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The Northwest Theatre Review is a regional journal intended to publish works by or about Northwest theatre scholars and practitioners. Our goal is to provide a means by which to share the discoveries and accomplishments of our vast, highly productive region as exemplified by the diverse topics contained in this issue. All contributions are of vital importance to our region and may encompass topics as wide ranging as playwriting, community college issues, theatre for youth and international theatre.

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Editor’s Note

The previous issue of the Northwest Theatre Review contained a fine article on the history of Chinese theatre during the early days of Portland, Oregon, written by Allen J. Adams. Following a prolonged struggle with a most serious illness, he passed away before he could see his research in print. This volume is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Adams, theatre scholar and practitioner, and inspired teacher.

It is truly fitting that this issue consists entirely of work produced by Northwest theatre students.

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Someone’s in the Kitchen with Dionysus

SUSAN K. BROWN

"Women’s work is in the kitchen." It is impossible to tell how many times Susan Glaspell may have heard that phrase while growing up in eastern Iowa, but the expression must surely have made an impact because some of her best work was created in that very room. In her works, The Road to the Temple, "A Jury of Her Peers," and Trifles: A Play in One Act, she reveals the kitchen as a source of inspiration and conscience, a center of hospitality and security, and a chilling and traitorous crime scene.

Born in Davenport, Iowa in 1876, Glaspell was influenced by the midwestern tradition of agriculture and the newly formed commercial aspects of middle America:

Davenport, a pleasant, prosperous town on the Mississippi River, had made the transition from river town to railroad terminal without losing its charm and its beauty. Built on the west bank of the river in a valley area...Davenport remained a regional trading center that gracefully assimilated the newer commercial interests with its traditional agrarian concerns. (Wateman, p. 1)

Glaspell’s paternal family, some of the earliest settlers of Davenport, arrived in 1835. The pioneer spirit of Midwesterners included a great love of homeland and ancestral pride, and Glaspell was no exception. Her father, Elmer S. Glaspell, instilled these attitudes in his daughter throughout her formative years. Having spent her young summers on an aunt’s farm on the outskirts of Davenport:

...she gained the insights into rural Midwestern life that she was to convey in much of her fiction. She had no reason to question her homeland, nor to attack its values... Although in later years her attitude toward the Midwest underwent some modification, she wrote in 1942: "I have never lost the feeling that is my part of the country." (Wateman, pp. 17-18)

These words are particularly poignant when viewing her one-act play, Trifles, and the short story, "A Jury of Her Peers." Her short fiction:

...is not only Miss Glaspell’s best known story, one recognized as a classic of its kind it is also her finest story critically... It shows her more objective and mature attitude toward the Midwest.

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ern locale; its style is perfectly suited to the content; and it has characters who reach significant conclusions about the meaning of life. In addition, "Jury of Her Peers" has a unified plot and dramatic conflict because it was based on the one-act play Trifles, which she wrote for the Provincetown Players in 1916. (Waterman, p. 29)

In 1918 Glaspell married George Cram "Jig" Cook and moved to Provincetown, Massachusetts. This marriage marked a significant change in her life, reflected not only by the marriage itself but by the drastic change in location. She and Cook, native Iowans, were moving from the conservative climate and culture of the Midwest to the progressively liberal east. Her art, as well as her life, was about to change drastically for the next nine years.

Under the influence of Cook and the Provincetown Players, she abandoned the novel to write plays. Her adjustment from the conventional novel to the experimental play was at once abrupt in decision and smooth in delivery. This change in the direction of her writing, having already published three novels, a play, and a collection of short stories, was executed primarily by her desire to please and support her husband. In her biographical novel about Cook, Glaspell relates her commencement as a playwright:

"Now, Susan," he said to me, briskly. "I have announced a play of yours for the next bill."

"But I have no play!"

"Then you will have to sit down to morrow [sic] and begin one."

I protested. I did not know how to write a play. I had never "studied it."

"Nonsense," said Jig. "You've got a stage, haven't you?"

So I went out on the wharf, sat alone on one of our wooden benches without a back, and looked a long time at that bare little stage. After a time the stage became a kitchen there all by itself just as it was. There was the table, the stove, and the steps going upstairs. Then the door at the back opened, and people all bundled up in—two or three men. I wasn't sure which, but sure enough about the two women, who hung back, reluctant to enter that kitchen. When I was a newspaper reporter out in Iowa, I went down-state to do a murder trial, and I never forgot going into the kitchen of a woman locked up in town. (Glaspell, Temple, p. 255–256)

Glaspell's imagined kitchen on the wharf was a place representing two important factions of her life: inspiration and social change. The kitchen of the women in the early 1900's was a place where many women's identities were forged. Mothers would sometimes keep their recipes or special sewing techniques secret, because their pies or their needlework were often what gave them a sense of self, of worth. It would have been important to a woman who had given up all other individual identity to hear the words, "No one else can make a pie as good as your Mama" or "Have you ever seen such tiny stitching?" A woman's self esteem was often afforded to compliments like these, sometimes lightly given, but gravely taken. This same kitchen was the center of the home, a place where important matters were discussed, budgets were prepared, the family bank was housed, sustenance was served (be it through food or prayer), babies were birthed and bathed, wakes were held, fires were sustained, figures and letters were taught. The kitchen has been the inspirational source for many writers, Susan Glaspell among them. The kitchen she envisioned as she sat upon the wharf would soon become the setting of what critics have often touted as her most successful play.

Trifles is the poignant tragedy of a midwestern wife who has suffered abuse and neglect at the hands of a brutish husband. The play opens onto the cold and gloomy kitchen of a Nebraska farmhouse where John Wright has been murdered, strangled with a rope in his sleep. Three men and two women enter the room, the men to look for a motive regarding this case, and the women to gather some things for Minnie Wright who is being held in the county jail. In the course of collecting Minnie's shawl, apron, and some tattered clothing, the women uncover clues which not only solve the mystery of John Wright's death, but establish Minnie's motive. Minnie's action was clearly not without provocation as the women discover. In an unspoken agreement, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters conceal the evidence from their husbands and the county attorney. Their actions in the kitchen of Minnie Foster-Wright encourage the audience to ponder this act of revenge and consider "how sometimes a man's loyalty transcends a man's laws." (Kozelka, p. 182)

While the kitchen was the author's inspiration for the setting and the theme of Trifles, it was also the source of tremendous guilt that she strove to expunge in her creation of this play. Though Glaspell, during her lifetime, never revealed the identity of the murderer in that "down-state" trial, noted biographer Linda Ben-Zvi discovered through her research the source of Glaspell's subject: "the murder of a sixty-year-old farmer named John Hossack on December 2, 1900, in Indianola, Iowa." (p. 21) At this time, Glaspell was a twenty-four-year-old reporter for the Des Moines Daily News. It is assumed that Glaspell's acquaintance with the Hossack kitchen stems from a visit to the farmhouse where she was gathering material for the newspaper which, according to Ben-Zvi, expected two tasks from her: "rouzing the readership and ensuring that the story stay on the front page." (p. 28). In this journalistic experience, as well as her more creative venues, Glaspell was successful. In her depiction of the Trifles character, Mrs. Hale, Glaspell seemed to sort through her own troubled emotions concerning her involvement in this case. As Ben-Zvi points out, she mixed "fact, rumor, and commentary with a superfluity of language and imagery." (p. 24) In this manner she submitted twenty-six reports on the Hossack case. Ben-Zvi's article thoroughly explores the Hossack case and Glaspell's account of it, pointing out the damming and unfair opinions formed about the suspect which, though by no means evidence, were the yardstick by which Mrs. Hossack's guilt was measured. In the final argument for the prosecution, the county attorney revealed that:

Margaret Hossack had been pregnant and given birth to a child before their marriage... Just how a pregnancy thirty-three years earlier could have been the sole cause of trouble in the marriage and how it proved Mrs. Hossack's guilt in the murder of her husband was not clear, but as Glaspell reports, it provided the jury with the impression that she was a woman who could not be trusted. (Ben-Zvi, p. 51)

Fifteen years later, Glaspell created characters that represented the predominant figures of the Hossack case. Ben-Zvi offers that "...the lawmen bear traces of the original investigators.... Mr. Hale is a composite of the Indianola farmers who testified...." Mrs. Peters apparently was modeled

https://cedar.wwu.edu/wstr/vols/iss1/1
after the Iowa sheriff's wife, who sat by and wept with Mrs. Hossack during the trial. The victim and accused, John and Margaret Hossack, were rewritten as the ill-used couple, the abusive John Wright and his victimized wife, Minnie. Perhaps the most revealing character of all was Mrs. Hale.

Mrs. Hale comes to her own awareness in the course of the play. What she discovers in the kitchen of the Wright home is her own complicity in Minnie's situation, because of the aid she has withheld. "We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same thing," she says, summarizing her insight about "how it is for women." In light of the Hossack case and Glaspell's role in sensationalizing proceedings and in shaping public opinion, the latter appear to be confessional; thus, to her question "Who will punish who?" Mrs. Hale's words seem to indicate Glaspell's awareness in 1916 of her omissions and commissions in 1901, of her failure to act in Margaret Hossack's behalf, and of her failure to recognize the implications of the trial for her own life. (Ben-Zvi, Mandel, p. 88)

Though Glaspell adapted to many of the radical ways of the bohemian culture practiced within the population of Greenwich Village and the Provincetown Players, she "remained at heart a Midwesterner." (Waterman, p. 59) Glaspell's own words speak her conviction most sincerely, "Although my home has for some years been in the East...almost everything I write has its roots in the Midwest; I suppose because my own are there." (Bigby, p. 16) Her restless characters, their unfulfilled lives and their bleak surroundings often reflect strongly this prairie heart. Her sympathies for the women who left their families, their comfortable homes, and their art, literature, and music to follow their men to the vast, plains and the pervasive indifference.

As a kindred spirit to Glaspell's Minnie Wright, Cather's Aunt Georgiana in "A Wagner Matinee" is a woman who suppresses her love of music, as she adjusts to the hard life of a farmwife. Never completely abandoning this love, she teaches Clark, her nephew, in the glow of the kitchen fire, Latin, Shakespeare, mythology, and scales and exercises on a small parlor organ, purchased for her by her husband. Cather's character, though she has suffered the abuses of difficult farm labor and the alienation from the richness of her former days, finds a way to keep a shred of her abandoned life alive in the male world, which at this point in the play is to investigate the women to comprehend the share in those simple pleasures that other women experienced.

MRS. HALE. Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie. She had to wear plain clothes and be lonely, when she was Mrs. Hossack, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that—oh, that was thirty years ago.

