceries. He hangs his coat and places his boots on a towel. He retrieves a wet mop from the closet and buffs the floor where he had walked with his boots, gingerly removing the cleaning pad from it. He walks to the trash and places it in then washes his hands.

He shakes a bothersome thought out of his head.

He walks to the kitchen with his groceries and begins to unpack the bags: a pound of Arctic Char, and two lemons. One half dozen eggs and cream cheese. Four everything bagels and a package of heirloom tomatoes. He reaches into one of the bags and removes a few potatoes and a container of pulp free orange juice. He moves a bowl of butter, a head of romaine and two pounds of cherries to the counter. He unpacks a gallon of water and a pint of half and half. He opens the refrigerator and places everything within except for the Arctic Char and the lemons; he puts the everything bagels into the bread box near the toaster.

He takes a Tupperware container from the cupboard and places the Arctic Char in it. The plastic grocery bags and the butcher paper in which the Arctic Char was wrapped are placed in the trash. He washes his hands.

Lewis opens the refrigerator and takes out a piece of ginger. He smashes it on his cutting board with his chef's knife. He has another memory of the taxi exploding towards him but he shakes the memory from his head and continues chopping the ginger.

He mixes the ginger with soy sauce and red pepper flakes then massages the marinade into the flesh of the fish.

He washes the cutting board and chef's knife, dries them and then cuts a lemon into wedges. He eats two of the wedges. He opens the refrigerator and removes the bottled water, opens it and squeezes lemon juice in. The roughness of the bottle's handle reminds him of the pistol grip of his M16. He lets the thought go and places the water in the freezer. He cleans up the counter then washes his hands.

Lewis walks from his kitchen to his living room. His apartment is newly built. It's neither trendy nor extravagant but it reflects Lewis's relative affluence. Its floors are covered in grey limed oak; its ceiling is unpainted concrete. An expensive black leather sofa provides seating while a midcentury-inspired dining table set provides more.

Lewis stands in the center of the room with the television remote in hand, flipping from channel to channel before settling on cable news. The anchor reports typically damning news: another massacre, quarreling politicians, fraud, waste and abuse. Lewis, who considers himself conscientious and progressive, shakes his head.

His cellphone buzzes and he takes it from his jeans and responds to the text message. He turns the ringer up and walks to the kitchen and plugs the phone into a wall socket.

He takes a mug from the cupboard and fills it with water then places the cup and water in the microwave. He sets the microwave for two minutes and pushes the start button.

He takes the Tupperware container out of the refrigerator, opens it and smells the Arctic Char before placing it back in the refrigerator. He removes the half and half and opens it.

The microwave beeps and Lewis takes the hot water to the counter and spoons in two table spoons of coffee and two table spoons of sugar in the raw. He stirs in a splash of half and half.

His cell phone chirps and he answers the text message. He takes a sip of coffee and walks to the center of the living room.

He stands with the remote in hand and switches the channel to sports. After a minute he switches back to cable news.

His cell phone chirps so he walks to the kitchen to answer the text message.

Realizing that he had forgotten to place the half and half in the refrigerator he does so and takes a handful of cherries. He eats the cherries and drinks the coffee in the kitchen while still watching cable news. He finishes his cherries and his coffee placing the pits in the trash.

He washes his hands.

He places the cup and spoon in the dishwasher then washes his hands again.

He looks over his shoulder at something said by a pundit on the cable news channel and sees the taxi exploding towards him. He closes his eyes and then opens them.

He takes a breath.

Lewis turns on the oven and sets the temperature. He takes the Tupperware with the Arctic Char from the fridge. He opens the Tupperware and smells the Arctic Char. He takes a Dutch oven from the cupboard and places the Arctic Char inside. He drips the remaining soy sauce and ginger on to the Arctic Char before placing the lid on the Dutch oven. He places the Tupperware in the dishwasher and washes his hands. He sets a timer on the oven and places the Dutch oven inside. He walks to the window in the living room and opens it slightly to cool the apartment.

He goes into his bedroom for several moments; he removes his clothes places his jeans and button down shirt on hangers and hangs the hangers in his closet. His undershirt, socks and underwear get balled up and placed in the hamper. He wraps his towel around his torso and exits his bedroom, but on his way to the bathroom, he stops in front of the television to watch cable news. Lewis shakes his head in disbelief as the news reports another mass killing; a blast of very cold air forces a shiver so he crosses the living room to close the open window. The oven beeps indicating it has completed cooking the Arctic Char. Lewis shakes the cold off of his body. The cell phone beeps and Lewis walks to the kitchen to answer the message.

