

Michael Bettencourt

Full-Length Plays: Volume 2

Block & Tackle Productions Press



Full-Length Plays: Volume 2

Michael Bettencourt

**Esquina • Ain't Ethiopia
A Bright Gold Promise**

All scripts are offered under the
Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

Block & Tackle Productions Press



Co-Founders Elfin Frederick Vogel and Michael Bettencourt

**Copyright © 2015
www.blockandtackleproductions.com**

To María Beatriz - always in all ways

Esquina

Lies written in ink can never disguise facts written in blood. Blood debts must be repaid in kind. The longer the delay, the greater the interest.

- *Lu Xun* -

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

An off-duty police officer is charged with the murder of 17-year old Jose Aral.

CHARACTERS

- MARIA, Jose's grandmother
- ELIÁN, Jose's grandfather
- RAOUL, Jose's uncle
- ESCONDIDA, Jose's aunt, wife of RAOUL
- SERAFINA, Jose's older sister, police officer
- PAUL, Jose's older brother, accountant; wears a black eye-patch
- MARIO, MAGDALENA, MARTA, friends of Jose's
- REPORTER/PRIEST/MAYOR (same actor)

NOTE: Jose's "shrine" is indicated by a candle surrounded by stones of various sizes.

* * * * *

Scene 1

A single candle burns. RAOUL, PRIEST, SERAFINA in uniform. RAOUL's shirt has streaks of what look like blood. He kneels in front of the flame.

RAOUL

It shouldna happened. I mean, a kid, just a kid, good kid,
full of, you know, the usual fires --

PRIEST

Raoul --

RAOUL

(ignoring PRIEST)

-- but good, always good, open, not like a slap but like a
door, welcome you in --

PRIEST
(more insistent)

Raoul --

RAOUL
(still ignoring)

-- I will miss his laugh, man, "tio tonto, tio tonto," but, you know, said in an open way, big smile, no meanness to him --

SERAFINA

Uncle --

PRIEST

Raoul --

RAOUL

Don't touch me!

SERAFINA
Father -- Uncle, why do you have --

PRIEST
(overlapping)
Sometimes we cannot understand --
(to SERAFINA)
Sorry --

RAOUL
Don't tell me we can't understand!
(to SERAFINA)
And don't touch me!

SERAFINA
Just job-related, uncle, believe me ---

PRIEST
Raoul, I only mean that sometimes it is not possible to make sense of what seems senseless.

RAOUL shoots to his feet.

RAOUL
This was not some event! Assassination!

PRIEST looks to SERAFINA.

SERAFINA

I've never seen him like this.

RAOUL

Why did this happen -- what kind of, I mean, animal takes Jose -- Jose! --

PRIEST
(to SERAFINA)

Please --

SERAFINA

Uncle Raoul, look at me -- focus --

RAOUL
(ignoring)

-- what kind, you tell me, because I know people are animals --

PRIEST

You mustn't --

SERAFINA

Uncle, I gotta know --

RAOUL

Animals from the mud! Made right outta the mud -- Adam made outta mud, right, huh? Isn't that what God did? You're the know-it-all. You never lose where you come from, right?

RAOUL drops to his knees again.

RAOUL

Jose! Jose! -- we're all mud -- just dirt --

SERAFINA

Uncle, I gotta know why --

RAOUL

Don't! You gonna make it any better?

SERAFINA

I'm not from the mud.

RAOUL

Look at what one of your kind --

SERAFINA

Not my "kind" -- how many times --

RAOUL

Mud is mud.

PRIEST

This is your niece, Raoul

RAOUL

You want me doing the other cheek?

PRIEST

Just don't let your grief make you hard.

RAOUL

What a stupid thing we do, isn't it, candles, a flame gets put out and we put up another flame to make a memory -- but nothing, nothing is gonna bring him back, nada me lo va resucitar -- good boy, full boy, had a heart -- a heart! That pig took it!

PRIEST goes to say something, but SERAFINA puts a hand on PRIEST to stop him.

SERAFINA
(with force)

Uncle Raoul.

RAOUL
(ignores, then speaks)

What?

SERAFINA

The shirt.

RAOUL

What?

SERAFINA

The shirt. I gotta ask about the shirt.

With repressed rage and a flamboyant gesture, RAOUL unbuttons his right shirt cuff to show a forearm slashed. He rubs it across his shirt front, leaving a smear. He rebuttons the cuff.

RAOUL

Blood dust ashes pain memory --

SERAFINA

Nobody else's?

RAOUL

What?

SERAFINA
(with emphasis)

Nobody else's?

RAOUL

You think at a time like --

SERAFINA

Yes or no, uncle?

RAOUL

Mine only -- cut out for Jose --

SERAFINA

Jose wasn't yours -- Jose belongs all around now, tio, you can't mark him out all for your own --

RAOUL

Uniform and badge --

SERAFINA

You think that's all I am?

RAOUL

That's all I'm hearing -- that blue line pig kills your brother
and you hassle one of your own about blood he has shed
for the Angel --

SERAFINA

(to PRIEST)

Tell him when he comes around back to talking sense --

RAOUL

-- what would you know about sense --

PRIEST

-- I sense --

SERAFINA

-- that he shouldn't make such a big thing about waving
around a bloody shirt since pigs like me take a dim view of
anyone walking around bleeding like a chaos and talking up
trash about how blue lines ain't nothing but animals full of
mud -- no blue takes that kindly --

RAOUL

And you can tell --

PRIEST

Now, look --

SERAFINA

I got a duty to get back to.

SERAFINA exits.

RAOUL

And you can tell her --

PRIEST

I'm not a messenger service.

RAOUL points at the candle.

RAOUL

That's all that's left.

PRIEST

That's not true.

RAOUL

Then what is true, padre? What is goddamn left of the Angel?

PRIEST

Whatever is left of ourselves.

They both stare at the candle. PRIEST loosens his collar.

RAOUL

That's the goddamn truth, Father.

PRIEST

Unfortunately.

RAOUL

That's the goddamn truth, too. Go. Go!

PRIEST exits. RAOUL stands slowly, then takes off his bloody shirt.

RAOUL

Angel, don't you worry. Don't you worry at all.

RAOUL snaps the shirt quickly, which blows out the candle. Blackout.

* * * * *

Scene 2

REPORTER, MARIA, ELIÁN, ESCONDIDA. Glaring lights.

REPORTER

Yes, Gary, we are reporting live from what people are now calling La Esquina, which almost overnight has turned into a gathering place for friends and family and neighbors and well-wishers, even strangers who have stopped by to offer their condolences. As you can see over here, people have set up a little shrine to Jose on the street corner, just down a block from where he was allegedly attacked by Officer

Pedro Amargo -- there are candles, messages of love and sadness scrawled across the altar --

Gesturing to the unseen cameraman to move in closer.

REPORTER

-- even a pair of Jose's sneakers which they've hung up as a kind of tribute to this very well-liked young man.

Moving towards MARIA and ELIÁN.

REPORTER

And I have with me here --

REPORTER moves to MARIA and ELIÁN.

REPORTER

-- the grandparents of young Jose, Maria and Elián Aral, who had raised him when Jose's parents died in a tragic accident --

ESCONDIDA

What are you doing?

REPORTER ignores ESCONDIDA as he moves in.

REPORTER

Mr. and Mrs. Aral --

ESCONDIDA

Get out of here.

REPORTER

-- could you tell us how you feel?

ESCONDIDA goes to say something else, but ELIÁN holds up his hand to stop her. ELIÁN glares at REPORTER as if looking at an insect. MARIA simply stares ahead. Painful dead air as REPORTER waits for ELIÁN to say something.

REPORTER

(to ESCONDIDA)

Are you a translator for the family?

ESCONDIDA

I am Jose's aunt.

REPORTER

Would you mind --

With disgust, ESCONDIDA turns to MARIA and ELIÁN.

ESCONDIDA

This reporter is asking --

REPORTER

Wait --

ELIÁN

I know what he's asking.

REPORTER

You know English?

ESCONDIDA

Why would you think they wouldn't?

REPORTER

I --

ESCONDIDA

They have been here for more years than the numbers you have in your IQ, so let me keep translating for you since you seem so unprepared --

REPORTER

You don't really have to --

ESCONDIDA

Just wait.

REPORTER

Really --

ESCONDIDA speaks in a very exaggerated Spanish accent.

ESCONDIDA

He. Wants. To. Know. How. You. Both. Feel. About.
What. Happened. --

(to REPORTER)

Good eh?

ELIÁN

You want to know what we feel.

ESCONDIDA

Elián, he doesn't deserve --

REPORTER

Yes, yes -- please --

ELIÁN glares at the REPORTER.

ELIÁN

Viva Fidel. Viva Che. Viva Cuba.

REPORTER with tight false smile.

REPORTER

Reporting live from La Esquina --

Blackout.

* * * * *

Scene 3

PAUL, dressed in a sharp suit. MARIA, ELIÁN, ESCONDIDA, RAOUL with a new shirt. Everyone silent, watching PAUL pace.

PAUL

(to ESCONDIDA)

What you did --

ESCONDIDA

What did I do?

PAUL

Well, it was not smart, tia.

ESCONDIDA

But what did I do?

PAUL

You basically told a reporter, in front his cameraman, and his audience, to take his microphone and --

ESCONDIDA

Why should I be polite to an idiot -- like giving a crystal bowl to a pig -- and what gave him the right anyway?

PAUL

It's his job.

ESCONDIDA

Don't use that tone!

RAOUL

Escondida --

ESCONDIDA

You stay out of this, Raoul --

PAUL

I am just trying --

ESCONDIDA

He should not stick his nose in the meat grinder if he doesn't want it to be part of the chorizo. And that goes for any of them because I will chop them all off.

PAUL

Tia --

ESCONDIDA

You know me, Paul --

(indicating ELIÁN and MARIA)

-- when it comes to them, I have no storage space for bullshit. And I am done explaining to you.

PAUL

Papa --

ELIÁN

What?

PAUL

What you said to him, Papa --

ESCONDIDA

Leave him alone!

ELIÁN

What about what he said to us -- asking us how we felt -- what did he think? Like we want to dance? What would have happened if I had said what I really feel?

(indicating MARIA)

What she really feels? None of you know that! There would have been nothing left of him!

A tense silence settles in the room.

PAUL

He's just doing his j[ob] --

ELIÁN

A stupid job, then, and he should find work to do that doesn't suck him dry.

PAUL

His "job" can do a lot for us if we play ball with them.

ELIÁN

Now I have a grandson who insults me with sports.

PAUL

Papa --

ELIÁN

"Do a lot"? To do a lot of what? To make a sport out of --

PAUL

To help us make our case --

ELIÁN

The only case is Jose's dead!

RAOUL

Angel's dead.

PAUL

I mean "out there" -- you should know this better than anyone, abuelo -- getting the hearts of the people behind you --

ELIÁN

Completely different then -- not done for some capitalist vultures --

PAUL

(patiently)

We know because we're on the inside -- but "out there" -- Jose can be just some punk kid who got what he [deserved] --

ELIÁN

Jose was never a "punk" --

PAUL

We know that -- all of us know that -- but --

ELIÁN

They swarm around like flies over dead meat.