MRS. FETERS. She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. Yes, here it is. (Glaspell, Trifles, p. 12)

This brief dialogue tells much about the women and their roles, not only in this play, but in life as well. The only reason that these women have entered the male world, which at this point in the play is to investigate the scene of the crime, is to collect a few meager items which Minnie Wright has requested. The men have left the women alone in the kitchen to gather these items and have departed with demeaning comments regarding the trivial concerns of the women, including Minnie's fears over her canned fruit and the condition of the kitchen. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, by the very essence of being female and at home in the kitchen, are able to read the signs of disarray for what they are—clues to a disturbance. The County Attorney only dismisses the disorder and comments that Mrs. Wright didn't have the "homemaking instinct." (Glaspell, Trifles, p. 10) The obtuse Sheriff displays an even broader lack of sensitivity when he charges, "Nothing here but kitchen things." (Glaspell, Trifles, p. 9) In her essay, "Murder and Marriage: Another Look at Trifles," Karen Alkalay-Gut underscores the acute perception of these women and the lack thereof in the men:

And yet, of course, it is precisely their unwillingness to perceive the potential relevance of the kitchen, the world and pattern of the women, that excludes the men from understanding what has happened: they fail to comprehend the motivations for the events, and the method of uncovering the underlying pattern eludes them. The little squares of material being formed into a quilt that the women decide to bring to Mrs. Wright to "occupy her time" is ridiculed by the men but provides an unrecognized key to this male exclusion: because this quilting method parallels the only way clues could form the truth; the joining together of scraps of details allows the women to comprehend the situation of Minnie Foster and her development from house- wife to criminal. The "log cabin" patchwork the women discover in Minnie Foster's sewing basket is made exactly in this fashion: rectangular strips are sewn around the original square or rectangle...of the patch. Each patch has an individual entity, but its beauty (and meaning) is in relationship to the other patches formed with similar painstaking consideration. The colors
Glaspell's choice of the "log cabin" pattern is masterful for it allows several layers and textures symbolic of the women in this play to emerge in much the same way the pattern of the quilt does. Mrs. Hale first notices that the sewing on a particular block is uneven and the stitches are large, unlike the work on other blocks. She suspects, as does Mrs. Peters, that this work may be significant. In fact, Mrs. Hale wonders what could have been troubling Minnie so that her work could be so careless. The "log cabin" is also symbolic of Minnie’s desire for a shelter of warmth (physical and emotional) which John Wright has denied her. "Small Things Reconsidered: A Jury of Her Peers," an essay by Elaine Hedges, presents an effective argument regarding the importance of Minnie’s quilt:

Unable to sing in the church choir, deprived of her surrogate voice in the bird, denied access to other people, and with no visible beauty in her surroundings, Minnie, almost inevitably one can say turned in her facelessness to the final resource available in nineteenth-century American women—quilting. Minnie’s quilt blocks are the penultimate trifle in Glaspell’s story. The discovery later of the strangled bird and broken bird cage explain the immediate provocation for Minnie’s crime. But it is with the discovery of the quilt blocks, to which the women react more strongly than they have to any of the previously introduced "kitchen things," that a pivotal point in the story is reached. (Ben-Zvi, p. 61)

Finally, this particular pattern can be made from the stingiest of fabric remnants, so representative of Minnie Wright’s existence. Her name, Minnie, is highly significant of this minimal reality. All that is found in her kitchen, her threadbare garments, the broken stove, splintered chair, meager and spoiled food supply, and the telltale quilt scraps are from the bottom of the barrel. As Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters piece together the sad life of Minnie Foster Wright, a woman who calls for help from the bottom of her barrel, they unveil a startling tale of cruelty and revenge. All of the clues are in the "kitchen things." The most damning piece of evidence, one that would provide the motivation that the men are so determined to find in the larger and more "important" rooms in the house, is the discovery of the strangled canary, wrapped in silk, at the bottom of the sewing basket. The women know Minnie has suffered the last abuse from John Wright when he destroyed her canary. This discovery prompts Mrs. Peters to recall a dismal childhood memory in which a boy killed her kitten with a hatchet. In her reverie she recalls her desire to avenge her pet’s death and harm the boy. With this memory and Mrs. Hale’s own desire to make up for her neglect of her own kind, the women conspire in an unspoken agreement to conceal this evidence. This concealment is artfully foreshadowed in the opening scene when the County Attorney is criticizing the untidy condition of the kitchen. Mrs. Hale defends Minnie with a terse reply about how much work there is to be done on a farm and how men are often careless about the dirt they bring into the home. Attorney Henderson condescendingly remarks that her defense is a woman’s way of being loyal to her sex. Cleverly, Glaspell sets up a chain of queries and discoveries that turn Minnie Wright’s house against her. But, in a strange knot of complications, the women become a jury that acquits Minnie.

This judicious action of the women is precisely what motivated Glaspell to turn the play into a short story. The action of "A Jury of Her Peers" begins in Mrs. Hale’s kitchen:

When Martha Hale opened the storm-door and got a cut of the north wind, she ran back for her big woolen scarf. As she hurriedly wound that round her head her eye made a scalded sweep of her kitchen. It was no ordinary thing that called her away—it was probably farber from ordinary than anything that had ever happened in Dickson County. But what her eye took in was that her kitchen was in no shape for leaving her bread all ready for mixing, half the flour sifted and half unsifted. (O’Brien, p. 206)

Again Glaspell uses the kitchen to tell about character and situation. This time, the kitchen is Mrs. Hale’s, and the reader catches a glimpse of that Midwestern pride and sense of order. Women were loathe to leave their homes in disarray when they were called away, even for a short trip. Part of the ingrained ritual of the farm wife was to tidy up before leaving the home. The word “scandalized” in the opening paragraph is particularly effective. It carries with it a description of Mrs. Hale’s attitude and an overwhelming foreshadowing of what was to come. As in Trifles, the rest of the action takes place in the kitchen of the accused.

The naked truth often startles; sometimes it liberates, but it always empowers. Good drama tells the truth about humans. In Trifles the theme that emphasizes the importance of little things is not extraordinary, but Glaspell’s approach is noteworthy. Paul Kozelka observes how “slowly she builds interest until the reader becomes as deeply involved as the neighbors.” (p. 182) The audience member is drawn into sharing the sympathy and protection of the absent protagonist of this play.

This absentee character was one of Glaspell’s gifts to modern drama. In her devotion to Cook and the Provincetown Players, she became an integral part of its lasting success:

They were searching for something deeper and meaningful. . . . Roaming around in the dark tunnels of the psyche, those of the Provincetown relentlessly probed for the truth of human experience and struck the mother lode of American realism. (Kozelka, p. 27)

In her imaginary kitchen on the wharf, Susan Glaspell developed an outstanding one-act play that would deliver a message modern thinkers would embrace for years to come. The women in her kitchen urge even the most conservative of minds to transcend tradition. Glaspell’s women are in the kitchen with Dionysus, and they are stirring up the emotions, a necessary ingredient in modern drama.

References


CAST:
The Storyteller
AMY BRIDGES-WILLIAMS
a blond haired jew
Chorus (This can range anywhere from four to ten women)

SCENE: The stage is dimly lit, with four long and thin pieces of white chiffon hanging from each vaum. Down stage left, (Vaum B), there is a rectangular black box, on it are sitting two Shabbat candles, a Kiddush cup, a Spice Box, a bottle of wine, and a Havdalah candle. The Shabbat candles are lit. Upstage left, Vaum D, there is a single chair, or a black box, which is chair level. Running diagonally from upstage right, Vaum A, to downstage left, Vaum C, there is a thin line of soil dividing the stage. Upstage, a large screen of muslin should be hung. This will serve as the projection screen for the slides. The slides should be back-projected, behind the muslin, so the pictures do not become distorted by actors walking in front of the slides.

As the lights come down, the Chorus, wearing grotesque white masks, black skirts, black shirts, and black shawls covering their heads, kneel on the line with candles. As the lights fade from black, to a slight eerie dim, solemn Mediterranean music begins that is impassioned and reverent. The masked chorus begins a movement piece that is representative of the Jewish faith. It is a dance of deliverance and worship. As the piece progresses, The Storyteller dances out between the Chorus. She is not masked, and she moves with complete freedom and liberation. As the music finishes, the Chorus kneels silently, frozen.

Amy Bridges-Williams is currently a freelance theatre artist in Anchorage, Alaska. She is a recent graduate of University of Alaska—Anchorage, where she wrote Women of the Holocaust.

No performance or reading of this play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of Ms. Bridges-Williams.
The Storyteller: (with authority). This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Mitzrayim, in Egypt. All who are hungry, let them enter and eat. All who are in need, let them come and celebrate. Now we are here. Next year we will be in the land of Israel. Now we are enslaved. Next year we will be free.

The Chorus enters quietly in the corner, as A57763 and a blond haired jew come to Israel on the soil line. The Storyteller goes to the Shabbat table to begin the Sabbath Ends ritual. Throughout the ritual, the Chorus moves together in the corner, breathing words Barukh atah Adonai softly, almost a silent moan.

The Storyteller: (begins pouring wine into the Kiddush cup and lets it overflow) Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam borei p’ri ha-gafen.


The Storyteller: (lifting the spice box to smell the spices) Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam borei mi’nei besamim.


The Storyteller: (lifting the cup of wine) Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam be’ma’aseh. Barukh atah Adonai, Ha-mavdil be’ma’aseh.


As The Storyteller finishes her song, A57763 wanders onto the stage. They acknowledge one another, and a slight comes onto the music that reads, A57763. As The Storyteller exits, the chiffon blows up behind her, leaving A57763 on stage alone. The lights fade up to a warm romantic glow. A57763 notices the picture on the soil line. She picks it up, taking it in. Obviously, it is a photograph that holds meaning for her.

A57763: (She is addressing the audience.) I love romance. (pause) I love romance. To me, the only book worth reading is a book about romance. The only movie worth watching is a movie about romance. The only life worth remembering is a life about romance, because that is a life about love.

In the time of Moses, many years ago, there was a very romantic custom. When a Jewish woman was truly in love with her husband, she would have his name tattooed on the palm of her hand as a sign of devotion to him. That was the custom. Though it may sound very simple to you, to a Jewish woman it was significant. You see, in the time of Moses, many years ago, people were very careful when they chose a name for their child. They did not choose a name because it sounded beautiful or because it was popular. In the time of Moses, people chose a name that stood for the beliefs, the ideals that the family stood for. They chose names that meant peace, honor, revolution, and when a woman wrote that name on her hand, it meant that she stood for something. It meant that she stood with her husband. For her husband. That she held in her hand forever his honor. When he was gone, she could hold him, and remind her children of what they came from. The strength that was theirs, passed on through a name. Just a name. (pause)

I am A57765. That name, too, has meaning. It means that I was the 57,765 person to come to Auschwitz. I was the 57,765 person to be disinfected. I was the 57,765 person to see the sign above the wall. Work is Freedom. Freedom is a strange word to see on the wall of Auschwitz. (She notices the picture and fondly picks it up.) My father was a professor of political science at the University in Warsaw, Poland, in 1987. He was a smart man. He was also quite vocal about his opinion of the Nazi Party. So vocal, that one morning in March, he was loaded onto a truck with fifteen other people, taken to the forest, where he was ordered to dig his own grave, then shot. Two months before, I went to live with a Roman Catholic family in a village called Rudama. I was fifteen years old the last time I saw my father. (As she reverently places the picture where she found it, she recognizes her husband’s scarf and is drawn to it.)

(worshipful and nostalgic) I married my husband when I was only eighteen years old. I met him at the Roman Catholic school where he was studying to be a priest, but when he took one look at me he had to give it up, or so he said. (light-hearted) Who could blame him? He was a smart man. Gentle. Kind. He loved to talk, to hear me talk. He was a good man.

You see, the family that took me in told the village that I was their niece. In 1937 no one realized that the Nazi army would search so extensively just
to find one person. Who would have thought that one life could be so important? But they left no stone unturned. (pause) One morning they came for me.

I will never forget that day. We had just finished eating breakfast. My husband was in the living room reading. My daughter was in the kitchen with me. (pause) I don’t think I mentioned her. She was four years old. I was folding the tablecloth, when I heard a knock at the door. I knew. I couldn’t move. I just stood there, holding onto that tablecloth like it was my lifeline. At that moment, I was somewhere else looking down on a life that I did not know. In the back of my head somewhere, I could hear someone telling me that everything would be all right. That was only a dream.

(frank) I heard a voice. Loud. Demanding. Angry. Wanting to know where I was. Wanting to know where my daughter was. Then another voice. This one more familiar. This one more protective, telling them to go away, to leave us alone. (pause) Then a gunshot.

I took my daughter into my arms, and I told her to cover her eyes. We walked out of that house. We walked out of that life. A57763 walks out of that house. We walked out of that life.