He walks into the bathroom to shower and locks the door. The toilet flushes and we overhear Lewis washing his hands. While Lewis is in the shower his cell phone beeps then it rings.

Lewis is followed out of the bathroom by a cloud of steam. The apartment is cold from earlier and he shivers. He walks to the thermostat and turns the temperature up five degrees.

The smell of the Arctic Char is compelling enough for Lewis to want to remove it from the oven to taste. He salts it and returns it to the oven. He takes the lemon water from the freezer and places it in the refrigerator.

A group of people are in the hallway outside of Lewis's apartment. Their conversation is indistinct, but their voices are recognizable as female. Lewis walks to the front door and looks through the peephole. He touches himself. His cellphone beeps and Lewis is surprised by the many messages and missed calls. He answers the text then unplugs the phone from the wall socket and heads to his bedroom to dress.

He dresses in sweats and t-shirt and walks out of his bedroom with his phone in hand texting back and forth. He takes a seat on the couch and closes the phone and switches the channel on the television from cable news to sports. His phone beeps and he returns the text. He flips the channel on the television from sports to cable news then gets up and walks to the dining area and sets the table for two. At this moment, he realizes that he has been thinking about the taxi exploding towards him again; he stands still for a moment and lets out a breath.

Lewis walks to the thermostat and turns the temperature down five degrees then opens the window to vent the heat.

Lewis begins to cut the potatoes into wedges. He seasons the potatoes with salt, pepper, rosemary and olive oil and pours the wedges into stoneware. He places the stoneware into the toaster oven and sets the temperature and timer. He preps the salad and raspberry vinaigrette. He washes his hands. His phone beeps and he answers the text, the taxi explodes towards him.

Lewis walks to the thermostat and turns the temperature up five degrees then closes the window. He turns down the lights in the apartment then sits on the couch and flips the television from cable news to sports. He gets up and walks to his desk and picks up a book. He switches the television off and begins to read. He feels the dull pain of a migraine reveal itself behind his left eye. He clutches at his eye and groans. He closes the book and takes a bottle of over-the-counter pain reliever from his work bag. He opens the bottle and spills four pills into the palm of his hand. He downs the pills with a cup of water and lays down on the couch. He gets up and takes his Ray Bans from his work bag and puts them on. He switches off the light and sits in the dark.

The toaster oven rings. Lewis bolts up and dashes to the bathroom to vomit. He writhes several times into the toilet. He flushes the toilet. He brushes his teeth and washes his hands. He stumbles from the bathroom to the kitchen and makes himself a cup of coffee. He walks back to the couch sipping the coffee. His phone

beeps. He reads the text then tosses his phone against the wall. He rubs his eyes and forehead.

Lewis walks in to the bedroom and comes out wearing a sweater. He spills four more pain pills into his hand and downs them with the rest of his coffee. He picks up his car keys and puts on his heavy winter coat. He slips his feet into his boots and not caring so much about the mess he is making, walks to the living room and retrieves his broken phone. He places it in his pocket and walks out the door.

Hours later, Lewis lets himself into the apartment. He removes his boots and heavy winter coat. He steps carefully trying to not step with his sock feet in the puddle. He goes into the bathroom and washes his hands. He places the roasted potatoes and Arctic Char into the refrigerator. He drinks a cup of orange juice. He massages his temples and eyes. He is lost in thoughts about the increasing severity of his migraines. He is beginning to believe he might need to see a neurologist to make sure he does not have a brain tumor. He opens his eyes and sees the exploding taxi.



**MAURICE DECAUL**, a former Marine, is a poet, essayist, and playwright, whose writing has been featured in the *New York Times*, *The Daily Beast*, *Sierra Magazine*, *Epiphany*, *Callaloo*, *Narrative* and others. His poems have been translated into French and Arabic and his theatrical works,  *Holding it Down*  and  *Sleep Song* , collaborations with composer Vijay Iyer and poet Mike Ladd, have been produced and performed at New York City's Harlem Stage, Washington DC's ATLAS INTERSECTIONS FESTIVAL, in Paris and in Antwerp. His play  *Dijla Wal Furat, Between the Tigris and the Euphrates*  was produced in New York City by Poetic Theater Productions in the winter of 2015. Maurice is a graduate of Columbia University and New York University, and is currently studying at Brown University.