PAUL

First it's vultures, now it's flies --

ELIÁN

And what good are flies or vultures to us?

PAUL

They will help us make our case -- doesn't anyone see that?

ESCONDIDA

Thought that's what the court is for --

PAUL

Yes, but there's --

ESCONDIDA

-- the judge is for, the jury is for --

PAUL

But there's another case --

RAOUL

We need to get the body back that they're eating.

ESCONDIDA

(disapproving)

Raoul --

PAUL

He's right. Raoul is right. Jose belongs to us. So let's just, for the moment -- for the moment, okay -- look at the facts.

ELIÁN

The facts?

Such is his vehemence that everyone falls silent. MARIA stares into space like a stone.

ESCONDIDA

(indicating MARIA)

Elián -- look -- be --

ELIÁN puts a heavy but not ungentle hand on MARIA.

ELIÁN

(slightly softer)

The facts? The facts know everyone in this room. Your brother is dead.

PAUL

I know --

RAOUL

My nephew --

ESCONDIDA

Our --

PAUL

I know --

ELIÁN

Murdered.

PAUL

I know!

ELIÁN

Then why are you wasting time about --

PAUL

Because, like it or not -- like it or not -- life goes on.

Everyone responds to this in his or her own way.

PAUL

Life goes on. It goes on. Tia, you want courtroom, judge, and jury -- have you heard the people outside, around that "shrine," making a pilgrimage to la ofrenda -- "Justicia," they shout --

ESCONDIDA

I hear it -- who can't --

PAUL

"Justicia."

ESCONDIDA

And your poor abuelita can't --

PAUL

It's loud, I know -- but that "justicia, justicia" is only going to get louder and louder and louder and louder --

ELIÁN

(to RAOUL)

Unless I had a son --

(to PAUL)

-- or a grandson who'd throw 'em out --

RAOUL

I can do that if you want --

ELIÁN

Then you should do it!

SERAFINA enters. PAUL does not see her.

PAUL

A trial is already going on out there --

RAOUL

But Papa --

PAUL

-- a trial about justice, whether we want it or not --

RAOUL

Look at what Paul is saying, Papa --

ELIÁN

What he's saying disgraces Jose --

PAUL

They don't think it's a disgrace to Jose -- they see a cop kill a kid for no reason and they gather and they demand -- no more just letting it pass, no more keeping it quiet! That would be the disgrace! You out of all us should respect that, Papa!

ESCONDIDA

Paul, turn down the volcano, okay? Pay attention.

ELIÁN holds up his hand to ESCONDIDA, looks directly at PAUL. PAUL notices SERAFINA.

ELIÁN

Go on. Go on.

PAUL

We can't think the mayor and the police department aren't sitting in their offices already making plans.

(to SERAFINA)

Right? Plans are being made up all around us, aren't they?

(to ALL)

So why shouldn't we be as smart if not smarter about it, about all of it? Not doing it for us but for Jose. But we need to be smarter, we need to be a lot smarter --

SERAFINA

And are you laying out a case for the lynch mob, brother of mine?

PAUL

No.

SERAFINA

(as she greets everyone)

Setting it all up for rough justice?

SERAFINA greets ELIÁN, ESCONDIDA, nods to RAOUL. Hugs MARIA.

SERAFINA

Papa, Mama, tia --

ESCONDIDA

Serafina --

PAUL

No.

SERAFINA

Sounds like it to these ears.

PAUL

Well, it's not like that.

SERAFINA

Then what's it like?

PAUL

We want justice, not just what the law might feel good about giving away.

SERAFINA

Hasn't even been indicted yet --

PAUL

He will be --

SERAFINA

-- and already you're planning --

PAUL

Someone needs to watch out for this family.

SERAFINA

So it would make more room for you if I just left?

PAUL

It would be better if you understood.

SERAFINA

(to ALL)

It'd also probably be better if my brother wasn't right. Yes, there are plans, Papa. I don't know what they are, but they're laying them out to us. We've got cruisers on three corners, and there's talk about blocking the street off so that people can --

ELIÁN

So you're going to let them stay --

SERAFINA

Not me, Papa --

ELIÁN

-- on my property, making a mess --

SERAFINA

Not me, Papa -- I'm not the police chief.

PAUL

Yet.

SERAFINA

Not ambitious like you, bro -- I like just serving and protecting.

(to ELIÁN)

Those are the orders by the book so far, Papa.

ELIÁN scrutinizes PAUL and SERAFINA.

ELIÁN

My ears are burning. I hear all of this, and my ears burn.

(to PAUL)

I have you talking in here about justicia --

(to SERAFINA)

-- and your "cop" in here -- you give me "law" and you give me "orders" --

ESCONDIDA

Elián, why don't you just spit on her shoelaces and get it over with?

ELIÁN

I never wanted her to be a "cop" --

SERAFINA

(to ESCONDIDA)

Never far down, is it?

ESCONDIDA

Because a cop killed Jose doesn't mean Serafina's --

ELIÁN

"Law" and "order" killed Jose!

ESCONDIDA

Last I heard Serafina didn't change her name to "law" and --

RAOUL

You should --

ESCONDIDA

(ignoring him)

Serafina is just our Serafina, like always --

SERAFINA

Papa, "cop" is an old misery between us that now has got to go away -- the sun is rising in a different place from now

on, now that Jose is dead. Yes? At least my brother the accountant is right about that.

PAUL

Papa, it's not any different -- you wanted justice back then -- we want it now -- no cleaner, no dirtier --

ELIÁN

It's not the same.

PAUL

Yes it is. Plans. I'm thinking that --

PAUL gives them all a concentrated look.

PAUL

If you want, I will handle the bobos and bobas coming around sticking us up with their cameras and whatever.

SERAFINA

Our vocero?

PAUL

For the family. If everyone agrees.

ESCONDIDA

I don't ever want to talk to them again -- I'd have to take too many showers.

PAUL

Raoul?

RAOUL

Whatever makes people see the Angel as the Angel.

PAUL

Papa? Papa?

ELIÁN look at them, his face suddenly very tired.

ELIÁN

It's only been three days -- three days --

PAUL

I know --

ELIÁN

-- and already it's like the world means nothing that it did before.

PAUL

Life does go on.

Without warning, ELIÁN slaps PAUL, but not hard -- out of frustration.

ELIÁN

Life.

ELIÁN takes MARIA's hand with an uncharacteristic tenderness.

ELIÁN

What is "goes on"? I'm sorry.

PAUL

It's all right. I will spend myself as much as I can, Papa.

SERAFINA laughs.

PAUL

I'll take that as a yes from you.

SERAFINA

Just not a "no."

PAUL

Then I will take that as a yes.

SERAFINA

It doesn't matter, Pablo --

PAUL

Paul -- Paul --

SERAFINA

"Pawl"-not-Pablo -- it's all now "Let my people go" and no one can stop it --

ELIÁN
(warningly)

Serafina.

SERAFINA

Of course.

(to PAUL)

Count my "not no."

PAUL
Well, all right, then -- it's decided.

MARIA
Yes.

Everyone looks at MARIA, realizing that she has spoken for the first time.

MARIA
If there is hell --

PAUL
Okay, Mama.

MARIA
If there is hell --

PAUL
It's okay, Mama. It's okay.

MARIA strikes her breast, hard, with the hand that holds ELIÁN's hand.
Blackout.

* * * * *

Scene 4

MARIA and PRIEST -- confessional. MARIA has a large black purse.

PRIEST
Yes? How long has it been since your last confession?

No response.

PRIEST

Yes?

No response.

PRIEST

Are you there?

MARIA strikes her breast, hard.

PRIEST

Take your time.

MARIA

Do you know who I am?

PRIEST

In the confessional, we are all equal before God.

MARIA

That's very nice -- and it's also very wrong -- but it's not what I asked you. I asked you --

PRIEST

Yes, of course, Maria, I know you.

MARIA

I don't think you do.

PRIEST

You are Maria Aral -- you are the grandmother of Jose Aral, wife of --

MARIA

(dismissive)

That "Maria"? That Maria is gone.

PRIEST

She is a "Maria" worth keeping.

MARIA

Not any more.

PRIEST

Then who is here?

MARIA

I don't know. New Maria.

PRIEST

And has this new Maria come to confess her sins?

MARIA

Sins? Sins?

PRIEST

You are there, and I'm in here.

MARIA

And what are these "sins" that she should confess?

PRIEST

How would I know until she -- you -- confess them?

MARIA

You don't hear me -- give me the catechism about "sins."

PRIEST

Maria, this isn't necessary --

MARIA

You do not get to choose. Define them.

PRIEST

Technically -- they are an offense against God's love for us.
Given to us forever, without end or hesitation or condition.

MARIA

Then God's "love" is the sin here. Listen to this.

MARIA strikes her breast, hard.

MARIA

I am trying to get it to ring.

MARIA strikes her breast again, hard.

PRIEST

You shouldn't do that --

MARIA

(twice more)

I want to break it -- it's useless.

PRIEST steps out of the confessional.

PRIEST

Maria? Maria? Let's find some place softer.

PRIEST offers MARIA his arm.

PRIEST

I'm sure Elián won't mind.

PRIEST picks up her purse.

PRIEST

Come with me.

MARIA rises, takes his arm.

MARIA

You have a little muscle there.

PRIEST

From thirty years of making the sign of the cross. Come on.

They move into a new light, sit in a pew: the chapel. Several moments of silence.

PRIEST

I like the light in this little chapel -- the air soothes --

MARIA holds up a hand to stop him.

MARIA

I know your tricks, Father --

PRIEST

All of them?

MARIA

I'm not some little lamb on the edge of a cliff.

PRIEST

You don't think so?

MARIA

No I don't. Your "shepherd of the people" is not for me, not now.

PRIEST

Then that puts me fresh out of tricks.

MARIA

Good -- now you can just listen and answer me straight.

PRIEST

Without tricks, then -- at your service.

MARIA

Is there a hell? Is there a hell? It's a simple question.

PRIEST

It's not a simple question.

MARIA

Four words, single syllable.

PRIEST

"Four words" doesn't mean a simple question or a simple answer.

MARIA

(slight sarcasm)

"Technically" -- I don't have time --

PRIEST

"Technically" -- yes.

MARIA

And who goes there? Technically.

PRIEST

"If one violates God's love" -- Maria, this is not the topic for
--

MARIA

Answer me --

PRIEST

(formulaic)

If one violates God's love, then, without confession, the soul
will be lost. But --

MARIA

(cuts him off)

"Will be lost" -- uh-uh, no, wrong voice, Father. Voz pasiva.
They don't just go "lost," just wander into hell like, "Oops,
man, how the hell did I get to hell?" -- they get sent. They
get thrown. They get flung --

(flicking her fingers)

-- like something picked out of the nose. Who? Who?

(flicking her fingers)

Who does that? You don't even have to answer because
we both know the answer.

PRIEST

It's not God.

MARIA

Ah, well, you have to speak well of your employer, but I
don't. Not me. I know.