As the lights fade, and A57763 exits, some upbeat 1940’s jazz begins playing. The Storyteller comes onto the stage, wearing a beautiful tiara. She begins laughing and dancing with The Storyteller. Throughout the first of her monologue, the music continues to play, and she is telling the story with The Storyteller.

a blond haired jew: (charming with a touch of arrogance) My blond hair is my jewel. It’s my prize. From the time I was a child, it has always brought me good luck. I can still hear my mother saying, “God bless you with that hair. Solomon had wisdom, David had strength, and you, you have a good head of hair. Better than Samson. Good looks pay off for a woman in this world, my dear. Mark your word. Look at Queen Esther.”

Pay off, it did. (She puts on the tiara) I won my first beauty pageant when I was only five years old, and I didn’t stop winning. I could sing and dance pretty good too, but when the ballots came in, they always said the same thing. (elated pause) She has the most beautiful hair in all the world.

I have heard it said, that a good education will make you rich, or that a smart business sense will get you far, but all my money came from this right here, my hair. (She becomes drawn into herself. The music fades out, and The Storyteller leaves.)

(Taking the tiara off. Addressing the audience) The first time I realized how precious my hair really was, though, was the first day in Auschwitz during the selection. We had gotten off the train, when we were ordered to get into a line. A man was walking beside us, looking us over, and dividing the line, sending some to the right and some to the left. I did not know this then, but I soon found out that those sent to the left were immediately killed, either sent to the gas chambers or shot, then burned their first day in Auschwitz. Those sent to the right were “the chosen.” The ones who would move in, work to keep the camp running, get sick, and eventually end up in the incinerators themselves. There were many selections in Auschwitz.

So as this man was dividing our line, he eventually came to me, but when he did, his rushed efficiency suddenly changed. He stopped, took my hair in his hands and said, “You, you are beautiful. If you didn’t such a swine, I would take you home right now and make love to you.” With that, he motioned me into the right line.

After all of us were divided into our lines, the ones in the left were sent to be disinfected and showered, but when the soldier at the bath house saw my hair, he said, “Are you sure you’re a Jew? You look too good for that. We could never shave off this hair. You will have to go to work in the commandant’s quarters as a servant. He’ll like you. You don’t have a big nose.”

So there I was, in the middle of Auschwitz, where everyone received a cup of coffee, a small bowl of soup, and one piece of dry bread daily for nourishment. There I was, in the middle of Auschwitz, where grown men would stand and laugh at small children being marched nude into a chamber and smothered with gas. There I was, in the middle of Auschwitz, where the rivers of blood flowed just as deep as the rivers of dysentery flowed from the lavatories. And there I was, in the middle of Auschwitz, working in a warm house, eating wonderful food, and cursing my beautiful blond hair. (Lights fade.)

Sullen middle-eastern music begins to play. A slide appears on the muslin that reads: Mitzvahim. As the lights fade from black, to a dim, the Chorus begins a movement piece that is representative of imprisonment within the Holocaust. The piece is repetitive and simplistic. Perhaps different members of the Chorus are engaged in separate actions. This piece should not have the unity of the first line. As the repetition of the movement is established, a montage of graphic photographic footage of the Holocaust should begin, on the muslin. During this, The Storyteller enters and approaches different members of the Chorus. She holds them and helps them. A57763 is torn between looking at the Shabbat table, and looking at the Chorus. She becomes frightened by the table. She tries to touch the Shabbat pieces, but she can’t. She is confused and afraid. She runs
off the stage. The music is dramatic. As The Storyteller speaks, the Chorus falls to floor.

The Storyteller: (defiantly) This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Mitzrayim, in Egypt. All who are hungry, let them enter and eat. All who are in need, let them come celebrate. Now we are free. Next year we will be in the land of Israel. Now we are enslaved. Next year we will be free.

The Chorus slowly exits, injured and persecuted. The Storyteller exits as well. a blond haired jew is left standing on stage alone. As the music is slowly fading, she examines the Shabbat table.

a blond haired jew: Good looks pay off for a woman in this world. (pause) I had been in Auschwitz five months. It was winter. It was on this particular Thursday afternoon that I heard a knock outside the back door by the kitchen. I went out onto the porch to see who it was, and standing at the foot of the cement stairs, in the snow, was a barefoot old man without any teeth. He had been working all morning on the fence surrounding the commandant’s house. He wanted to know if I had access to a pair of shoes that he might be able to have. Three days before, someone had stolen his. I told him that I would see what I could do.

I immediately went back to the storage closet behind the stairs. I remembered seeing some old clothes in there before, and sure enough, at the bottom of one of the boxes was an old pair of shoes and some socks. Since I knew that no one would miss them, I sneaked them out the back door to the old man. He thanked me, but just as he was sitting down to put them on, five Nazi soldiers walked around the corner. He struggled to put them on, but it was too late. They had seen what he was doing.

The first one came over and said, “Look at the little barefoot Jew. Where did you get your new pair of shoes little barefoot Jew?” They were all laughing.

The old man stood up at attention with his hat in his hand, face to the ground. He didn’t say anything.

The first soldier threw his fist into the old man’s face. He fell over, hitting his head on the stairs, but he stood up again, silent.

The soldier took a shoe out of the old man’s hand, inspecting it. “This doesn’t look like a shoe issued in this camp. I believe we have a little frozen thief here. Did you steal these shoes from the commandant little barefoot thief?”

The old man stood silent. He was shaking.

The first soldier looked at me. “Did you give him these stolen shoes, fraulein?” (pause) I said, “Did you give him these stolen shoes, fraulein?”

This time it was I who was silent.

Because I’m sure you know what happens to a shoe thief in Auschwitz.”

The first soldier pulled me by the arm and threw me down onto the cement, and just as I could hear him cocking back his pistol, I felt a hand on the back of my neck. I heard him say, “I would never kill you, fraulein, you are too beautiful. This hair is too beautiful. I’ll have to fuck you instead.”

He slapped me hard across the face and started kissing me, running his tongue all over my mouth while tearing off my dress. The other soldiers lining up like school children at a drinking fountain.

I don’t remember what happened after the third one. I lost consciousness and woke up staring into the eyes of the barefoot old man. They’d shot him after all.

I started to get up when I realized that I couldn’t move. Both of my legs were swollen and then numbed by the snow. I was lying in a pool of blood, thick and fresh. It was running everywhere. You couldn’t tell where the old man’s ended, and mine began. I started vomiting violently as if every part of my body was rejecting this terror that my life had become. As I lay there in my own muddy lake, I saw a world that I had never seen before. I saw a world devoid of promises, of hope. For the first time in my life, I realized that God had forgotten us. We were nothing to him, and he was nothing to me.

(Addressing the Shabbat table) Oh God of the Universe, the one that called down fire from heaven, where are you now? Oh God of the Universe, the one that brought your people out of slavery with promises of blessing, what do you say now? Or can you say anything? Or are you dead like everything else? The hand that brought your people out of Egypt and into the promised land? The hand that rained manna everyday onto your people so they wouldn’t starve? The only thing you rain down now are ashes. You tell us to trust, to have faith. Well, I do have faith. I have faith in Adolph Hitler, because he is the only one who keeps his promises to the Jews.

a blond haired jew exits. A distant train can be heard. The chiffon wisps out as A57763 enters.

A57763: When we arrived in Auschwitz, there were guards waiting for us at the train stop. They were shouting and hitting us with clubs, telling us to line up. A man I didn’t know came up to me. He told me to leave my daughter on the ground, to get away from her, that she would be bad luck for me during the inspection, but I didn’t listen to him. (pause) I saw a man there dividing the line, sending some to the right and some to the left. The right was life, the left death. He saw my daughter and pointed us to the left.

Everything was silent. You would think that people being marched to their own death would fight or cry out, but no one said a word. In front of me there was a child, behind me an old woman. So still. So quiet.
Through the silence, I could hear a voice. It was a voice that I recognized from Rudama, from the Roman Catholic church in Rudama. It was a man who had known my husband well. Now he was an officer in the Nazi army.

I called out to him softly. I knew what I had to do. I said, "My daughter is four years old. You know that she is only half Jewish. I know that she could be a good servant for you someday. She is smart like her father. I know you could help her. Please."

The officer took her into his arms. "She would be a good servant, this little thing? Or would she lie like her mother, pretending to be something that she is not?"

My daughter was frightened, and she started calling out to me, "Mumae, mumae please help me."

The officer grabbed her face in his hands shouting, "You do not call her that. In here that is not her name. She is called A57763. You will call her A57763."

But my daughter didn't understand. She kept reaching out to me, as if I could do anything, calling, "Mumae, I want mumae."

He slapped her hard across the face. She was crying. He said, "Oh look, she's just a Jew like her mother after all." Then he threw her down onto the ground, and shot her in the back of the head.

The officer looked up at me, smiling. "Did you really think I would help you? You are nothing to me. You are a Christ killer, and you can go to hell where you belong."

I fell down onto my knees as I brought my daughter into my arms. She was still warm. I held her close to my chest, rocking her back and forth in the silence. Ash falling around us like a fresh snow.

What world is this that I live in? This world that I once loved, these people that I cared for, this life that I cherished. What world is this that I live in where everything is dead, where hope has fallen?

(Addressing the Shabbat) Oh, God of the Universe, creator of all things, they have taken everything away from me; please don't let them take away you. You who are mighty. Strong. Forgiving. Is this your sepulcher? Is that you I smell burning in the furnace consumed by your own love, their hate? Have they killed God?

Tonight I sit like Haagar in the wilderness, abused and thrown away by your servant Abraham, and I wonder, do you see me here? Does El Roi, the God who sees the suffering of his people, do you see me?

Do you know me now? You, the one who gives life, who gives love to his creation that hates him. Do you remember me? Or have you forgotten? Because I haven't forgotten you. I have your name written here on my heart with so many promises. (Crying out) Please, oh my father. Please hold me.
Russian Lessons
a one-act play

BEVIN FLYNN

Russian Lessons: code words used in underground ads to advertise masochistic practices.

The play takes place over a period of several days in a small, run-down butcher shop.

SYNOPSIS

Scene I: Morning.
Scene II: Later that day.
Scene III: The next day.
Scene IV: That night.
Scene V: The next morning.
Scene VI: That night.
Scene VII: The next morning.
Scene VIII: That night.

SETTING

The front room of the butcher shop. There is a counter facing the audience which is sometimes used to cut meat, but is usually bare. There is a glass door with a bell leading to the outside, and opposite it is a door leading to a bathroom. There is also a door to the freezer and heavy equipment. There are shelves behind the counter with various objects, such as a cleaver, some tape, aprons etc. There is also a small table with coffee machine and cups.

CHARACTERS

TILL ....................................................... A woman of about 20. She is very attractive, deceptively innocent looking, wears a lot of white.

DAMON ................................................. A man of about 23. He is good-natured and good-looking, wears a lot of brown.

PATCH ................................................... A man of about 25. Gorgeous and knows it, he wears a lot of black.

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SCENE I

The front room of a butcher shop. There is a counter facing the audience. Opposite each other, there is a door to the outside and a door to the bathroom. There is also a door to the freezer and heavy equipment, and some shelves behind the counter. There is a table with a full coffee pot and cups. There is a sleeping bag and a suitcase on the floor.

(AT RISE, TILL is lying on her back on the counter, looking at her reflection in a knife. After a moment, a key is heard in the back. Outside door opens, jangles. DAMON ENTERS.)

DAMON: How did you get in here?

TILL: Do you work here?

DAMON: Yes.

TILL: Hi. Me too.

DAMON: How did you get in here?

TILL: Hi. Me too.

DAMON: You're welcome.

TILL: Can I help you?

PATCH: Hi. Me too.