(flicks her fingers)

He's got big fingers. They're working all the time.

PRIEST

God does not send --

MARIA

I'm past that --

(flicks her fingers)

It's what He does. And that is all right -- God can do
whatever God-things he wants -- except that He has to
expect something back --

(flicks her fingers)

-- in His face. Who sends God to hell? When he violates our love? Answer: me.

PRIEST

You can't.

MARIA

I can.

MARIA strikes her breast, hard.

MARIA

I have.

MARIA strikes her breast again.

MARIA

Now, Father, I would like to confess.

PRIEST

Forgive me, Maria --

MARIA

No, that is what you are going to do for me.

PRIEST

I can't begin your confession with such --

MARIA

I am ready.

PRIEST

-- anger in your heart --

MARIA

"Bless me, Father -- "

PRIEST

Wait --

MARIA

"For I have sinned --

PRIEST

Wait --

MARIA

"And this will be my last confession."

MARIA gives him a hard look.

MARIA

It is my right. It is my duty to Jose. Go on. Tell me I should have love in my heart even though my heart has been crushed.

PRIEST

Ma ria --

MARIA

The other cheek -- yes. Go on. Tell me about being tested, God's plan, the resurrection --

PRIEST

Maria -- stop. There's no need. You are exactly the lamb at the edge of the cliff. And this will not be your last confession.

MARIA

Oh yes it will. Because after this, I am without sin, forever. I don't have to answer to anyone except Jose, and Jose never asks anyone to be in pain. Go on, teach me some more -- tell me that no human being can be without sin.

PRIEST

You should have been a Jesuit.

MARIA

I should have started being a pain in His ass a long time ago.

PRIEST

I'm sure you were, whether you knew it or not.

MARIA

Good.

PRIEST

But the lamb at the edge of the cliff -- listen -- the shepherd?
The shepherd? You see, he's -- twisted inside. If he doesn't
move, and the lamb doesn't move, and everything just stays
still --

MARIA

No dead lamb.

PRIEST

No sorry shepherd.

MARIA

But nothing ever stays that still.

PRIEST

And so he must act. Soft words, gentle motions -- "come
here" "come here" -- stepping closer, closer, all the time
hoping --

MARIA

Father -- now you listen -- you try to be such a good man,
and that's why you miss everything. The lamb isn't scared.
No -- that look in its eye, the shake in its muscles -- it knows
--

PRIEST

What?

MARIA

It knows that with one step it will be freed from the shepherd.
You think the lamb wants to stay with the man who will kill it
one day? One step -- and gone from the suffocating hands.

PRIEST

The shepherd only wants to save it.

MARIA

The lamb only wants to be released.

PRIEST

No chance the two can be as one?

MARIA

The two should be as two. The shepherd should go home.
That way, no one gets hurt.

MARIA stops.

PRIEST

I think -- I feel -- that perhaps certain kinds of suffering --

MARIA

"Certain kinds"?

PRIEST

Maybe all, then --

MARIA

All, Father --

PRIEST

I don't know -- but --

MARIA

All --

PRIEST

Perhaps you are -- In any case, I think -- I feel -- that great
suffering at least --

MARIA

Yes?

PRIEST

Does absolve --

MARIA

Like water over the baby?

PRIEST

It can.

MARIA

It must -- or else why, Father? Why?

PRIEST

Yes. Yes. If you'd like to begin.

MARIA blesses herself.

MARIA

Here is my act of contrition: hatred has washed my heart clean. I am purified because I have chosen my hell. I am not going to leave it to anyone else to put me in it. I will not be fooled by love. I will not lose my precious Jose like some bird flying away by forgiving anything or anybody. I want my heart to crush the killer because now it is nothing but stone and that is all stone is good for. These are my sins that are no longer sins. Amen.

MARIA sits back. She opens her purse, takes out a string of rosary beads. She hands them to PRIEST, closes her purse.

MARIA

It is very nice here.

PRIEST

(examining beads)

Yes it is. Are you all right?

MARIA

Are you?

PRIEST sits back. MARIA smiles. Blackout.

* * * * *

Scene 5

PAUL and RAOUL in PAUL's office. At times PAUL will take out a pack of cigarettes from his suitcoat pocket and knock them against the palm of his hand. But he never opens the pack. He is doing this as he looks at RAOUL.

PAUL

I heard about you and Serafina. How is your arm?

RAOUL

It's fine.

PAUL

It is?

RAOUL

Yes.

PAUL

Yes?

RAOUL

Yes.

PAUL

That's good, uncle. That's good. Serafina can be tough. Is tough. I don't how I ever got such a hard-ass for a sister.

RAOUL stands very still, as if he were under interrogation.

PAUL

It's okay, tio, you can smile at that.

RAOUL

I don't see anything to smile at. That's how she is.

PAUL

Yes, that's how she is. But you can still smile -- relax -- you have the "job" already -- well, not a "job," I guess, since it won't pay any money -- well, maybe it will, you never know -- but it'll be good work we're doing.

RAOUL

Like I said before, anything to make people see the Angel as the Angel.

PAUL

(overlapping)

-- see the Angel as the Angel" -- the Angel, yes -- uncle, you may have to stop saying that, things like that -- feel them in here, but keep them to yourself. The blood -- the intensity -- I understand, believe me, but private now --

RAOUL looks at PAUL, then looks away.

PAUL

Please sit down. Go ahead.

RAOUL sits.

PAUL

Because you must know, right? How they talk?

RAOUL

No.

PAUL

Raoul --

PAUL stops tapping the pack against his palm, looks directly at RAOUL.

RAOUL

Yes. I know.

A couple of taps more, and then PAUL puts away the cigarette pack.

PAUL

We are part of a family that talks, aren't we? Talk talk talk
talk talk -- a bunch of parrots.

RAOUL

I know they talk about me. That I'm slow.

PAUL

Uncle, you don't have to --

RAOUL

"One cerveza short of a six-pack" -- and because Escondida
and I didn't have children --

PAUL

Uncle --

RAOUL

That was not my fault -- everything's fine in me -- it was her
--

PAUL

Uncle -- Raoul -- look at me -- look at me -- we have to be clear about everything if you're going to go with me on this -- you connected? Plugged in?

RAOUL

Yes.

PAUL

Good, good, because beer -- children -- you know that's not what they really talked about.

RAOUL

I never.

PAUL

And I want to tell you that I never believed any of it. I saw you with Jose -- you were a good uncle -- I even defended you --

RAOUL

You never said anything to me.

PAUL

I didn't want to embarrass you.

RAOUL

They said everything to me, but never to me -- their faces -- always this look -- Escondida couldn't give me a -- nothing inside her, you know -- and so Jose was like this -- this -- why didn't you say anything to me?!

PAUL

I wanted to respect your dignity. I'm sorry. I told all of them -- I should've told you.

RAOUL stares straight ahead, barely keeping himself contained. PAUL taps on his eye-patch.

PAUL

Remember how I got this?

RAOUL

What?

PAUL

Remember how I got this?

RAOUL

That was a bad day.

PAUL takes out the cigarette pack.

PAUL

Got me to quit smoking!

RAOUL

You shouldn't joke.

PAUL

You are going to have to learn to joke if we're moving forward with this together. You want to move forward, don't you?

RAOUL thinks.

PAUL

Tell me a joke.

RAOUL

How about "one egg short of a dozen"?

PAUL

How about "one pork pie short of a picnic"?

RAOUL, for the first time, actually smiles.

RAOUL

How about "one hot pepper short of an enchilada"?

PAUL

There you go!

(tapping eye-patch)

That's how this felt after a while. It did get me to stop smoking -- gotta remember that.

PAUL puts away the pack.

RAOUL

It was a horrible day.

PAUL

Raoul, the operative word in that sentence is "was." The way they broke up the party -- that night-stick slammed down -- bam! -- the way Serafina went off to the police academy --

RAOUL

Just like sticking a finger in your eye.

PAUL

Is that a joke?

RAOUL

No.

PAUL

Yes it is! I never knew you had a comedian inside you! Stuck a finger in my eye. Yeah, it was a horrible day -- horrible month after that day -- horrible year after that month --

RAOUL

They never did anything to him --

PAUL

"Line of duty" -- my parents just too scared -- I hated them for a long time -- yeah, I did -- I got talked about, too -- little whispers, little doubts: "Is he ever going to -- " You know what I mean. But all that is all "was," Raoul. All "was."

RAOUL

You defended me?

PAUL

Jose loved you.

RAOUL

He made a lot of fun of me, too.

PAUL

It was his way -- he took after his brother!

RAOUL

Some of the things he said --

PAUL

Just like a kid -- it meant the opposite of what it looked --

RAOUL

Is that true?

PAUL

Of course it is. Jose knew.

RAOUL

When he came along --

PAUL

He seemed to make everything bad go away.

RAOUL

For everybody.

PAUL

Is it going to be "was," uncle? Is it going to be living well and doing the right thing? Or is it staying back? Is it always going to be "one short"?

RAOUL

You defended me?

PAUL

(tapping eyepatch)

I know how to do that.

RAOUL stands, faces PAUL, shakes his hand.

PAUL

Inside. Private. Strong.

Blackout.

* * * * *

Scene 6

MARIA and ESCONDIDA in ESCONDIDA's hair shop, set up in ESCONDIDA's home. MARIA sits primly in the chair. Her purse is nearby. ESCONDIDA picks up a comb, touches MARIA's hair lightly.

ESCONDIDA

The same, Maria? The usual?

MARIA does not respond. ESCONDIDA looks it over.

ESCONDIDA

It hasn't grown much. And it's getting thin the way my stomach isn't --

MARIA

Why are you still married to a follón like Raoul?

ESCONDIDA gives MARIA a direct look.

ESCONDIDA

So this is the mood we picked out of the closet this morning?

MARIA

Too many things under too many stones.

ESCONDIDA

And today is made different how?

MARIA refuses to answer. ESCONDIDA puts her hand on MARIA's head, then pulls it away.

ESCONDIDA

The volcán! Maria Full of Grace is full of steam! I know that heat, chica -- what's up your pantaletas?

MARIA

You stayed married to him.

ESCONDIDA

And a pig in Havana oinks the same as in Miami. So what?

MARIA

You had better in you. Have.

ESCONDIDA

You already had Elián, and I woulda felt bad stealing him from you. Now, do you want me to --

MARIA speaks with a sudden ferocity.

MARIA

Turn them over! All of them! Now! Now!

ESCONDIDA brings over the second chair, carefully sets it down, carefully sits in it.

ESCONDIDA

What could I have done?

MARIA

You were never pregnant.

ESCONDIDA

I thought I was.

MARIA

And you married him on such a thought.

ESCONDIDA

I was way past the quinceañera, María -- I was young getting older. You know how that is.

MARIA

And did it ever make the fear go away? No, it didn't. And older still caught up with you.

(snaps her fingers)

Jose gone, you owe nothing to anyone. Not even to Jose.

ESCONDIDA

And you not even to Elián?

MARIA

Too many things have been put under too many stones --
that's all I know.

(indicating the apron)

Put it on the floor.