DAMON: How did you get in here?
DAMON: Thank you.
(TILL smiles, sips coffee.)

PATCH: (To TILL.) What are you doing?

DAMON: She works here.

PATCH: No, she doesn’t. WE work here.

TILL: Hi. Me too.
(She extends her hand. PATCH doesn’t take it.)

PATCH: Who hired you?

TILL: The Boss.

PATCH: What Boss?

TILL: Your Boss.

PATCH: (To DAMON.) What is she talking about?

DAMON: I don’t know.

PATCH: (Crossing behind counter.) We don’t know any Boss.

TILL: (To DAMON.) Of course you have a Boss. Don’t you get a paycheck?

DAMON: It gets mailed to my house. I don’t know who sends it.

TILL: Who hired you?

DAMON: (Indicating PATCH.) He did.

TILL: (To PATCH.) Well, who hired you?

PATCH: (Indicating DAMON.) The guy who used to do HIS job.
(He notices the suitcase and sleeping bag.) What’s all that?

TILL: It’s mine. I’m going to be living here for the summer.

PATCH: Who said?
PATCH: No. Female.

DAMON: What?

(PATCH ENTERS.)

PATCH: So, how's it going?

TILL: The faucet in there drips.

DAMON: Can I help you with anything?

TILL: No thanks.

PATCH: Can I?

TILL: No, I'm fine. (Pause.) Oh, I'm Till.

PATCH: (Probing.) Till...?

TILL: Yes.

PATCH: Okay... I'm Patch. And that's Damon.

DAMON: Nice to meet you.

TILL: Thank you. Do you mind if I look around?

DAMON: Go ahead.

PATCH: I hope you don't mind blood.

(TILL laughs.) Is that a yes or a no?

TILL: Nevermind.

(These EXITS to freezer, PATCH and DAMON watch her go. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE II

(TILL is unpacking her suitcase. DAMON is emptying the outside door. TILL pulls an empty vase from her suitcase, sets it on the table. She returns to her suitcase, pulls out a rolled up poster, crosses behind the counter. She finds some tape on a shelf on the back wall, begins putting tape on the poster. Her back is to the counter. PATCH ENTERS from freezer with a long chain of sausages. He whispers in DAMON'S ear. DAMON smiles, grabs the other end of the sausages. They sneak up to the counter, suspending the sausages over it.)

PATCH: Hey, little girl! You want some sausage?

(TILL turns and they juggle the sausage in her face, laughing. TILL turns back, grabs a cleaver from the shelf, and chops the chain in half. DAMON and PATCH stop laughing. TILL sets the cleaver on the counter and returns to her poster. She takes the poster to an empty space on the wall, and puts it up. PATCH collects the sausages. DAMON looks at the poster.)

DAMON: Who is that?

TILL: Saint Agnes. She refused to get married, so her suitors accused her to the Roman governor as a Christian. At first they tried to butter up her heart, make her change her mind, but she seemed eager to suffer torment and death instead. So they threatened her with torture, and she offered herself to the rack. Finally they decided to cut her head off, and she went to her death with joy.

DAMON: (Pause.) Why?

TILL: She didn't have to give in.

PATCH: So she chose to die?

TILL: Yes.

PATCH: Sounds like giving in to me.

TILL: You wouldn't understand.

PATCH: Why?

TILL: She didn't have to be what someone else wanted her to be.

PATCH: (Pause.) And being dead is better?

TILL: You wouldn't understand.

PATCH: You're right.

(He picks up the cleaver, and begins to separate the sausages. TILL watches, notices his medical bracelet.)

TILL: What's with the bracelet?

PATCH: Oh, I like to think that I'm the long lost last of the Russian royal line!
DAMON: He's a bleeder.

PATCH: A hemophiliac.

TIIL: (stares at him, then at D.ghaviour.)

I'm careful! Besides, with the kind of accidents you're likely to have here...

If you lose your hand in that slicer back there, what good is a scab?

(He chops off another sausage. TIIL picks it up and looks at it. As she speaks, she slowly moves toward the table.)

TIIL: I've always thought that the word "hemophilia" should refer to a sexual perversion, you know, an unnatural taste for blood. Necrophilia, paedophilia, hemophilia... Besides, it's a much more common condition than yours. I think everyone must at least get flashes of it. Watching a vampire movie... licking your wounds as a child... watching the pulse in someone's wrist... or neck...

(She stops at the table.)

Anyway!

(She looks for a place to put the sausage, then sticks it in the vase. She laughs. PATCH and DAMON look at each other. TIIL pours a cup of coffee, takes a sip. She pulls the sausage from the vase, tosses it to DAMON.)

Hey, little boy, you want some sausage?

PATCH: (Laughing.) He's a vegetarian.

TIIL: You're kidding now, right?

(PATCH and DAMON shake their heads.)

You two amaze me.

(She EXITS to bathroom. Pause. She ENTERS.)

The light is burnt out in there.

DAMON: I'll fix it.

(He runs to bathroom, immediately reappears and tosses the sausage to PATCH. He goes back into bathroom. Pause. PATCH and TIIL look at each other.)

DAMON: (Crash.) OW!

(PATCH tosses sausage to TIIL, he EXITS to bathroom. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE III

(DAMON and PATCH are at counter. PATCH is working at an account book. DAMON is writing on wrapped pieces of meat.)

PATCH: I asked you first.
FLYNN

PATCH: Hmm. I’ll be right back.
(They laugh. TILL puts down broom, gathers up some more meat.)
Have we offended you?

TILL: No. Sorry.
(She EXITS to freezer. PATCH and DAMON look at each other, then down at their tasks.)

DAMON: Stop it.

PATCH: Stop what?

DAMON: Don’t look at me like that!

PATCH: I’m not looking at you!

DAMON: That’s what I mean! You’re watching me in your peripheral vision.

PATCH: Why would I do that?

DAMON: Because you always think that you can tell what I’m thinking by how I look when you’re not looking!

PATCH: Why would I care what you’re thinking? Are you thinking something?

DAMON: No.

PATCH: Come on, I know you’re thinking!

DAMON: You only know I’m thinking because you think you know what it is!

PATCH: Is that so?

DAMON: Yes.

PATCH: (Pause.) You want to know what I’m thinking?

DAMON: NO.

TILL: (ENTERs from freezer.) The latch on the cooler is loose.
(They look at her.)

PATCH: Oh.

TILL: Where’s the tool box?

(They point to the bathroom. She EXITS into bathroom. PATCH and DAMON resume their tasks.)

DAMON: Stop it!

PATCH: Stop what?

(TILL ENTERs with toolbox.)
Can I help you with that?

TILL: No. I’m fine.
(She crosses towards freezer. She drops a tool. DAMON picks it up, puts it back in the box. TILL smiles.)
Thanks.
(She EXITS to freezer.)

PATCH: So?

DAMON: So what?

PATCH: Why don’t you go for her?

DAMON: Don’t be ridiculous.

PATCH: I mean it. She likes you.

DAMON: She likes YOU.

PATCH: No, come on. She’s always nice to you.

DAMON: So? Most women are nice to me. Women are never nice to men that they’re attracted to.

PATCH: Says who?

DAMON: I don’t know! (He starts.) Did you hear something outside?

PATCH: Damon, there is no one out there.

DAMON: Well, can we talk about something else?
(TILL ENTERs with box full of meat.)

TILL: Well, I tightened the latch, but this is all bad. What do I do with it?

DAMON: I’ll take it.
(He takes the box, EXITS outside door, it jangles.)
TILL: So, how are the accounts?

PATCH: Well, let's just say, I have only had to sharpen this pencil twice since I got this job.

TILL: Does anyone ever come in here?

PATCH: Not really. We make a couple of regular deliveries to small markets, but that's about it.

TILL: Do you like this job?

PATCH: Yes. Do you like Damon?

TILL: What?

PATCH: I was just wondering.

TILL: Sure. He seems like a good guy. He seems kind of... edgy, though.

PATCH: Yeah. He fought in the war, it kind of unsettled him. I was the only person who would hire him when he got back. He isn't crazy, he's just very emotional.

TILL: Wow.

PATCH: He likes you a lot.

TILL: What should I do?

PATCH: (Pause.) Be nice to him. (He EXITS into freezer, taking book. Pause. Door jangles, DAMON ENTERS.)

TILL: Hi!

DAMON: Hi.

TILL: Thanks for doing that. It's going to take me a while to get used to this place.

DAMON: That's okay. Are you really living here?

TILL: Yes.

DAMON: Do you ever leave?

TILL: No.

DAMON: Not at all?

TILL: Where should I go?

DAMON: I don't know. How do you eat?

TILL: I keep some food here. Most of it, I get delivered.

DAMON: (Pause.) Do you get lonely?

TILL: Sometimes.

DAMON: (Pause.) You know, I could bring you some food tonight. That way you wouldn't have to eat alone, and you wouldn't have to go anywhere if you don't want to. But that's okay, I don't have to if you don't want me to—

TILL: That would be great.

DAMON: Really?

TILL: Really.

DAMON: (Pause.) Okay then.

(LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE IV

(DAMON and TILL are sitting on the sleeping bag. DAMON has boxes of food. He gives TILL a rose.)

TILL: Thank you.

DAMON: Careful, they didn't cut off the thorns.

TILL: I don't mind. (She smells the rose.) It's beautiful.

DAMON: It's not very original.
TILL: So what?

DAMON: I don’t know. It’s just—

TILL: It’s very sweet.

DAMON: You don’t have to say that.

TILL: I know I don’t. What’s wrong?

DAMON: Nothing.

(He starts opening boxes.)

I got lots of different things, because I wasn’t sure what you would want. I should have asked you first.

TILL: It’s okay.

DAMON: Well, I just... I hope there’s something you like, anyway.

TILL: It’s fine. (She grabs a box and a fork.)

I love this stuff. (She takes a bite.)

What’s wrong?

DAMON: Nothing.

TILL: Are you going to eat?

DAMON: I don’t know.

TILL: (Handing him a box.)

Here, have this. Oh, no wait, you’re a vegetarian. (She hands him a different box. He takes it, but does not eat.)

Aren’t you hungry?

DAMON: Not really. (He looks toward the door.)

Did you hear something?

TILL: No. (Putting down her food.) Are you okay?

DAMON: What do you mean?

TILL: Well... Patch told me-

DAMON: Patch? What did he say?

TILL: Well he told me-

DAMON: Don’t believe everything he says!

TILL: He just told me-

DAMON: I don’t want to know!

TILL: Why not?

DAMON: It’s none of my business what you and Patch talk about.

TILL: It’s about YOU!

DAMON: Great.

TILL: What is wrong?

DAMON: Nothing. I just don’t want to talk about him.

TILL: I was talking about YOU!

DAMON: You don’t have to. It’s okay, I understand.

TILL: What?

DAMON: He likes you too.

TILL: What?

DAMON: This was a really stupid idea. I just... Patch told me...

TILL: What did he tell YOU?

DAMON: It doesn’t matter. He was wrong.

TILL: Wrong about...?

DAMON: You.

TILL: Me?

DAMON: I mean me.

TILL: You.

DAMON: Nevermind. I’d better go.
FLYNN

TILL: (Grabbing his hand.) Hey... where are you going?

DAMON: (Pulling away.) Will you stop being nice to me? (Pause.) I'm sorry. (He crosses to door, EXITS.)

TILL: What the hell did I do? (The door closes behind DAMON, jangles. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE V

(TILL is alone, putting up another poster. Another new poster is already on another wall. PATCH ENTERS.)

PATCH: Who are they?

TILL: That's St. Agatha, she was mutilated. This one is my favorite, St. Barbara. She was imprisoned in a tower by her father because of her great beauty. Then, when he wasn't looking, she snuck into his bathhouse, and started redecorating it HER way. Her father found out and got really mad. She tried to run away, but got caught, and since she wouldn't shape up, her own father had her beheaded.

PATCH: Charming. Why is she your favorite?

TILL: Oh, that reminds me! The slicer in back is broken.

PATCH: Broken how?

TILL: It doesn't work.

PATCH: Well, why don't you tell the Boss?

TILL: Why don't you?

PATCH: You know him.

TILL: Not much better than you.

PATCH: At least you've seen him!

TILL: At least you get a paycheck!

PATCH: (Pause.) What?

PATCH: He called me this morning. He said he isn't feeling well and won't be in. What did you do to him?

TILL: What do you mean?

PATCH: Well, what happened last night?

TILL: I have no idea. He got really upset and ran out.

PATCH: What did you do?

TILL: I didn't do anything! It had something to do with you.

PATCH: What did I do?

TILL: I don't know. He has some strange idea that there is something going on with you and me.

PATCH: (Pause.) Isn't there?

TILL: No.

PATCH: Are you sure?

TILL: Yes. You have been mean to me since the moment I got here.

PATCH: So? Men are never nice to women they are attracted to.

TILL: Oh, shut up.

PATCH: I'm serious. (They stare at each other.)

TILL: I'm going to try to fix the slicer.

PATCH: Hey, wait, we're talking here.

TILL: Is that what you call this?

PATCH: Yes, and I think it's important.

TILL: The slicer is important. We can't do much without it.

PATCH: I don't care about the slicer!
FLYNN

TILL: Really? Well, then maybe I WILL call the Boss!

PATCH: Go ahead!
(They stare at each other. Pause.)
Look, I’m sorry. I just want to talk to you.

TILL: Why?

PATCH: (Pause.) I want to apologize for being such a pain.
(Pause. He laughs.)
I thought women were supposed to LIKE that.

TILL: (Laughing.) Who told you that?

PATCH: I don’t know. Probably Damon. He thinks women would like him better if he wasn’t such a nice guy. He says they always treat him like a brother. Or a pet.

TILL: Poor guy.

PATCH: He’ll be okay. (Pause.) Do you forgive me?

TILL: For what?

PATCH: For being such an asshole.

TILL: (Teasing.) Well, I don’t know...

PATCH: Can I make it up to you?

TILL: What do you mean?

PATCH: Can I bring you dinner tonight?

(LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE VI

(PATCH and TILL are on the sleeping bag. PATCH has boxes of food. He gives TILL a fancy dagger.)

TILL: Thank you.

PATCH: Careful. It’s just been sharpened.

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TILL: It’s beautiful.

PATCH: It reminded me of you. (TILL laughs.) Do you want another drink?

TILL: Sure. (PATCH refills her glass.)
I probably shouldn’t, though.

PATCH: What, you have someplace you have to be?
(TILL laughs.)
You’re really something.

TILL: What?

PATCH: You’re not going to tell me anything about yourself, are you?

TILL: Like what?

PATCH: Like why you’re here.

TILL: No.

PATCH: That’s what I thought. Well, I’m not telling YOU anything either, then.

TILL: Like what?

PATCH: Well, like why I’m here.

TILL: It’s your job.

PATCH: Yeah, so?

TILL: Me, too.

PATCH: Whatever. This is getting me nowhere. Do you want to eat?

TILL: I’m not really hungry.

PATCH: Me neither. (They look at each other.) Can I ask you one thing?

TILL: Maybe.

PATCH: Are you glad you came?

TILL: (Smiling.) Maybe.

PATCH: Can I kiss you?
FLYNN

TILL: Maybe.

PATCH: Can I throttle you? (He puts his hands around her neck. She laughs.) You're killing me.

TILL: Sorry.

PATCH: All right. We'll make a deal. You answer my next question, and I'll never ask another.

TILL: Fine.

PATCH: (Picking up the dagger.) What you said the other day about blood. Did you mean it?

TILL: (Pause.) Yes.

PATCH: It really turns you on?

TILL: That's another question.

PATCH: That's the same question.

TILL: I already answered it.

PATCH: (Pause.) Wow.

TILL: What about you?

PATCH: Does it turn ME on?

TILL: Does it?

PATCH: I don't know. I've never tried it.

TILL: (Pause.) Well, technically, neither have I.

PATCH: Really. (Pause.) Give me your arm. (TILL laughs.) I'm serious. (She holds out her arm. He takes it and makes a small cut.) Does that hurt?

TILL: (Shaking her head.) Is it bleeding?

PATCH: A little. (He makes the cut a little bigger. TILL flinches a little.)

It really is pretty. (He licks the cut.) You know, when I was a little kid, I thought that maybe if I drank enough of someone's blood, it would replace mine and make me normal. (He makes another cut. TILL gasps.)

TILL: Ow.

PATCH: Did that hurt?

TILL: A little.

PATCH: I'll be careful. (He takes her arm again.)

TILL: Wait. That's enough. I'm bleeding too much. (She tries to take the dagger from him. He holds it out of her reach.)

PATCH: You're really something. (He embraces her. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE VII

(The shop appears to be empty. A key rattles in the lock, the door opens, jangles. DAMON ENTERS. He goes to look at the new posters. TILL ENTERS from the bathroom, her arm is heavily bandaged. At the same time, PATCH ENTERS from the outside, his arm is also bandaged. DAMON turns when the door jangles, sees the two, looks back and forth between their bandages, starts to say something, decides not to. TILL and PATCH look at each other, walk to different areas of the shop.)

PATCH: (To DAMON.) So, how are you doing?

DAMON: Fine. What happened to you?

PATCH: Oh, I had a little accident. Wait, oh you'll never believe what happened this morning! I went to the store to get you some Pop-rocks as a gift, but they were all out. I asked the man at the counter, "What happened to all the Pop-rocks?" and he said "I don't know! We suddenly just had a huge demand for Pop-rocks." He was completely bewildered! (He laughs.)

DAMON: Have you tried raw meat yet?

TILL: Oh, yeah, he tried. Unfortunately, he had a little accident. (She EXITS to freezer.)
FLYNN

DAMON: What did that mean?

PATCH: I have no idea. You know, if the meat thing catches on like Pop-rocks, we may actually get people in here.

DAMON: Where were you last night? I tried to call.

PATCH: I don’t know, I was all over the place. The hospital, obviously, for part of it.

DAMON: Were you ever here?

PATCH: Just for a second.

DAMON: Oh.

(He EXITS to bathroom. PATCH puts up a poster he brought on the front of the counter. TILL ENTERS.)

PATCH: I brought you something.

TILL: (Looking at the poster.) Who is that?

PATCH: Rasputin. He was a holy man, the only one who could take care of the Tsar’s hemophiliac son. People worried about the power he had, so a group of men decided to assassinate him. First they gave him enough poison to kill several men, but he didn’t die. Then they shot him through the heart, and he got up and chased them around the house. They shot him several more times in the chest and head, but he still didn’t die until they threw him in a frozen river.

TILL: (Pause.) But he’s not a saint.

PATCH: Of course not. He wouldn’t die easy enough.

(Pause.) I’m going to try to fix the slicer.

(He EXITS to freezer. DAMON ENTERS from bathroom.)

TILL: Hi.

DAMON: Hi.

TILL: Are you okay?

DAMON: I wish you wouldn’t ask me that. (Pause.) How did you hurt yourself?

TILL: It’s a long story.

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DAMON: Oh.

TILL: (Pause.) Did you get hurt?

DAMON: What?

TILL: In the war, I mean.

DAMON: Oh. Hurt? Well, that depends on what you mean.

TILL: Were you scared?

DAMON: I’m still scared.

TILL: Of what? (Pause.) I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said anything.

DAMON: It’s okay.

TILL: If you want to talk about it, you can tell me.

DAMON: I know. Look, I’m sorry about the other night. I don’t know what my problem is. I just feel stupid.

TILL: You’re not stupid... actually you were kind of right.

DAMON: About what?

TILL: Well, Patch. Sort of. He...

DAMON: Oh God. I knew it. I can’t trust anyone!

TILL: Would you listen to me?

DAMON: Don’t...

(He EXITS outside door, it jangles. PATCH ENTERS.)

PATCH: Did someone come in?

TILL: No, Damon took off.

PATCH: Is he all right?

TILL: I don’t think so.

PATCH: Oh, God.

(PATCH EXITS after DAMON. TILL looks at poster. The phone rings. She turns. LIGHTS FADE.)
SCENE VIII

(It is dark. TILL is alone, packing her suitcase. She packs a few things, then EXITS to bathroom. A key rattles in the front door, it opens, jangles. DAMON ENTERS wearing army coat and hat. He is drunk. He looks around, crosses behind counter. TILL ENTERS with the last of her things. DAMON hears the noise, picks up the cleaver and whirls around.)

TILL: Damon! What are you doing?
(DAMON relaxes, puts the cleaver on the counter, puts his head in his hands.)
You scared me.

DAMON: (Looking up.) You scared me! What are YOU doing?

TILL: I'm just... cleaning, putting things away.

DAMON: (Looks toward the front door.) Did you hear something?

TILL: No. What's wrong?

DAMON: SHH!

TILL: Why don't you go home?

DAMON: It's not safe at home. Why do you want me to leave?

TILL: I don't.

DAMON: Yes you do. You're not cleaning, you're packing. Where are you going?

TILL: I don't know. I just have to go.

DAMON: The Boss is coming.

TILL: The Boss told you to leave?

DAMON: The Boss told me not to.

TILL: The Boss told me to.

DAMON: (Pause.) So you're running away? (He laughs.) That's what I did.

TILL: What?

DAMON: And now they're coming after me.

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TILL: THEY?

DAMON: THEY.
(TILL looks confused. He shakes his coat.)

THEY!

TILL: The enemy?

DAMON: The what? (He laughs loudly.) The ENEMY?

TILL: What is so funny?

DAMON: You think I'm afraid of the ENEMY? There's no enemy. There never was an enemy!

TILL: What are you talking about?

DAMON: I never saw any "enemy." I saw a lot of dead children. I saw a lot of women crying. I saw men with surrender flags, but we killed them anyway. Oh, yeah, there were plenty of blood-thirsty soldiers around, but they were all giving MY orders. Don't you get it? I'm not afraid of the "other side." I'm afraid of mine!

TILL: The war is over, Damon.

DAMON: For how long? How long until the next one? Well, there's NO way!
(He picks up a knife.) No matter what, they won't make me do it again!

TILL: Damon, give me that!
(She reaches for the knife, he dodges away. The door jangles, PATCH ENTERS.)

PATCH: There you are, I've been looking everywhere!
(He grabs DAMON.)

DAMON: Don't touch me!
(He spins around, cutting PATCH across the stomach. Everyone freezes.)

PATCH: What the hell...
(He collapses.)

DAMON: Patch...
(He kneels over PATCH. TILL gets a bloodstained rag from behind the counter, puts it to PATCH'S stomach.)

TILL: Damon, call a doctor!
DAMON: Patch...

TILL: Damon!
(He doesn't seem to hear her. TILL goes to the phone, it is dead.)

TILL: Damon, the phone isn't working!

DAMON: I didn't mean to. I really didn't mean to.

PATCH: I know.

TILL: Damon!

DAMON: I didn't mean to.

PATCH: I know.

TILL: What do I do?

DAMON: I thought I could trust you. I mean I thought I couldn't. I mean...

PATCH: Damon, shut up.
(Pause. TILL puts down the phone and watches them.)

DAMON: I'm sorry.

PATCH: I know.

TILL: (Moving toward them.) It's my fault.