ESCONDIDA gets up, spreads out an apron. MARIA points to her purse.

MARIA

Bring me that.

ESCONDIDA goes to pick up the purse but finds it incredibly heavy - so heavy, in fact, that she needs two hands to bring it over.

ESCONDIDA

What'd'you have in here?

MARIA reaches into the purse and takes out a good-sized stone.

MARIA

Some people stone to death what they hate.

MARIA lets the rock drop onto the cloth. She reaches in, takes out another one, drops it.

MARIA

This is too slow. Grab one side.

They each grab a strap, lift, turn upside down. A good piles of rocks come tumbling out. MARIA kneels down carefully. ESCONDIDA joins her.

MARIA

I have been picking them up from the street, from the grass
-- I wish I knew all their names.

MARIA starts handing rocks to ESCONDIDA, who begins to pile them in an orderly way -- into what might be a grave marker in a cemetery.

MARIA

Granito. Cuarzo. Basalto. Pedernal [flint]. Caliza
[limestone]. Pizarra [slate].

MARIA holds a stone, lets it drop.

MARIA

Jose, mea culpa.

ESCONDIDA places it. This same action happens again and again as the lights fade to black.

* * * * *

Scene 7

Three FRIENDS of Jose gather at the shrine: MAGDALENA, MARTA, and MARIO. MARIO has a trumpet that he blows from time to time. He also has a backpack. All are disconsolate.

MAGDALENA

I can't believe it.

MARTA

I still can't believe it.

MARIO
(sotto voce)

Believe it.

MAGDALENA

Jose, man -- gone -- goddamn --

MARTA

Not just gone --

(voice drops)

-- but like, gone!

MARTA makes an exclamation point in the air: sharp downward line, period jabbed by the middle finger.

MARTA

Fucked clean away.

MAGDALENA

I hope they fry that motherfucker's ass!

Makes the same exclamation point.

MARTA

To a McDonald's golden brown.

They share a hand gesture.

MAGDALENA

Asesino for motherfucking sure.

MARTA

A badge and a Glock and you think you don't have to answer --

MARIO gives a blast on the trumpet, which interrupts MARTA and MAGDALENA. Indicates the candle. They both fall silent.

MARIO

Respect, eh?

MAGDALENA

You always scare the shit way out of me with that thing!

MARIO

You two huffing up like pansy-ass gangstas. Embarrassing.

MARTA

You're right, you're right. We really shouldn't be --

MARIO

My weapon of choice.

MARTA

Don't talk about weapons!

MARIO

(showing trumpet)

I'm carrying my dead dad.

MAGDALENA

(makes sign of the cross)

You shouldn't talk like that.

MARIO

Why not?

MAGDALENA

Spooky.

MARIO

You don't think we got dead people all around us?

MAGDALENA

Just don't, all right.

MARIO

I'll bet you right now -- agh! Watch out -- behind you!
Fantasma!

MARIO blows a mambo riff as MAGDALENA jumps. MARTA laughs.

MARIO

It was horrible, man --

Chasing him.

MAGDALENA

I'm taking your throat --

MARIO

It looked like Celia Cruz going for your hair -- hey! -- 'cause
she needed a new wig -- hey, hey!

MARTA

Chica, he got you a good one.

MARIO

It was gonna be a hot mango wig with salsa verde roots.

Stops chasing him.

MAGDALENA

Don't do that shit to me! You know how spooked I get if
you --

MARIO

Oh, oh, oh -- Magda and her bad dreams --

MAGDALENA

Mario and his dead papa.

MARIO

(mock-horrified)

Do you see him?

MAGDALENA

Shove it. This whole thing has got me spooked.

(ruffles MARTA's hair)

Ain't it got you spooked, too?

MARTA gives a wan smile but doesn't answer. MARIO adds in a slow mambo riff.

MARIO

My dad caught my mom with this stuff.

MAGDALENA

Yeah, we heard.

MARIO

Sweet music.

MAGDALENA

So sweet, then, what happened to the son?

MARIO makes as if he's going to blow it again, and MAGDALENA covers her ears in mock pain.

MAGDALENA

I wouldn't want to be your mama anyway.

MARIO

Don't worry.

Silence as they return to the candle. MARTA traces on the air, as if she were tracing something written on the shrine.

MARTA

"We love you, Bemba."

MARIO

Bemba -- Bemba --

MAGDALENA

Our Bembita.

MARIO
(tracing)

"R.I.P. Jose -- "

MARTA
(reads the rest)

"You will always remain in my heart."

MARTA suddenly begins to cry, really really hard. Surprised, MAGDALENA and MARIO wait.

MARTA

"In my heart."

MAGDALENA

What, Martita?

Hesitantly looks at them both, then decides to reveal.

MARTA

I loved him.

MAGDALENA

We all loved --

MARTA

No! No!

MARIO
(gives MAGDALENA a "look")

Oh boy.

MAGDALENA

What are you talking --

MARTA

What you looking at -- I did! We had plans. We did! We had plans.

MARIO

Jose's mambo.

MARTA

What?

MARIO

Nada.

MARTA

What did you say?

A look at MAGDALENA.

MARIO

I said, Jose's mambo.

MAGDALENA

He means, not just you, buena girl.

MARTA

What are you saying --

MAGDALENA

It's okay.

MARTA

What you do mean?

MARIO

Just ask.

MARTA

He told me.

MARIO

And another fifty.

MAGDALENA

Mario, lock it.

MARTA

He told me!

MARIO makes the exclamation point, then shrugs.

MARTA
(to MAGDALENA)

Is he being true?

MAGDALENA
No, chica -- he's just blowing some bad mambo out his
culito.

MARIO
Why? Why are you doing that?

MAGDALENA
Why what?

MARTA
Why what?

MARIO
Why lie? Why be liars lying? Especially now?

MAGDALENA
No one's lying --

MARIO
You're lying now by --

MARTA
Bemba didn't --

MARIO
Bemba did --

MARTA
He loved me!

MARIO

No más ni menos, linda, que anyone else.

MARTA

No! I am gonna chose to keep my mind around --

MAGDALENA

Hundred percent with you, girl. You make your own memory.
(to MARIO)

Fucker!

MARIO stands in a forceful way that takes MARTA and MAGDALENA aback, and his glare at them keeps them silent. With a sharp gesture, he brings the trumpet to his lips and plays the first three notes of "Taps." Then he begins to recite.

MARIO

Taps -- played for my dad -- dum dum dum --
when they dropped his bulleted body
down a hole in Arlington, gave my Mom a flag
folded neat as pain, and stuck

a white cross in his heart to make it go away
that he died for some presidential
Noriegan Panamanian hard-on invasion --

soft heart, full of love and honor, made my papa
die by a lie, and leave me at three years old

low and dry on the esquina -- not for me, man, no para mi.

MARIO blows out the second three notes of "Taps."

MARIO

Not ever for me a heart like that.
If we keep Bemba alive, it's not by some jive
of tear-eyed talking and walking wounded
like we the ones whose head got broke
into a million pieces of insane pain
by a boy in blue with a rat's ass IQ --

who are you to think that you
are the center of the center of the universe?

MARIO plays the middle part of "Taps."

MARIO

By hard, man, that's how we do it,
being hard being hard being hard being hard

keeping caged in the ribs a heart like
a wild animal-fire, like one plague after
another,
like a motherfucking asteroid slamming megaton
into the face of a two-faced world --

rage, man -- anger, man --
heart of stone down to the bone --

MARIO finishes "Taps."

MARIO

So sayeth the Preacher.

A moment of silence.

MARIO

Fuck.

MARIO blows out the candle. Blackout.

* * * * *

Scene 8

PAUL at a desk, writing, a newspaper beside him. A second chair at the desk. SERAFINA enters. She is not in uniform. PAUL looks at her, then goes back to his writing. SERAFINA waits. PAUL writes.

PAUL

(without looking up)

What?

SERAFINA

What do you think?

PAUL

I can't read minds.

SERAFINA

I'm worried about Mama.

PAUL continues to write.

SERAFINA

I think you should be worried about Mama.

PAUL

Mama is always someone to worry about.

SERAFINA

She speaks to nobody.

PAUL

She must talk to someone.

SERAFINA

Nobody. Just -- sits. Like a stone.

PAUL

(abstracted)

Hmmm...

SERAFINA

Could you listen for a second?

PAUL stops writing but does not face SERAFINA.

SERAFINA

I've tried to, you know, move her -- Papa, too -- get her to cook again, visit her club, do that exercising she does in the water, but -- like a stone, Paul.

PAUL

She is in grief. What would you expect?

PAUL goes back to writing.

PAUL

She is in grief for the death of her grandson who was also her son --

SERAFINA

Being like a stone is not grieving --

PAUL

Different people have different ways -- now, by all means, go ahead and worry, but --

SERAFINA

Paul.

The hard tone of her voice makes PAUL stop writing again.

SERAFINA

You can't brush her off with "people." Paul -- Paul! -- when I say "stone," I mean "stone." She. Doesn't. Talk. Like life lobbed her into some lake and she just drops and drops --

PAUL

Please -- I am trying to finish.

SERAFINA

I obviously came to the wrong person at the wrong place at the wrong time.

The silence of a stone between them.

PAUL

Of course I'm worried.

SERAFINA

Then you should show it around more.

PAUL

I am trying to --

SERAFINA

You should show yourself more.

PAUL

You don't realize --

SERAFINA

More directly --

PAUL

Of course you don't --

SERAFINA

-- you know, go and touch her, let her know, give her un
beso, un abrazo, like she matters --

PAUL

You have no idea, do you? Do you? This --
(looking for word)

-- thing --

SERAFINA

"Thing" --

PAUL

-- this --

SERAFINA

"Thing" -- great.

PAUL

Don't mock me!

PAUL's sudden vehemence stops SERAFINA.

PAUL

Don't mock me!

SERAFINA

Consider yourself unmocked, bro.

PAUL

For a heartbeat can you just stop with the backbiting, with
the cop -- Christ!

PAUL holds out his wrists, as if to be handcuffed.

PAUL

You want to, for trying to do what I'm trying to do? Go ahead -- go ahead! Because it's clear you don't see -- you can't see --

SERAFINA

All this cop sees is you acting like a suspect -- yeah -- like the perp on the perp walk -- "cop" enough for you? -- who treats his grandmother like she's a bargain matinee -- what are you --

PAUL moves toward SERAFINA.

PAUL

You have been at me --

SERAFINA

All right --

PAUL

-- ever since we decided --

SERAFINA

All right -- just back off.

PAUL

-- that I would speak for --

SERAFINA

Some air between us, all right?

PAUL gathers himself. He takes out the cigarette pack, slaps against his palm.

PAUL

(sardonic laugh)

"Old days," eh?

SERAFINA

No.

PAUL

Why can't we go back to Mama yelling "Basta!", arms crossed, time out --

SERAFINA

Because that was when I liked you.

PAUL

"Why can't they just get along?"

SERAFINA

She always liked praying for impossible things.

PAUL is collected. He puts away the cigarettes, taps his eye patch.