PATCH: YOU? (He tries to laugh.) WHO ARE YOU?
(He pauses. DAMON embraces him. They are frozen. TILL watches them for a moment, then starts for the door. Suddenly there is a loud knock. She runs from the door, finds herself facing St. Barbara. There is another knock. She reaches up and touches the poster. She crosses to counter, lies down. She picks up the cleaver, slowly aims it at herself. She swiftly raises it to strike, then stops. BLACKOUT.)

END OF PLAY

Dying Light

JASON D. MARTIN

Scene One

Prologue
At rise, a single white light shines down on a young man's face. This young man is TOM, a twenty-year-old terminal cancer patient. The rest of the stage should be saturated in blue light. The scene should have the aura of a dream sequence.

DOCTOR'S VOICE: Cancer!

TOM: What?

DOCTOR'S VOICE: Cancer.

TOM: Don't skip around the question anymore.

DOCTOR'S VOICE: (Seems to come from above. It is a knowledgeable male voice which TOM doesn't understand.) Many people that discover they have an illness such as yours find ways to live happier lives. Cancer may make one more aware of the fact that every minute counts.

TOM: Would you please tell me how much time I have left?

DOCTOR'S VOICE: I've already informed your parents about the nature of an anaplastic astrocytoma...

TOM: I want to hear it from you.

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JASON D. MARTIN is a recent graduate of the Department of Theatre Arts, Western Washington University, where he wrote "Dying Light."

No performance or reading of this play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of Mr. Martin.
DOCTOR'S VOICE: Let's just put it this way, you and I are going to become best friends over the next few years.

TOM: What the hell does that mean? Tell me!

DOCTOR'S VOICE: I'm going to have you treated with aggressive radiation. This is a program wherein we focus a radioactive beam on the area from which we extracted the tumor. Over the course of six weeks it should kill any remaining cancer cells.

TOM: How will this... This radiation affect me?

DOCTOR'S VOICE: You will lose hair in the area being treated, and you may feel sick at times. However, if the radiation works you will live a long and happy life.

TOM: And if it doesn't?

DOCTOR'S VOICE: An astrocytoma can be a very aggressive brain tumor...

TOM: How much time?

DOCTOR'S VOICE: If it reoccurs the maximum amount of time would be seven years.

TOM: What are the chances of the radiation working?

DOCTOR'S VOICE: In your case there is a ten percent chance that the radiation will be completely effective.

TOM: If it does come back is there anything you can do?

DOCTOR'S VOICE: If it comes back in the same place we'll operate again. We cannot repeat the standard radiation. We'll have to put you in chemotherapy.

TOM: What'll happen then?

DOCTOR'S VOICE: Well chemo is pretty serious business. One drawback to it is that there is a possibility of sterility. A percentage of patients also risk developing leukemia.

TOM: Wash! Wait a minute! You mean after radiation I'll be sterile?

DOCTOR'S VOICE: No, only after chemotherapy. Radiation will only affect the area where the tumor was.

Scene Two

The Waiting Room

As the lights come up, TOM is discovered sitting in a hospital waiting room. He is very uncomfortable in this surrounding and tries to hide his discomfort by burying his nose in a magazine. A young woman, JENNY, enters. She looks up from his magazine for a moment and their eyes lock. TOM quickly glances away and tries to pretend he is engrossed in his magazine. JENNY sits down near TOM, studying him.
JENNY: Hey. You're new here aren't you?
TOM: Yes. (Long pause.)
JENNY: Do ya' mind if I ask what you've got?
TOM: Yeah.
JENNY: Sorry, I...I didn't mean to pry. It's just that you don't see very many people our age hanging around waiting rooms for radiation therapy.
TOM: That's OK. Look, I'm the one who's sorry. I've never done this before.
JENNY: Radiation?
TOM: Well, yeah...
JENNY: It's no big deal. It's not like it's going to make ya' glow or anything.
TOM: How long have you been in?
JENNY: What? Radiation? About two weeks. I haven't lost a single strand of hair yet. But I'm sure that wonderful little adventure is right around the corner. It's not that big a deal, I've been bald before. I've had a few surgeries, and it was shaved off. So this'll be the first time I lose it because of radiation.
TOM: What do you have?
JENNY: A Glioblastoma. Actually a cluster of them... This stuff doesn't bother me as much as you'd think though. I get dizzy sometimes, and I forget things. Every once in a while I have a seizure... Those can be...well, they're not much fun.
TOM: It can't be as bad as it sounds, you don't look half bad.
JENNY: (Checks him out.) You're not so bad yourself. I'm Jenny.
TOM: Tom. (They shake hands.)
JENNY: Tom, that's a nice name. So what's your story Tom?
TOM: Ya' mean why am I here?
JENNY: Sure...
TOM: You gotta' have a favorite movie.
JENNY: I don't know. I like Alien a lot.
TOM: Why's that?
JENNY: Well, it's just really good. It's about these aliens that can live inside you. It's pretty scary...they show how these things impregnate this guy. This little crab thing comes out of an egg and plants a baby alien in his stomach. Then the thing sits inside, growing until it's ready to escape. It just sits there, getting bigger and bigger until it kills the guy.
TOM: That's pretty disgusting.
JENNY: You'd like it.
TOM: Probably.
JENNY: I mean it's not that bad compared to some of the stuff you see around here.
TOM: What do you mean?
JENNY: Nothing.
TOM: What kind of stuff?
JENNY: Well...a lot of patients. Some of the stories they tell...
TOM: What about them?
JENNY: I could easily write a book from all the hospital stories I've heard. Most of them are pretty funny, you know. (Pause) Oh, you're smiling, you have one don't you? Come on, tell me.
TOM: Something funny?
JENNY: Yes, hospitals are...They're funny places.
TOM: Well there was one thing, but it's kind of embarrassing.
JENNY: Hey, hospitals are embarrassing places, too. Tell me.
TOM: I dunno'.
JENNY: Come on, Tom.

TOM: I can't tell a perfect stranger this story.
JENNY: I'm not a stranger...You know my name. You even know my disease.
TOM: Well...
JENNY: What else do you want to know?
TOM: Well, um....
JENNY: Ya' got to tell your story, then.
TOM: Family?
JENNY: Huh?
TOM: Do you have a big family? Small family?
JENNY: Two parents, divorced...I'm an only child. I don't talk to my Dad. Right now I'm living at home with my Mom. We don't get along so well.
TOM: Sorry. I live with my parents too...Bummer, huh?
JENNY: Yeah.
TOM: So what do you want to do?
JENNY: What do you mean?
TOM: I mean after all this?
JENNY: You mean what do I want to be when I grow up?
TOM: Yeah.
JENNY: (Sad smile.) Well, I think I'd like to be a screenwriter.
TOM: Really?
JENNY: Yeah. Bad science fiction.
TOM: Hey, that would be pretty damn cool. Livin' behind the scenes in Hollywood...
JENNY: What do you wanna' do...after all this?
MASON

TOM: I don't know. I'm taking classes at the University right now... But eventually I'll probably take over the family business with my little brother.

JENNY: What's that?

TOM: Hardware. My Dad owns a couple stores...well, five or six. It's suppose to be a good business. It's kinda' cool 'cause I've always got a job.

JENNY: I guess people always need hardware.

TOM: I guess. So who's your doctor?

JENNY: Which one?

TOM: Who's your Oncologist?

JENNY: I don't call my doctors by their real names.

TOM: What?

JENNY: My Oncologist is Dr. Lump.

TOM: Huh?

JENNY: My Oncologist is Dr. Lump, my Radiologist is Dr. Zapp, and my Gynecologist is Dr. Probe.

TOM: I see.

JENNY: So what's your funny story?

TOM: What?

JENNY: You're not getting off that easy. You still have to tell me your funny story.

TOM: I don't know if I should tell it.

JENNY: Come on...

TOM: No...no, my story's a little different.

JENNY: How so?

TOM: It's not the kind of story a person should tell to somebody they just met.

JENNY: Don't worry, you won't shock me.

TOM: (Slightly embarrassed.) Well, when I woke up after surgery, there was this tube sticking out of... Well, there were tubes sticking out of everywhere, my nose, my arms, the top of my head; there were wires attached to my chest and... Well, there was a tube sticking out of my, my... (He just can't say it).

JENNY: Penis?

TOM: Uh, yeah...My, uh...

JENNY: Penis?

TOM: My dick. It was a catheter, the tube led to a bag on the floor. I couldn't believe it, there was a huge goddamn bag on the floor fulla' my piss. Not ta' mention the fact, that this tube was stickin' out the end of my dick. Let me tell you, it was not a comfortable moment. Well I was layin' there awhile, when I started to wonder...

JENNY: What?

TOM: It's just kinda' embarrassing to tell a girl.

JENNY: Go ahead. Let it out. Hospital stories can be hilarious. Besides, we've known each other five minutes and we've already discussed your penis. What else could there be?

TOM: (Nervous laugh.) OK, you asked for it. Well, I started to wonder what it would feel like if I had a boner with that fuckin' tube in there.

JENNY: Now, I know way too much.

TOM: After thinking something like that there was no stopping it. I swear my thing had a mind of it's own... It's not like I was even thinking about sex or anything. One minute he was just hangin' there, the next he was up and around. Man that hurt. I had this raging boner with this thing stuck up my dick. Jesus, and I thought the surgery would hurt! Ya' wanna' know the worst part about it. The goddamn thing wouldn't go away. It was harder than a steel pipe until the nurse, an older heavy-set woman with a mustache, came in. She took one look at it and started cracking jokes. "So do you have a tube in your penis or are ya' just happy to see me?" Then she did it. She yanked it out. Christ! I thought that thing was only in there an inch or two. There was at least two feet of plastic tubing stuck up the end of my dick!

JENNY: (Laughing.) Do you have a girlfriend?

TOM: That's about the last question I expected you to ask after hearing that story. Didn't that disgust you just a bit? 
JENNY: (Laughter.) Does it happen to all guys?

TOM: How the hell am I suppose to know that? Maybe I'm just perverted or something.

JENNY: Well, do you have a girlfriend?

TOM: No.

JENNY: Hmmn.

TOM: What?

JENNY: You're sure you don't have a girlfriend.

TOM: I'm pretty sure... Let me think. Yeah, I'm sure.

JENNY: Well, well, well .. .

TOM: Are you making fun of me?

JENNY: No, I'm just wondering?

TOM: Wondering what?

NURSE VOICE: (Like the DOCTOR, this voice comes from the P.A. every time it's heard. This voice, however, is a female voice.) Tom to the treatment room. Tom.

TOM: (Looks up, mildly annoyed.) Wondering what?

JENNY: Do I have to spell it out for you?

TOM: I don't know. I'm not sure I know what you're going to spell out.

JENNY: (Sighs. A beat.) I'm wondering if you wanna' get ta' know me bet­

TOM: Better?

JENNY: (Blurt out.) I'm wondering if you're going to ask me out.

TOM: I hardly know you.

JENNY: That excuse doesn't cut it anymore.

Scene Three

Jenny's Monologue

*The stage is flooded with blue light. It should be apparent that the following scene is going on inside JENNY's head. The monologue is to be played to the audience. JENNY's* speech *should not be tearful; she must tell her story with the air of a person who has been dealing with her death for years. If she can make the audience laugh, the goal of the scene will be achieved. For the only way one can deal with such pain is through laughter. The set remains the same. JENNY is discovered center stage.*

JENNY: Glioblastoma. That's what they say I have... Glioblastoma. Sounds like some kind of science fiction laser. My Glioblastoma is set for kill. Just give the word Captain and I will vaporize the alien beast. 'Course it's not from Star Trek or Star Wars, or Star Blasters. It's from real life. But like those types of movies it seems like some kind of alien. It snuck inside my head and began eating my brain. It's no lie that it's set for kill either. A Glioblastoma is probably the worst type of tumor you can get. Nope, I wasn't lucky enough to only get one little tumor. Instead, I had a cluster of the damn things. Every time I had an MRI—that's like a cat scan but better—they managed to find a new one. So three operations and a ride on the radiation rollercoaster later, I'm still here. It's strange the way people treat you when you're dying. My Mom tries to pretend nothing's wrong... Maybe that's for the best. Recently a doctor told me I should consider putting my estate in order. Estate in order! What's that? Some clothing, make-up, and a beat-up bicycle. I'm not goin' to be leavin' a whole lot behind to prove I was here. Cancer! Brain surgeries! You wouldn't believe how hard it was in high school to deal with all that crap. You wouldn't believe how hard it was for a girl with no hair to find a date for the prom. Nobody asked me. Nope... Nobody wanted to take the bald chick out. No big deal. Ended up having to hire someone...
MASON

to go with me... Just kidding. Actually, I ended up asking Henry Shlatman. The guy had glasses that were about a foot thick, and he still couldn't see. On the night of the prom he complemented me on my hair. I didn't have the heart to tell him I didn't have any. Well, at least for the time being I have hair again. (She brushes her fingers through her hair and pulls out a number of strands. She looks at the hair for a moment, then laughs.) Well, I'm still alive. (She pulls out a scarf and begins to tie it over her hair. See note at the end of the monologue.) And I have Tom. He took me out again last night, and we had a blast. It's actually very funny when he's not thinking with his head... I mean about his head. (Laugh.) We've been going out every night for a week now. It wouldn't surprise me if this becomes really serious, really fast. Last night we rented a really stupid Shwarzenegger sequel. Usually, I would have been upset to have wasted my time on such a dumb movie, but Tom made it funny. He kept talking back to the screen. When the hero said, "I'll be back," Tom responded by saying (imitates accent), "Don't bother, we won't be here." (She laughs. If the audience does not laugh add the following: Well, it was funny at the time.) When he brought me home last night... He gave me a kiss that junior high cheesy love sick lingo. Well, when you're nineteen time. (Blackout.) When he brought me home last night... He gave me a kiss that junior high cheesy love sick lingo. Well, when you're nineteen years old, and you know you're going to... there's not time to waste. And... and Tom is such a good guy. I think I might be... God, this sounds so mushy! I think I might be falling in love.
(The director may choose to have JENNY remove a scarf or hat and cover her hair with it in silence as opposed to doing so during the monologue.)
(Blackout.)

Scene Four

Religion for Sale

At the lights rise, TOM and JENNY are discovered sitting on the couch together in the waiting room. This is JENNY's fifth week of radiation and TOM's third. JENNY has lost most of her hair. To imply this, the actor may simply wear a scarf that completely covers her hair. TOM suddenly jumps to his feet and rips out a large clump of hair.

TOM: I can't stand to wait for my turn anymore! (Pretends to be insane. Rips out another clump of hair. Imitates Golem from Lord of the Rings.) I have a gift for you my precious. Here take it. (She takes the hair.) In kind of a weird way it's fun to lose your hair. I had a test in Psych today. I was feeling sick, when I was suppose to be studying. 'Tests will do that to ya'. So, today I'm sitting there staring at a question about Freud that I couldn't have answered if my life depended on it. So I decide screw it. I don't wanna' take a test on the same day my hair started to fall out. So I stood up, ripped a huge clump of hair outta' my head and screamed, the... stress... is... too... much!

JENNY: You didn't

TOM: No, but I thought about it. I did scare quite a few people today, walking around campus and ripping out hair. Sometimes I'd even huddle to myself at the same time. (Walks back and forth pretending to be insane, babbling, pulling hair out of his head.) Man! People wouldn't come within a hundred yards of me. (Laugh.) They really thought I was psychotic. (Rips out another clump of hair and hands it to her.)

JENNY: What am I supposed to do with this?

TOM: I dunno'. Maybe you could glue it to your head or something.

JENNY: Very funny.

TOM: You should see how much hair is in the drain after I take a shower. Christ, you wouldn't believe how much hair a person has.

JENNY: I would.

TOM: Well, most people wouldn't. You're kind of quiet today. What's up?

JENNY: Just feelin' a little sick. Oh... I, ah, I got this for you. (She gives him a baseball hat which he promptly puts on backwards.)

TOM: Thanks. So what are you thinking about?

JENNY: Nothing.

TOM: Nothing huh? How much of you're brain did they take out with the tumors? (He waits a moment for her to respond, then realizes that she has not been listening.) Jenny?

JENNY: I'm sorry, I'm not feeling too good... I...

TOM: Is it your Mom again?

JENNY: I don't want to talk about her. Not everyone's family is as tight as yours.

TOM: Okay, it's not your Mom. What is it?

JENNY: It's nothing.

TOM: It's something. Tell me.
JENNY: No, I'm alright...

TOM: Sometimes talking helps.

JENNY: I'm fine.

TOM: Okay, you fine, but you don't look fine. What are you thinking about?

JENNY: I don't know. I'm just thinking about all the other patients. That lady who always comes in when we leave... The one with lung cancer. Her husband said she only has six months. Sometimes I wonder about people who just stop coming to therapy. Are they done? Are they cured? Or are they gone?

TOM: I don't know.

JENNY: Today, I've been thinking about somebody I saw here on my first day of radiation.

TOM: Jenny?

JENNY: There was a woman sitting over there. I said hello to her, but I don't think she even knew I was in the room. She looked like she hadn't washed her hair in days. It was very limp, hanging around her pale white face. Her eyes were sunken. They looked like black marbles incapable of any emotion except pain.

TOM: Was she a patient?

JENNY: No, that's the horrible part. She was waiting for someone, and when I saw who... (Tears begin to stream down her cheeks.)

TOM: Was it someone you knew?

JENNY: No. They brought a little boy out of the treatment room in a wheelchair. He couldn't have been more than five years old. My God, he was so small. So pale. The woman stood up and put a tiny baseball hat on his bald head. His little skull was red from radiation burns. His eyes were half shut, and I could tell that it wasn't because he was sleepy. That little boy... that little boy wasn't sleepy at all. He was dying. While he should have been outside playing on the swings. While he should have been watching cartoons or riding his bike. While he should have been living the life of a five year old, his body was dying. Cancer was eating him up, just like us, but he was just a little kid! I could see his little chest rising and falling as his mother pushed his wheelchair out. It hurt so much to think that his heart wasn't going to beat much longer. I couldn't handle the thought of him no longer breathing. I prayed for that boy. Now, this morning... he... this morning he wasn't around for treatment. The nurse... she didn't have to tell me what happened... (JENNY is crying. TOM tries to comfort her by hugging her tightly. She holds onto him for a moment as if he is her only anchor to sanity.)

TOM: Oh God, it's alright. Jenny, it's alright. (They break from their embrace.)

JENNY: Why does this have to happen? Why? (She begins to pull herself together.) How could something like that happen?

TOM: I don't know.

JENNY: I don't know what to think anymore. I just... That kid died, just like that. He's gone. Never had a chance to make his mark on the world. (Long pause.) Tom, do you believe in God?

TOM: I don't know.

JENNY: I did, but I don't anymore. At least I don't believe all that bullshit about a gentle loving God. (Angry.) How could a kind God allow something like this to happen? How? That little boy is dead! You and I are both... Dying!

TOM: Don't say that!

JENNY: We are dying! Chances are we'll be dead before either of us reaches our twenty-first birthday! How could anybody believe in a God that would allow us to die like this? I don't know if I can believe in anything anymore.

TOM: Don't say that. You have to believe in something.

JENNY: There is nothing left to believe in. My body has betrayed me and my religion is gone. There's nothing left... Life... life has this way of really screwing us over. You're born one day to live and dream, and the next you're a five year old rotting in a casket... There's nothing left.

TOM: Yes there is. (He pulls her to him.) Believe this... (He kisses her gently.) I love you.

JENNY: You love me? (Half laugh, half sob.) I'm bald.

TOM: Don't worry about that, it kind of turns me on. (She hugs him tightly, tears again streaming down her cheeks.)

JENNY: I love you too. (She is smiling.)
TOM: I ah...I've got to ask you something.

JENNY: What?

TOM: Look, I've been thinking a lot about this.

JENNY: About what?

TOM: Um... Would you... I mean... do you... ah... I mean, you really love me?

JENNY: Yes...I really do. Is that really what you were going to ask?

TOM: No.

JENNY: What then?

TOM: I'm having some trouble putting it into words. (TOM smiles trying to think.) Alright, I've got it. (TOM puts up two fingers.)

JENNY: What's this?

TOM: Charades.

JENNY: Charades?

TOM: Yeah, just play along.

(TOM puts up two fingers again.)

JENNY: Second word. Wait a minute. Is it a movie, book, play?


TOM: It's me. Okay, something me.

(TOM raises his hands and frantically pointing at JENNY.)

JENNY: Sounds like fairy.

TOM: Yeah... It sounds like fairy.

JENNY: Marry?

TOM: Yeah.

JENNY: Marry me?

TOM: Okay... That was a lot easier than I thought.

JENNY: Oh, Tom... I...

TOM: It's alright, you can take some time to think about it. Well, don't take too much time. I mean we're not getting any younger... or healthier... or smarter... Or taller... We might be getting fatter, but...

JENNY: (She puts her hand up, indicating that he should stop babbling.) I want to marry you.

TOM: I want to marry you too. (They kiss.)

JENNY: What about Dr. Zapp?

TOM: I definitely don't wanna' marry him. (Blackout.)
Tom's Monologue

TOM: Yeah...I know. It all happened really fast. My father once told me he knew my mother was the one after taking her out once. (Laughs.) Once! Like father like son, huh? Well, when you look ahead and see your whole life before you and there ain't that much left...well, you know. So, I married her. Best decision I ever made. She drives all the pain and fear out of my life. Jenny...my wife, is the one that keeps me from dreaming about dying. When I'm with her all, I think about is being alive. (Blackout.)

Scene Five

We Need to Talk

At rise, the audience discovers TOM and JENNY's apartment. TOM enters. JENNY is seated on the couch, reading:

JENNY: (Rubbing her eyes.) Hey...

TOM: Hey... You were up early this morning.

JENNY: Yeah, I hate those early morning appointments. The doctor had some interesting news.

TOM: So did mine.

JENNY: Really?

TOM: We might need to celebrate.

JENNY: Celebrate what?

TOM: My good news.

JENNY: What good news?

TOM: This morning the doctor told me that I responded very well to the radiation. He said I might not have to do chemotherapy.

JENNY: (She hugs him.) Tom!

TOM: He said there's a chance... It's still slim, but he said there's a chance...
you wouldn’t like me when I’m angry.” That’d be really cool if all the radioactive shit we went through turned us into incredible Hulks.

**JENNY:** *(There is a pause and the tone changes.)* Tom?

**TOM:** Yes?

**JENNY:** There’s something that I need to talk to you about.

**TOM:** *(Sarcastically.)* Don’t tell me you have cancer, I just couldn’t handle that.

**JENNY:** Seriously.

**TOM:** What is it?

**JENNY:** This is really hard to say now.

**TOM:** *(More serious.)* Jenny, tell me.

**JENNY:** You know I went to the doctor this morning, too.

**TOM:** What?

**JENNY:** I’m ...

**TOM:** What is it?

**JENNY:** I’m... pregnant.

**TOM:** Pregnant?

**JENNY:** Yes ...

**TOM:** Oh, man.

**JENNY:** I may not get another chance at this. Listen, I really...

**TOM:** I won’t have another chance, either.

**JENNY:** What?

**TOM:** I still might have to... If I go into chemo... I’ll be sterile.

**JENNY:** *(A small smile is playing on the corner of her mouth.)* Wait. Are you telling me what I think you are?

**TOM:** Don’t jump to conclusions. I took care of my little brother a lot when I was younger. It’s not as much fun as it looks. I mean, a kid is more responsibility than I can imagine.