PAUL

I lose it because some cop with promotion on his mind does a one-man band on stopping "juvenile delinquency," and my sister, so caring, goes off to the police academy -- that's who we turned out to be.

PAUL straightens his clothing.

PAUL

This "thing" -- you want a word, Fina? Try on "cause." Our cause -- because it is now a cause --

PAUL hands SERAFINA the newspaper. SERAFINA reads and is visibly shocked.

PAUL

You didn't know.

SERAFINA

Nothing came to the station. For murder?

PAUL

For murder, sayeth the prosecutor's office.

SERAFINA

Oh God. Bemba. This is not good.

PAUL quotes from memory.

PAUL

"The autopsy revealed -- "

SERAFINA

Paul --

PAUL

(ignoring her)

" -- that he had had his head banged on the pavement, and the force was such that it caused -- "

SERAFINA

All right.

PAUL

(ignoring her)

" -- multiple skull fractures. The autopsy -- "

SERAFINA

All right!

SERAFINA slams the newspaper on the table. PAUL faces her.

PAUL

" -- in conjunction with with the statements we received from eyewitnesses, determined the cause for the murder charge."

PAUL looks at SERAFINA, who does not meet his gaze. He turns back to writing.

PAUL

The media -- all kinds, from all over -- I mean all over --

SERAFINA

Paul --

PAUL

-- everybody wants a piece of this cause --

SERAFINA

-- this will kill us --

PAUL

-- it's just growing --

SERAFINA

-- did you hear me --

PAUL

-- and growing --

SERAFINA

-- it will kill us --

PAUL

-- and growing.

SERAFINA

So does cancer.

PAUL

No, Fina, of the long sad face, this is growing like a cause should grow. Jose's cause, our brother's cause.

SERAFINA

Pablo's cause.

PAUL

I can hear the middle finger, but --

SERAFINA

You're just doing it for the good of --

PAUL

-- but we all agreed that I --

But SERAFINA holds up her hand: "Enough."

PAUL

(slight mock)

Ah, there's the basta!

SERAFINA toys with the paper. PAUL finishes writing.

PAUL

You afraid for your "fellow officer"?

SERAFINA

You know he's not mine -- different city, different badge --

PAUL

Isn't all blue true blue to each other under the skin? Huh?

No response.

PAUL

That's what I've been told: pig first --

SERAFINA

And you look like this when you think you look like a winner?

PAUL

Uh-oh --

SERAFINA

Is that the look of the "cause"?

PAUL

So read me my rights.

SERAFINA

I gotta ask because I have never seen that look on you. Ever. "Winner" and "Paul" in the same sentence? But hand you a dead brother, and, hombre, you the big pachuco on the esquina --

PAUL

Stop the fucking Spanglish --

SERAFINA

-- the press releases start puking right out --

PAUL

And that's all you want us to get out of this -- a dead brother? And some run-of-the-mill justice, maybe, from your friends at the courthouse? Nothing else?

SERAFINA

I will tell you what I want: Mama back. And Papa, too -- he doesn't know what to do. He's lost, like a blind donkey.

PAUL

Just go serve and protect -- I'll take care of my grandparents in my own way.

SERAFINA

Our grandparents. And they need help.

PAUL

So go serve and protect.

RAOUL enters. SERAFINA immediately stiffens.

RAOUL

They're here, Paul.

SERAFINA gives PAUL a puzzled look.

PAUL

Every spokesperson needs an assistant.

RAOUL

You hear he got murder?

SERAFINA

(to PAUL)

You picked Raoul?

RAOUL

I never did anything.

PAUL

We've made our peace with him.

RAOUL

Did you hear? The newspaper.

SERAFINA

(barely able to speak)

Yes -- I heard. I read.

RAOUL

The Angel will get justice.

PAUL

Yes he will, uncle. By any means necessary.

SERAFINA

Who's here?

PAUL

The cast and crew of the first of many channels.

PAUL holds up the piece of paper.

PAUL

A crude beginning -- but it will get better.

PAUL leaves.

RAOUL

Good news, huh?

SERAFINA

Tio, you better catch up with him -- he's moving fast.

RAOUL leaves.

SERAFINA

Mama, Mama, Mama.

SERAFINA carefully crumples the newspaper into as small a sphere as she can manage. Blackout.

* * * * *

Scene 9

The shrine. MARIO with his trumpet, MARTA, and MAGDALENA. The three sing a song in low voices -- director's choice of song.

MARIA comes, stares. The singing trails off. They all stand.

MAGDALENA

Señora Aral?

MARTA
(sotto voce)

Man, look at --

MAGDALENA

Señora?

From her pocket, MARIA takes a small knife.

MARTA

Oh God! Mario --

Without hesitation, MARIA cuts her fingertip.

MARTA

Mario!

MAGDALENA

Señora!

MARIA ignores them. Using the blood she begins to write on the shrine, pressing her finger to get more as she uses it.

MARTA

Mario, stop her --

MARIO

Sshh!

MARIA struggles to write: not enough blood. SERAFINA enters, in uniform, sizes up the situation, goes to MARIA and gently tries to pull her away.

MARIA resists.

SERAFINA is reluctant to try harder but continues to pull her away.

MARIO comes over and gently puts his hand on MARIA's elbow. MARIA looks at him, then releases herself. SERAFINA moves MARIA away.

Not much is written on the wall.

SERAFINA

Nona -- Nona -- vamos, abuela -- vamonos ya. You shouldn't be out here -- We've got to get you home -- come on, come on -- we'll make you safe --

MARTA comes over, presses on the tip of MARIA's finger to stop the bleeding. MAGDALENA takes MARIA's other arm.

MARTA

She just showed up, like, you know, a ghost --

MAGDALENA

Like, right out of the blue -- is she okay?

SERAFINA

She's fine --

MARIO goes into his backpack and pulls out a First Aid kit, brings over a band-aid.

MAGDALENA

You carry a First Aid thing?

MARIO unpeels two band-aids and gently puts one over the tip of MARIA's finger and the other around the finger to hold the first. Throughout this, MARIA does not resist.

MARIO

"Be prepared."

MARTA

What's that?

MARIO

Boy Scouts.

MAGDALENA

You?

MARIO

Believe it or not.

MAGDALENA

You and merit badges?

MARIO

(to MAGDALENA)

Yeah.

(to MARIA)

¿Te aprieta mucho?

MARIA directly looks at MARIO, then folds her hands together.

MARIO

I guess I did it okay.

MARTA

She's okay, huh?

MAGDALENA

For now, I guess.

SERAFINA

Thanks.

MARIO

El gusto es mio.

SERAFINA

(to MARIA)

Tenemos que irnos, 'lita.

(to them)

I have to get her home.

MARTA

We can go with you --

SERAFINA

No, it's fine --

MAGDALENA

Really, we like her -- we can --

SERAFINA

It's not that far.

They start to move away.

MARIO

Serafina --

Given the moment, the use of the name sounds oddly intimate -- they both notice this. And, hearing the name, MARIA stops, turns, looks directly at MARIO.

SERAFINA

Yes?

MARIO

I'm sorry, but I have to ask --

SERAFINA

It's okay --

MARIO

-- what was she going to write? Tu abuela? What did she have to --

SERAFINA

I don't know.

MARIO

Can I ask her?

MAGDALENA

Mario --

SERAFINA

I don't know what she was going to write.

MARIO

Can I --

MARTA
(loud whisper)

Mario!

SERAFINA

It's okay. It's okay. Nona?

MARIA looks at MARIO, who holds her gaze.

SERAFINA

I guess it's okay.

MARIO

Perdón, Señora -- ¿qué iba a escribir en la pared?

MARIA continues to look at him, unanswering.

SERAFINA

Maybe I should really take her --

Without changing expression or posture, MARIA clearly and defiantly speaks out several lines.

MARIA

¡Que no quiero verla! / dile a la luna que venga / que no
quiero ver la sangre / de Ignacio sobre la arena --

MARIA simply stops, stares. MARIO holds up his hands.

MARIO

Señora, not enough blood in these ten to write all of that.

SERAFINA

It goes on a lot longer.

MARIO

Yeah.

SERAFINA

A lot.

MARIO

(to MARIA)

Then I would have to add my toes.

(to SERAFINA)

Who?

SERAFINA

(looking at MARIA)

Mama -- mama --

MARIO

It's okay --

SERAFINA

A man named Lorca -- Federico García Lorca. Spanish.
She knows him full out from memory. Look --

MARIA

(exploding)

¡Amor, enemigo mío / muerde tu raíz amarga!

MARIO

(admiringly)

Bite the bitter root?

MAGDALENA

I don't get it.

MARTA

I sorta --

MAGDALENA

And I don't get who this Ignacio is and why his blood is on
the sand and why my enemy has to bite a bitter root --

MARIO

Because it's poetry, chica.

MAGDALENA

Like you know.

SERAFINA

(to MAGDALENA)

Don't worry, we didn't get it either --

MAGDALENA

No way!

SERAFINA

-- but she gave it to us with the breakfast milk anyway.

MARIO

That is -- man, that is just so --

SERAFINA

I really gotta --

MAGDALENA
(to MARIO)

Let her go!

MARIO
(very reluctant)

Right, right -- sorry --

MAGDALENA
(to SERAFINA)

We'll take her home!

MARTA

Really! It's just up the stairs there. We know where you guys live. Come on.

SERAFINA hesitates, then gives in. MARTA and MAGDALENA shepherd MARIA. SERAFINA tracks them.

MARTA

Ven con nosotras, abuelita --

MAGDALENA

Such beautiful poetry, señora --

MARTA

Careful, señora, cuídese --

MAGDALENA

To tell the moon to come -- I would never be able to recite --

They exit.

SERAFINA

It's really sweet of them --

MARIO

They really liked Jose.

SERAFINA

Who didn't?

The conversation drops for a moment.

SERAFINA

You've been out here a long time.

MARIO

Have to do the right things right.

SERAFINA

Your mother and aunt --

MARIO

They know where I am -- they always know, even if I don't tell them -- sixth-sense-thing, you know -- "Mario radar" --

SERAFINA

Yeah -- Mama had one, too. She never lost it, old as she is -- but like none of what she stuffed away up here backed her up when Jose -- things aren't true for her anymore, I think -- I don't know --

MARIO

I can understand it's hard to understand --

SERAFINA

She never gives up, one way or another, better or worse, but, now -- Look, I've got to go -- and then back to work -- be careful --

MARIO

You know this Lorca.

SERAFINA

Gotta go, really.

MARIO

Okay, Fina, okay, can understand --

SERAFINA realizes she may have been rude.

SERAFINA

Yes, I know "this Lorca" -- a little --

MARIO

Look, if you gotta go --

SERAFINA

No, no -- I'm sure she's -- in good hands --

MARIO

With those two, just like insurance.

SERAFINA, seemingly almost against her will, chuckles.

MARIO

What?

Laughs a bit more, then controls herself.

SERAFINA

I don't know, maybe it's just the -- It's just that -- I have not heard -- that -- come out of her mouth in a long time.

MARIO

It's amazing.

SERAFINA

Yeah, it is -- she is --

MARIO

Lorca, Lorca --

MARIO takes a pen from his pocket. SERAFINA notices that he has things written all over his hands. MARIO writes the name on the third finger of his left hand.

MARIO

-- gotta remember him --

SERAFINA

Mario, I have paper --

MARIO

Nope, fine -- remember better this way --

MARIO shows her his hands.

MARIO

My Palm Pilot.

SERAFINA

Very "handy" -- sorry --

MARIO

Bad jokes are still good jokes --

SERAFINA

Sure you'll remember?

MARIO

Third finger over, left hand.

SERAFINA

At least until your next shower. Look, the band-aids --

MARIO

Siempre listo.

SERAFINA

And I gotta say that I don't know many people your age that would be hauling First Aid in their back-pack.

MARIO

"My age"?

SERAFINA reaches for her wallet.

SERAFINA

(not hearing him)

Can I pay you back for --

MARIO

How old do you think I am?

SERAFINA

What?

MARIO

How old do you make me, Fina?

SERAFINA

Mario, all I meant was --

MARIO

What you meant -- I know what you meant, but I just wrote Lorca on my hand and how many --

SERAFINA

Look, I'm gonna go --

MARIO

-- how many cholos you deal with each day would do that?

SERAFINA

You're tired --

MARIO

I am not tired!

SERAFINA

Well, you're something --

MARIO

Yeah, I'm something --

SERAFINA

-- and I'm way behind getting back to --

MARIO

I'm not my age, is what I am.

SERAFINA

I'm gonna go --

SERAFINA turns to exit.

MARIO

Marta, big eyes, big sloppy heart, for Jose -- that's her age.
Magda, bite the chili pepper, don't trust any sugar -- that's
her age. Serafina --

SERAFINA stops, waits.

MARIO

La Fina --

SERAFINA

That's enough.

(lighten it a little)

El fin.

MARIO

No.

SERAFINA

You are tired, and you should go home.

MARIO

You're like the juggler -- keeping it all in the air -- one foot
with the friends, one foot with the others --

MARIO mimes juggling --

MARIO

-- just up, and up, and around, and around, and then --

-- until one of the "balls" drops to the ground, which becomes the candle.
Then he stops -- and realizes he may have gone too far.

MARIO

And then I find myself here --

MARIO pumps his hand protest-like into the air.

MARIO

(slight self-mock)

-- justicia! justicia! -- and you find yourself having to deal
with, you know --

A couple more half-hearted pumps.

MARIO

-- in your face, and who knows what and how and why --
and it all gets hard and --

SERAFINA

If this is how you treat your friends, then you probably don't
have a lot of friends at your age.

MARIO

(half-smile)

Magda and Marta.

SERAFINA

Younger, not your own.

(relenting)

You always could be one of those little flies that buzz up in
your ear, get you slapping, you know --

MARIO

Drive you nuts.

SERAFINA

Mario and his trumpet, in your ear -- you still play?

MARIO

I still play.

SERAFINA

That's good. That's good for any age. Now, I'm really
gonna go.

MARIO

Can I trade you something?

MARIO picks up his trumpet and plays a few bars of a mambo tune -- perhaps
something from Tito Puente or Perez 'Prez' Prado. He gets SERAFINA to
laugh, which makes MARIO smile.

MARIO

Now you play.

SERAFINA

I can't --

MARIO

Lorca -- play Lorca. Just like she did.

SERAFINA

Mario --

But SERAFINA sees that MARIO is not going to relent.

SERAFINA

It's been so long --

MARIO

You said you knew it. You still got to know it. Just like she did. Go on, Fina. Jose's sister.

At this moment, MARTA and MAGDALENA come on, see MARIO and SERAFINA, who do not see them.

SERAFINA

¡Que no quiero verla! --

MARIO takes up the trumpet, blows several notes to accompany.

SERAFINA

-- dile a la luna que venga / que no quiero ver la sangre / de Jose sobre la arena --

They both respond to SERAFINA's slip of the tongue at the same time.

MARIO

You said "Jose."

SERAFINA

I meant "Ignacio" -- I meant "Ignacio."

MARIO

Doesn't matter.

SERAFINA

Enough --

MARTA

Fina?

SERAFINA and MARIO look at them, surprised, rattled.

MARTA

Fina?

SERAFINA

Yes, Marta.

MAGDALENA

She's asleep. Tu abuelo is sitting with her.

SERAFINA

Fine. Thanks.

MARTA

No problem, really.

MARIO

Thanks.

SERAFINA

I can't do it again.

MARIO grabs the third finger of his left hand, as if to say, "I can read him." SERAFINA looks around, then exits into the next scene. MARTA and MAGDALENA walk over to MARIO, a question on their faces.

MARIO

I'm tired.

MAGDALENA

Yeah, so?

MARIO

I'm going home.

MAGDALENA

Mario!

MARIO

She's got a job to do.

Lights out, candle still burns.

* * * * *

Scene 10

Without transition, lights up on another part of the stage: PAUL, RAOUL, unseen REPORTERS, SERAFINA as "security."

PAUL

Thank you for coming. Thank you. Today, injustice has been met with justice, con justicia!

PAUL pumps his fist into the air. MARIO picks up the candle. A strained look on PAUL's face, then one more pump. MARIO blows the candle out. Lights to black.

INTERMISSION

Scene 11

ELIÁN and the PRIEST -- confessional. Several beats of silence.

PRIEST

Yes?

ELIÁN says nothing.

PRIEST

I hear breathing.

ELIÁN says nothing.

PRIEST

I still hear breathing.

ELIÁN raps his knuckles hard against the chair.

ELIÁN

That's the sound of my head, Father.

PRIEST

Sounds hard.

ELIÁN

That's how hard it's gotten because I find myself coming here.

PRIEST

Or it could be someone knocking on a door wanting to come inside.

ELIÁN

Believe me, Father, I need nothing from inside here.

PRIEST

Then why are you here and knocking?

ELIÁN does not respond.

PRIEST

At least I can still hear you breathing. Do you really want to believe your head is that hard, Elián? Or that you are that hard? Or as durable as my chair?

ELIÁN

I think I'm that flammable. I think I am like underbrush in the sugar cane --

PRIEST steps out of the confessional, which surprises ELIÁN.

PRIEST

Come on -- I can't have people bursting into flame in my confessional. Besides, I'm too tired today for metaphor. Come on.

ELIÁN stands.

ELIÁN

Where?

PRIEST

Come on -- I need a break -- come on.

They move into a new light, sit in the chapel.

ELIÁN

I've never been in here.

PRIEST

Because you've never really been in this church at all.

ELIÁN

I've stepped inside.

PRIEST

And right back out after Maria takes her seat.

ELIÁN

I have no use for --

PRIEST

Had no use -- except now, because you're here. Right?

ELIÁN

Except now, yes. It's nice here.

PRIEST

It's not a place for flammable.

PRIEST raps his knuckles on the pew.

PRIEST

Nice to have you here.

PRIEST waits.

ELIÁN

You're waiting for me to say something.

PRIEST

You came to my house, Elián --

More silence hangs between them.

ELIÁN

I am a man without an island, Father.

PRIEST

I was hoping you'd say "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned"
--

ELIÁN

I wouldn't confess to you -- or to any man --

PRIEST

It's not men we need to confess to -- but that's all right.
Another time. You said "island."

ELIÁN

Without an island.

ELIÁN gets up from the pew.

ELIÁN

Without my Cuba.

As improbable as it seems, ELIÁN begins to dance -- stiff, shuffling, but with
memories of a younger body.

PRIEST

What are you doing?

ELIÁN

I am riding.

PRIEST

Elián --

ELIÁN

I am riding -- I am riding into Havana con Fidel and Che
and Raúl --

PRIEST

Your Cuba.

ELIÁN

You didn't know that about me, did you?

PRIEST

Everyone knows that about you.

ELIÁN

But they don't really know.

PRIEST

Of course not -- how could they? Dance away. You must have been quite the dancer.

ELIÁN stops and points a finger.

ELIÁN

And you -- you would have been la cura que no tiene una cura --

PRIEST points back at him.

PRIEST

And you would be wrong. This cura does have a cure -- if the dancing revolucinario would humble himself a little to try it.

ELIÁN gives him a dismissive gesture, begins dancing again. PRIEST matches his gesture.

ELIÁN

Riding in with the Trinity -- young, winners -- we had done something right!

ELIÁN, now in the grip of memory, dances -- but his breathing is the labored breathing of an old man.

ELIÁN

The smell of the diesel like jasmine, our own sweat like incense -- nothing was like it was before. Nothing! The people lifting us, their voices -- we wanted to do away with the priests -- break the Church -- it gave nothing to the people --

ELIÁN stops dancing to catch his breath. PRIEST half-rises, watches. ELIÁN, for a moment, looks completely lost, catches his breath.

PRIEST

And Maria, of course.

ELIÁN

What?

PRIEST

Maria.

ELIÁN

Yes -- of course -- of course -- Maria --

PRIEST

Come sit down, Elián.

ELIÁN at first refuses, breathing deeply. Then he sits.

ELIÁN

Such fire in her eyes then.

PRIEST

I've seen the picture. Of the two of you. She was quite beautiful -- still is.

ELIÁN

She was the true one -- the believer -- she was -- I only come here, you know, to see you because Maria comes -- I have no use for you --

PRIEST

Elián -- I'm an old bone you like to chew. And you I like -- even if you say you don't like me liking you --

ELIÁN

She has no use for you anymore.

PRIEST lets the words hang in the air.

ELIÁN

She's can't come here anymore.

PRIEST

Has something happened --

ELIÁN

She can't --

PRIEST

Elián, tell me --

ELIÁN

Loca -- mi esposa preciosa está loca --

PRIEST

She is not crazy --

ELIÁN

Then explain it to me!

PRIEST

Explain what?

ELIÁN

Explain why she has gone away from me --

ELIÁN lets out a howl that shakes his frail frame. PRIEST tries to gentle ELIÁN.

ELIÁN

We came in, and it was all good -- there was hope -- you should have seen us -- skinny, stinking, sore, sick -- stinking? God, we smelled all the way to the clouds! -- but happy -- happy! -- she sits like in a tomb, like a rock, like a stone angel! -- Fidel! Fidel! Of course, yes, but Che -- Che -- he was -- my man! -- he was -- in a room she sits, saying nothing, giving me nothing! -- Che, so beautiful, he was a real Christ -- I should never have left -- Che -- she -- has gone away -- and I am without an island --

ELIÁN faces the PRIEST.

ELIÁN

Give me absolution.

PRIEST

I can't give you absolution, you haven't confessed anything --

ELIÁN

I need to do that?

PRIEST

I know you haven't forgotten all the rules.

ELIÁN

All right, then -- I confess --

PRIEST

To what?

ELIÁN

I have killed my wife.

PRIEST

You have not.

ELIÁN

I have killed my wife.

PRIEST

You have not.

ELIÁN

Yes I have.

PRIEST

You have not.

ELIÁN

I have.

PRIEST

I can't imagine you killing anything.

ELIÁN

Then you have a failure of imagination.