**JENNY:** But a baby...

**TOM:** So soon after we were married... People will talk... What’s your Mother going to say? I mean it’s not like we had a long engagement...

**JENNY:** I don’t care what she says.
TOM: My parents aren’t going to be too thrilled either.

JENNY: Try, just try to imagine what it would be like. Close your eyes. *(She covers his eyes with her hands.)* There, now imagine a little baby girl...

TOM: Boy...

JENNY: OK, boy. Imagine teaching him to ride a bike. Showing him how to throw a football. Going camping with him.

TOM: Bringing him fishing and going hiking.

JENNY: Singing lullabies to him.

TOM: I don’t know about singing...

JENNY: You’ll sing... *(He pushes her hands down.)*

TOM: Maybe. There’s a lot more to it then that.

JENNY: I know. I know it’s not all fun. I know there’s a lot of work too... But think about it, our baby.

TOM: *(To himself.)* I’ll need to put in some more hours at the hardware store.

JENNY: Tom?

TOM: I...I can go...

JENNY: No. My husband is staying. I want him to hear whatever you’re gonna’ say.

DOCTOR’S VOICE: I’ve already informed your Mother...

JENNY: So much for confidentiality.

DOCTOR’S VOICE: I understand your condition has changed. Dr. Whitehurst has informed me of the onset of a pregnancy.

TOM: *(Quietly to JENNY.)* Who?

JENNY: *(To TOM.)* Dr. Probe. *(To the DOCTOR.)* Yeah, I’m pregnant.

DOCTOR’S VOICE: I see.

JENNY: There’s a bun in the oven... I guess it’d be more like a microwave for me.

DOCTOR’S VOICE: This is a very serious matter.

TOM: We should listen.

DOCTOR’S VOICE: In the last MRI another tumor was discovered. It is deep in the basil hindbrain... And from these pictures it appears that it would be a very difficult and dangerous operation.

JENNY: So what... What are we going to do?

DOCTOR’S VOICE: Long ago when we first began to discuss your options I told you that you would probably have to have chemotherapy at some point. It would appear that we have reached that point.
JENNY: Chemotherapy?

DOCTOR’S VOICE: Yes. Unfortunately, I am afraid that even chemotherapy may not have the desired effect on the tumor.

TOM: Wait! Just wait a minute! What are you saying here?

JENNY: He’s saying that I don’t have a lot of time left. Isn’t that right, Doctor?

DOCTOR’S VOICE: I’m afraid so.

TOM: How much time?

JENNY: It doesn’t matter, Tom.

TOM: How? How can you say that? How much time?

DOCTOR’S VOICE: Perhaps eighteen months. It depends on how the tumor responds. If it responds favorably, maybe a little more.

JENNY: What about the baby?

DOCTOR’S VOICE: Once treatment begins... The fetus will not survive the introduction of the toxins required by chemotherapy.

JENNY: And...and what if I don’t do chemo?

TOM: Jenny?

DOCTOR’S VOICE: Well, such a decision would seriously alter the amount of time you have remaining.

JENNY: How much time would I have?

DOCTOR’S VOICE: You would have a year at the most.

JENNY: What about the baby? Would I be able to have it?

DOCTOR’S VOICE: It is possible that you could carry the baby to term under those circumstances. However, it is highly inadvisable.

JENNY: You can’t operate at all?

DOCTOR’S VOICE: At this point the skill required to perform such an operation is not available.

JENNY: (Looking at TOM. Her voice breaks when she next speaks.) Tom? Oh, Tom...

TOM: (Takes her into his arms. Tears are shimmering in his eyes.) Jenny...God... It’s—it’s going to be okay. It’ll be okay. (The Doctor light slowly fades out. The two are left holding each other on stage for a long moment.) (The lights should fade directly into the next scene.)

Scene Seven

Decisions

TOM and JENNY are discovered embracing one another.

TOM: If...if there were any way in the world that I could trade places with you. If somehow by some magic I could put myself in your shoes. I’d...I’d do it in a heartbeat.

JENNY: No, you wouldn’t.

TOM: Yeah, I would. It’s like in the movies... Ya’ know? I mean; the guy is the hero... He always knows what to do. He always knows how to save people in trouble. If I’m the hero in this drama, I don’t have a clue how to save you.

JENNY: Damnit Tom, would you open your eyes! This isn’t a movie. This isn’t pretend. This is real and we have to deal with it.

TOM: I just hate being so helpless...

JENNY: I know, I do too.

TOM: I want to do something. I wish I could see the cancer... I’d...I’d kick its ass!

JENNY: (Starts to laugh.) You’d kick its ass?

TOM: (Smiling and making a punching motion.) I would... I’d...I’d beat the living shit out of it. (For a moment their eyes are locked, they are smiling at one another. Suddenly they both look away. Their smiles have fallen. There is a pause.)
MASON

JENNY: Tom, we need to talk about the baby.
TOM: Yeah... I know.
JENNY: I... I really want to have it.
TOM: Don't... don't do that to yourself.
JENNY: I can't help it.
TOM: We should try and forget about this... We should just worry about taking advantage of what we've got left.
JENNY: Forget?
TOM: Not forget... That's the wrong word.
JENNY: You're way ahead, Tom. I didn't say I was going to do chemo.
TOM: What?
JENNY: I said that I was thinking about not doing chemo.
TOM: But... but you have to do it. I mean, to stay alive the doctors said...
JENNY: What do doctor's know... Nothing! What they know about tumors and cancer, it's like a drop in the bucket. They don't know what's best for me.
TOM: Jenny...
JENNY: I just... I'm only nineteen years old, Tom... Nineteen, pregnant, and dying... I just...
TOM: It'll be okay.
JENNY: No, it's not. I... I can't stop thinking about that little boy... The one that died. I keep thinking about his mother, and how horrible it must be to lose a child. How... how death just can't be cheated. People don't think about it... They don't see themselves like a... I don't know. Like a fire. Like a fire that burns brightly for a short time, then it just burns out... (Pause) I don't want to die, Tom, and I don't want the baby to die.
TOM: But if you don't do chemo, you both could die. At least if you do this, at least you'll live longer.
JENNY: Is it worth it? For a few months, Tom? The chemo is hardly going to make a difference at all.
TOM: It might be... it might be worth it.
JENNY: I don't think so.
TOM: Jenny, you're probably not going to be strong enough to do this. This baby could kill you.
JENNY: You don't understand.
TOM: No, I don't. I just...
JENNY: You just want me to give up our baby...
TOM: No.
JENNY: Then, you're afraid of taking care of it...
TOM: No. I'm afraid, but not of that. I'm afraid of losing you.
JENNY: I can't do this without your help.
TOM: Whatever happens, I'm not going to stop loving you.
JENNY: Chemo won't save me.
TOM: I want you alive, Jenny.
JENNY: I'm going to die whether I go into treatment or not.
TOM: God, I want you alive.
JENNY: I know... I know. It's not about that though. It's not about me staying alive. There's something growing inside me, Tom, something important.
TOM: A cancer.
JENNY: A baby.
TOM: Jesus, Jenny. I... I can't look forward to your death...
JENNY: I hardly got sick at all during radiation.
TOM: But...

JENNY: I think I want to have this baby even if it does kill me. This is the most important thing I've ever done. Who knows? The doctor might be wrong. I might not even need chemo.

TOM: You know you need it! Jenny, don't do this!

JENNY: I accepted a long time ago that I was going to die. You're not thinking about the baby... You're thinking about yourself.

TOM: I'm thinking about you... I just want you alive and healthy.

JENNY: Well, we both know that's not going to happen.

TOM: Anything can happen.

JENNY: Now you sound like one of those stupid doctors. Anything can happen. You know what that means. It means I could die tomorrow.

TOM: Look, I... I may not live to see the kid's seventh birthday. Then who'd take care of him?

JENNY: I'm not going to live to see his first birthday.

TOM: Jenny...

JENNY: You're in remission. You've probably got a lot more time left now.

TOM: God, Jenny... Listen, I'm saying this because I don't want to lose you.

JENNY: No! I don't have that much time left. I can't believe your saying this. I can't believe you don't see!

TOM: Jenny...

JENNY: Don't you see how important life is? Can't you feel it? My God, every breath I take, I feel it fill my lungs. I taste the air! (Tears begin to roll down her cheeks.) Everything... everything is so beautiful. I love it all so much... But, you know what I love most, I love people! I love smiling, telling jokes, and hugging you. The reason I love all these things is, because they tell me I'm alive. They show me how precious every moment is. Every person dreams, every person loves, and every person wants to live forever. I...I have an incredible power now. I can give you something of me...

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TOM: (TOM is visibly shaken by her short monologue.) I understand what you're trying to say, but I don't want you to die. I don't want to be alone.

JENNY: I don't want to die either.

TOM: Then, your mind is made up.

JENNY: Yes, I need to do this.

TOM: My God... What if you die before the baby's born?

JENNY: Then my life won't have mattered. You'll be alone. I'll be dead and only a memory. But if I have a child, the baby will grow up and have children, then they'll have children. Part of me... part of us will always remain alive, and you'll never be alone.

TOM: My God, a baby. Your baby...

JENNY: Our baby. It'll be our child.

TOM: (Repeats to himself.) Our child.

JENNY: Tom?

TOM: I can't fight you... I love you too much.

JENNY: Tom?

TOM: If the baby lives... I mean... when you have the baby... I'll... I'll take care of him. (He embraces her.)

JENNY: (Laughing.) What makes you so sure it'll be a him?

(Blackout.)

Scene Eight

Epilogue

TOM and JENNY are discovered on stage. Each has a full head of hair. JENNY is seated in an isolated spot upstage of TOM. TOM is also in an isolated spot. He is sitting and holding a tiny baby wrapped in a blanket. See note following the description of the scene.
MASON

TOM: Hush little baby don't say a word,
Momma's gonna' buy you a mocking bird,
And if that mocking bird don't sing,
Momma's gonna' buy you a diamond ring.
(He takes a long pause looking into the baby's eyes.) Don't cry little Jenny. It'll be alright. Daddy's here. Everything is going to be alright.

JENNY's spotlight fades slowly to black following TOM's last spoken line. He smiles at the baby and takes a long pause as JENNY's light begins to fade. Perhaps he looks over his shoulder and watches her disappear into the darkness, perhaps not. He begins to sing again. There is a slight alteration in the lullaby.

TOM: Hush little baby, don't say a word,
Daddy's gonna' buy you a mocking bird,
And if that mocking bird don't sing,
Daddy's gonna' buy you a diamond ring.

As he is singing the final two lines of the song, the lights begin to fade, coming to black a moment after he finishes the song.

The Play is Finished.

Note: The director may choose to have TOM seated or standing on stage at the top of scene eight. JENNY may then enter in blue light with the baby. She hands the child to TOM. He does not take his eyes off her for the entire moment. TOM holds the baby in one arm and takes JENNY's hand with the other. There is a very long moment where they remain motionless looking at one another and holding hands. JENNY slowly pulls her hand away and retreats to her seat. The blue light crossfades to the isolation lights and TOM begins the first verse of the song.

Though this play is written with blackouts finishing most of the scenes, innovative directors are urged to explore the possibility of using subtle crossfades between the scenes to keep the action flowing.

In the original production, this play was produced on a thrust stage utilizing a series of acting blocks for the set. To indicate the different settings, these blocks were shifted between the scenes. Directors and designers may choose to be more elaborate than what is required, but they should not lose sight of the fact that this piece is about character, not spectacle.