Their eyes meet.

PRIEST

You didn't.

ELIÁN

You think the only way I could mean it is if I took a knife or took these hands -- you know so little about anything real.

PRIEST

You don't know anything about what I know, real or otherwise.

ELIÁN

Do you want to hear?

PRIEST

I want to hear because you want to tell me.

ELIÁN

That much is real.

ELIÁN fingers PRIEST's stole.

ELIÁN

Do what you have to do.

PRIEST takes his stole, kisses it, and replaces it around his neck.

PRIEST

That what you want? The formality?

ELIÁN

I hate to say it --

PRIEST

Consider it said. All right.

ELIÁN

Here is how this murder happened. I brought her here, gave her children that gave her grandchildren -- and all that has only given back to her a dead -- in a grave now --

PRIEST

That's not killing Maria --

ELIÁN

She didn't want to leave Cuba -- I did.

PRIEST

You?

ELIÁN

(pointing to self)

Revolucionario? Not me. Not really. I was the dancer -- remember? She -- she was the real thing. I lost faith in Fidel -- Raúl -- Che -- Che! She never did. So, a choice -- I forced a choice --

PRIEST

And she chose you --

ELIÁN

And that made it possible for her to die while she still breathes and I should be punished for leaving my island -- it is not her fault --

PRIEST

It is no one's fault, Elián, except for the man whom the law has named.

ELIÁN

This is the sermon.

PRIEST

And have to hear it. We may feel punished by our suffering over Jose's death, but none of us is guilty of anything except sadness and anger.

ELIÁN

(gently)

You are so foolish, cura.

PRIEST

I don't know if that's the second or third time you've called me that.

ELIÁN

Forgive me -- I absolve you! -- but you think like numbers -- add one, add two, get three -- a little list of sins -- venial, mortal -- check them off and then you swipe, swipe, swipe with penance, and I am clean.

PRIEST

Oh good -- now I'm not the only one being foolish.

ELIÁN

Simply being alive -- that is the sin, not your little list -- living
is el pecado original, el pecado único --

PRIEST

And you think it can't be washed -- that you can't be --

ELIÁN

You could swipe me forever and --

PRIEST

And that -- that is just vanity talking -- just self-pity --

PRIEST stands up, which surprises ELIÁN, and in a kind of white-bread way
begins to dance the way ELIÁN had danced. He is not very good.

ELIÁN

You're embarrassing me.

PRIEST

How do you get the hips to do --

ELIÁN

Stop it --

PRIEST

It's not in these Irish Catholic bones --

ELIÁN

Stop it.

PRIEST

There we go -- okay! Not until you stop it.

ELIÁN

Stop what?

PRIEST

That stupid dance of self-pity you're doing.

ELIÁN sets himself stubbornly. PRIEST keeps dancing.

PRIEST

I can keep this up longer than you -- I'm in better shape --

But suddenly PRIEST stops, clearly not in better shape.

PRIEST

All right, so maybe I'm not. But that doesn't change the subject.

PRIEST sits.

PRIEST

The only sin, I think, that's really a sin -- not just some ordinary daily human fuck-up -- pardon the Anglo-Saxon -- is pride. Let's think about that together for a moment. Can that hard head think?

ELIÁN

I'm thinking.

PRIEST

Good. Still thinking?

ELIÁN

Yes.

PRIEST

Even better. Because if you love Maria --

ELIÁN

You're a lousy dancer.

PRIEST

But I knock 'em out with my homily.

ELIÁN

I do --

PRIEST

And you came to me because of that --

ELIÁN

For her --

PRIEST

Yes -- so you're asking me --

ELIÁN

Swipe, swipe with some penance -- even if I don't believe it --

PRIEST

Belief isn't necessary --

ELIÁN

It will make a -- way -- back to her -- to get back to my island --

PRIEST

That -- that -- yes -- shows your head isn't that hard after all. Good thinking. Te absolvo, Elián.

ELIÁN raises his fist into the air.

ELIÁN

(sardonically but softly)

Justicia, eh?

Lights cross-fade to shrine. PRIEST exits.

* * * * *

Scene 12

MARTA and MAGDALENA at the shrine. ELIÁN appears.

MARTA

Look --

MAGDALENA

I see --

MARTA

He's never been here --

ELIÁN walks toward them, toward the shrine.

MARTA

Señor?

ELIÁN stands in front of the shrine.

ELIÁN

Help me.

ELIÁN holds out his hands, and MARTA and MAGDALENA support him as he kneels. Then they kneel. ELIÁN fingers the stones, selects two small pebbles.

ELIÁN

The stones.

MARTA

People bring 'em.

ELIÁN

Why?

MAGDALENA

I don't know. They just do.

MARTA

They put them down, they pray a little, they leave.

MAGADLENA

(pointing to stones)

They stay.

ELIÁN gestures to them again, and they help him sit on the ground. ELIÁN takes off one shoe, puts the pebble in it, puts it back on. He takes off the second shoe, puts the pebble in it, puts it back on.

Without asking them for help, ELIÁN slowly rises to a standing position. They rise with him. ELIÁN settles his feet into his shoes until he can feel the pebble in each one.

ELIÁN

Give me your hands.

They do. ELIÁN squeezes their hands.

ELIÁN
(mostly to himself)
Martha and Magdalene outside the tomb.

ELIÁN lets go of their hands, turns, and leaves. He feels the pebble in each shoe as he exits.

MARTA
I don't know --

MAGDALENA
I don't know, either --

MARTA
I mean, I don't know, like, a lot --

MAGDALENA
I don't know a lot either --

MARTA turns to the shrine, kneels, gets a pebble, and slips it into her shoe.

MAGDALENA
You're crazy --

MARTA stands, wiggles her foot around, feels the pebble, looks at MAGDALENA.

MARTA
I don't think so.

MAGDALENA
If everyone around you's crazy, how could you know?

MARTA
You're not crazy.

MAGDALENA
I will if I watch you --

MARTA takes a step. Then another step. Then one more. Then she sits and takes out the pebble, holds it up.

MAGDALENA

You got the point?

MARTA

I got the point.

MAGDALENA

What was the point?

MARTA

I think it's what old men do. Have to do.

MAGDALENA

But not us.

MARTA

Not us.

MAGDALENA

Good.

MARTA puts the pebble back. Lights out.

* * * * *

Scene 13

Lights up on PAUL at a press conference, with RAOUL. Next to him: the MAYOR. SERAFINA is in the background, providing "security." MARTA and MAGDALENA join SERAFINA.

PAUL

Thank you all for coming. And we appreciate you coming by to visit the Shrine, Mayor.

MAYOR gives an awkward embrace to PAUL.

MAYOR

At a time like this, Paul, with such a tragedy in our midst, we all have to pitch in to make sure the community is healed.

PAUL reaches back, and RAOUL smoothly hands him a thick document.

PAUL

Healed, Mayor, is exactly right --

PAUL hands MAYOR the document.

PAUL

-- and this is a petition, signed by the good people who you're the mayor of, calling for a citizen review board for the police department. Three thousand signatures, Mayor -- the voices of three thousand people. What do you have to say to them?

MAYOR, blindsided by the tactic, stands in the glare holding the signatures.

MAYOR

I will certainly -- take these into account --

PAUL

We don't have a board like this now, do we?

MAYOR

No.

PAUL

No one who overlooks the police except the police?

MAYOR

And myself, and the council.

PAUL

But the people -- where is the people's voice? Don't you think they should have one?

MAYOR

I will certainly take it under advisement, Paul.

PAUL

Thank you, Mayor. We would all appreciate you doing that. But we hope it goes farther than "advisement" because we want the memory of Jose to live on in a way that makes things better for everybody.

MAYOR

And so do we all.

They embrace awkwardly again.

PAUL

Thanks. A hand for the Mayor.

PAUL applauds politely. The glaring lights go out.

MAYOR
(barely civil)

Thank you, Paul --

(holds up document)

I won't forget this.

PAUL

And neither will my family, Mayor.

MAYOR

My best to your family.

PAUL

We can expect no less from a good man like you.

MAYOR exits. SERAFINA comes up to PAUL.

PAUL
(to the unseen reporters)

Thanks for coming, everyone. The governor said she would be by later today -- so we'll be back!

The media disperse.

SERAFINA

You just pissed off the Mayor.

RAOUL walks up to "bodyguard" PAUL.

SERAFINA

You just --

PAUL

He won't be mayor for long.

SERAFINA gives him a "look."

SERAFINA

Plans?

PAUL

(musing)

Life is plans, Fina. There are plans -- there are always plans.

SERAFINA

(to RAOUL)

Is he, uncle? Is he planning?

RAOUL

Where he goes, I go.

PAUL

The city could use somebody who knows --

SERAFINA

I'm going back, Paul -- I'm on the clock here. I can't engage in what you're talking about when I'm on the job. Department rules about police officers being used for --

PAUL

Small eyes, Fina, about the things of the world. There is work that needs to be done --

SERAFINA

-- and you're called to do it --

RAOUL

Nobody's looking out for --

SERAFINA

Uncle, him I talk to -- you don't need to talk to me -- you got that bloody shirt on underneath your suitcoat?

RAOUL

You've got no respect.

SERAFINA

I respect what's worth respect.

(to PAUL)

You should make "plans" to go see them -- fit them into your "plans."

PAUL

Is everything all right?

SERAFINA

As well as can be expected. If you have low expectations. But then again, I got small eyes, according to some authorities.

Glare of a video camera light comes on.

PAUL

(to unseen videographer)

Do I what? Of course, sure, just let me --

RAOUL smoothly hands him their standard press release.

PAUL

Where are you from? Japan? We got the whole world in our hands, eh? What would you like? The upcoming trial? What don't we have to say about that?

Lights to black.

* * * * *

Scene 14

Bathroom. MARIA prays to the Eggun, The Dead. On the floor, a small glass of rum, a plate of food. She holds the opa ikú, a stick with nine differently color ribbons and bells, which she will periodically pound on the floor during her prayer to call forth the Eggun. She is wearing a necklace of cowrie shells. MARIA seems at peace as she prays.

To the side, as if outside the bathroom, but with the bathroom door open stand ELIÁN, MARTA, and MAGDALENA. They listen to and watch MARIA praying.

MARIA

"Eluwekon ashé osain cherere adashé kokoni jikoji omó la dufetini cherebinu oluosó bogwó ayalu kosó agó -- "

MARTA

(sotto voce)

What is she saying?

ELIÁN ignores her, glares through what would be the bathroom door.

MARIA

"Ibaye baye tonu bowo oku be lese olodumare mo yuba ibaye bafayaye kosi iku kosi aron kosi -- "

MARTA

Señor, what's she doing --

MARIA

" -- ina dosi eye kosi faya kosi ofo ariku baba wa."

Silence. Then MARIA starts again and continues repeating the words under the following lines.

MARIA

"Eluwekon ashé osain cherere adashé kokoni jikoji omó la dufetini cherebinu oluosó bogwó ayalu kosó agó. Ibaye baye tonu bowo oku be lese olodumare mo yuba ibaye bafayaye kosi iku kosi aron kosi ina dosi eye kosi faya kosi ofo ariku baba wa."

MAGDALENA

Let's go.

MARTA

No! She may need help.

MAGDALENA

Let's tell Fina -- come on --

MARTA

No, you come on --

ELIÁN
(to MARIA)

Stop this!

MARIA pauses, and the silence settles heavily. Then MARIA begins where she stopped.

ELIÁN

Stop this! Now!

MARIA pauses, and the silence settles heavily. Then MARIA begins where she stopped.

MARTA
(to ELIÁN)

Do you want us to go tell somebody --

ELIÁN

She's been like this for days.

MAGDALENA

We can go --

MARTA

What is she saying?

MAGDALENA

Cállate! Respect! Look, we can go get --

But MARTA will not be put off.

MARTA

What is she saying, señor?

ELIÁN

She's calling the Eggun --

MARTA

The what?

ELIÁN

The dead. Maria!

MAGDALENA

I'm going to go -- this is getting way --

MARTA

(to MAGDALENA)

Stop it!

ELIÁN

She's praying to the Eggun --

MAGDALENA

(to MARTA)

Well, it is!

MARTA

Sssh!

ELIÁN

-- because she thinks -- that Jose will come back -- will come back to her. Give her peace. The Eggun do that sometime.

MARTA

You believe this?

ELIÁN

We tried to kill Santeria after the revolution.

MAGDALENA

What revolution?

ELIÁN

(not hearing her)

Might as well have tried to eat our own head.

MAGDALENA

What's Santería?

ELIÁN

Maria!

(no response)

No, I don't believe this trash. She should be out there, she has responsibilities -- Maria!

No response.

MARTA

But what if it makes her happy?

ELIÁN turns to stare at her. MARIA's voice underscores.

MAGDALENA

Now you done it.

MARTA
(to MAGDALENA)

Ssh!

(to ELIÁN)

Señor, all I'm saying is --

ELIÁN

You call that happy?

MARTA

I pray to Santa Marta, my namesake, and it makes me happy.

ELIÁN

Because you're a child. That happens to a child.

MARTA

Not to her?

MARTA walks into the bathroom, moves a strand of MARIA's hair back into place.

MARTA

Why not to her?

MARIA does not even notice her.

ELIÁN
(grudgingly)

She's not even doing it properly. She's got it all wrong.

MAGDALENA

I thought you said it was trash.

ELIÁN ignores her, walks to the bathroom doorway and watches. MARIA stops praying, puts down the stick. She takes a small paring knife and without hesitation cuts into her fingertip, then holds one of the cowrie shells up to the blood, as if feeding it.

MAGDALENA

Marta!

ELIÁN speaks, flat-voiced.

ELIÁN

The cowrie shells are the mouths of the saints -- blood purifies our desires, makes us clean, sweeps away the trash in our souls.

Then, with almost indescribable tenderness, ELIÁN steps into the bathroom and kneels beside her. MARTA moves out of his way. He takes MARIA's bloodied hand. He takes out a handkerchief and presses it against the cut.

ELIÁN

K eni hu we gbedegbede / K eni le ju pelepele / K omo eni
le n owo gbogbogbo / Le ni sin.

MARTA and MAGDALENA move closer.

MARTA

What are you saying --

MARIA underscores him.

MARIA
(overlapping)

K eni hu we gbedegbede / K eni le ju pelepele / K omo eni
le n owo gbogbogbo / Le ni sin.

ELIÁN
(overlapping)

Let us behave gently, / That we may die peacefully: / that
our children may / stretch out their hands, / upon us in our
burial.

There is a moment of tableau with the four of them, then MARTA and
MAGDALENA come in to the bathroom and gently help both of them to their
feet. They move out of the bathroom.

PAUL enters with RAOUL, followed by SERAFINA. They have all changed
their clothes. When he sees what's going on, PAUL asks RAOUL to leave.

PAUL

This is for family.

RAOUL

And I'm not --

PAUL

Go!

RAOUL leaves.

PAUL
(to MARTA, MAGDALENA)

You two should go. Thank you, but go!

MARTA and MAGDALENA exchange a look, then let go and start to leave
with RAOUL.

Suddenly, without warning, MARIA screams a scream of horror and delight.
Her body reacts as if someone had jumped upon her back like leaping onto
a horse. Immediately words stream from her mouth, a torrent of babble,
until she collapses.

MARIA

Odzu kokoru baba okandzua alagba mah o ero baba ole eni
ti ko gbo ti ega, a li ega nkpatoto enu eleda eda li olorun da
ni bi a lagbara dze o ni iya, ki ofi erin si i. bi adza ba li, eni
lehin, a kpa obo adza ti ko li eti ko se idegbe gagalo subu,
owo te akpako adaniloju ko se ifi ehin ti afedzu toto ko mo
okonri did ni imu abe imu bi aso kpe li abo a hu adebipani

ki ise ore enni afeno ni ti iyangbo agbari ko ni modunmodun
ennit i o da eru li eru ito. agbo meji ko mo omi akoto kan
agbon ko se ije fun eiye ki euje mo mo o tan ko je agbon ki
o li oro ki olorun ki ofu li emmi gigun --

Lights to darkness.

* * * * *

Scene 15

REPORTER

(with cordless microphone)

It was bedlam, sheer bedlam, inside and outside the courtroom at the arraignment of Officer Pedro Amargo today. Because of a mistake by the district attorney's office, the family was not informed of the time of the arraignment. By the time they found out, supporters arrived at the courthouse just in time to see Amargo hustled down the hallway and out of the building into a waiting cruiser.

The district attorney offered his apologies, but that did little to calm the family, friends, and supporters of Jose Aral, who spilled onto the street shouting "Justicia, justicia." Several people in the crowd scuffled with police and one was wounded seriously.

REPORTER moves to PAUL and RAOUL.

* * * * *

Scene 16

Lights up on PAUL and RAOUL. As PAUL speaks, RAOUL makes as if he is handing a flyer to the crowd around PAUL. He will move in a circle around PAUL. REPORTER has the mike right up to PAUL's mouth, or perhaps kneels in front of PAUL and holds up the mike.

PAUL

Look at the flyer my assistant is handing out -- look at it closely because you have be at the meeting tonight. Come to the Shrine -- bring everyone you can think of -- we must

work together to act now so that this travesty of justice is not allowed to stand!

Think of Jose -- think of our Bemba -- do not do anything that would make him ashamed of us! Look all around you -- you can see the police all around, you can see how ready they are to make sure our voices do not get heard, to break us up physically and break our spirits. Keep in your minds and in your hearts the name of Jose, the name of Bemba. Jose, justicia! Jose, justicia! Jose, justicia!

* * * * *

Scene 17

SERAFINA and MARIO. MARTA and MAGDALENA.

MARIO

Justicia, justicia!

SERAFINA

Move it on, Mario.

MARIO

Make me, pig.

MAGDALENA
(to MARIO)

This is Fina.

SERAFINA

Just move it on -- I can't ensure --

MARIO

What do I care, sell-out?

MARTA

Mario!

SERAFINA

Move it on.

MARTA

Come on.

MARIO

Make me.

MARIO pushes SERAFINA.

MARIO

"¡Que no quiero verla!"

MARIO pushes her again.

SERAFINA

Mario, you can't --

MARIO

"-- dile a la luna que venga" --

He advances on SERAFINA, who tries to avoid the inevitable.

SERAFINA

You gotta stop --

MARIO

"-- que no quiero ver la sangre -- "

SERAFINA

Mario --

MARIO

"-- de Jose sobre la arena -- "

They fight. He will not stay down. She has to use her baton, hard, knocking him unconscious.

MAGDALENA

He's hurt.

SERAFINA

Shit.

MAGDALENA

You hurt him bad, Fina.

SERAFINA

Shit.

MARTA takes off to find help; MAGDALENA follows. SERAFINA speaks into her radio.

SERFINA

I have someone down here. I have a protestor down here.
I need EMS services right away.

SERAFINA looks at the third finger of his left hand and sees that "Lorca" is still written there. SIRENS crack the air. Lights to black, sound out.

* * * * *

Scene 18

Lights on the PRIEST, kneeling. ELIÁN, in shadow, serves as his confessor.

PRIEST

Bless me father, for I have sinned. It has been one week since my last confession. In that time I have --

PRIEST pauses, sits back on his heels.

PRIEST

In that time I have been a lousy shepherd. Really really lousy. The Aral family? I have been unable to give them any guidance in their suffering, any help to ease their pain. I've begun to wonder if I ever could -- if anyone ever could -- I've lost all feel for the connection between suffering and sin and redemption and happiness. More and more I feel like I'm singing psalms to calm the cattle in the middle of a slaughterhouse.

I do have a sin I've never confessed. I confess it now. When I was fifteen years old and an altar boy, I racked myself with the usual adolescent doubts about God, about faith, etcetera, etcetera. One Friday I decided that I would fast for forty hours, until Communion on Sunday, to see if

a sign would be sent to smooth the waters of my heart. I figured if Christ could do forty days in the desert, I could do forty hours on a weekend.

Sunday came -- I was ravenous the way only an adolescent can be ravenous -- stomach growling, sure I was suffering a saint's penance. As the priest and the other altar boy moved down the line of open mouths at the communion rail, I absent-mindedly picked my nose --

PRIEST holds out right index finger.

PRIEST

-- and equally absent-mindedly was going to eat the booger when I realized that if I did that, I'd break my fast and be ineligible for communion. I looked at my finger and -- bam! -- I knew that here had come the sign: the body of Christ or my own body.

PRIEST wipes his finger on his clothes.

PRIEST

That's what I did -- I made my choice. Made what I thought was the right choice. And I felt noble and chosen and justified in my life and ate the kind of good hearty breakfast afterwards that a reprieved man would eat.

The sin? Believing then, ringing the bells as the priest raised wine and host, that suffering would give answers, pain would strengthen faith, that there were such things as love and the protected houses that love would give. Witnessing the suffering of this family and their friends, how they each try to wrench some safe harbor out of the howl of pain around them -- it's not that I've lost faith -- faith is different for me now -- it rests with the agonized Christ on the cross, not with the empty tomb and the pentecostal flames -- rests with the weeping apostles and the emptiness that comes from a loss deeper than your bones.

I should have eaten the booger. It would have made me a better priest. And now -- my penance?

Lights out on PRIEST.

* * * * *

Scene 19

Lights up on ESCONDIDA's beauty parlor, in her home. MARTA and MAGDALENA waiting, MAGDALENA browsing a magazine. ESCONDIDA points out the chair, holds out an apron like a bullfighter's cape.

ESCONDIDA

Hey, hey, hey, Martita --

MARTA

I want it short.

ESCONDIDA

How short is "short" to you?

MARTA

Short short.

ESCONDIDA

You sure so drastic? I can feather it here, you know --

MARTA

Short. Really short -- it's what I want.

ESCONDIDA

You want down to bald like a china cup?

MARTA

No me importa. You can chop it all off.

MAGDALENA

(sotto voce)

That would look nice.

ESCONDIDA

(to MAGDALENA)

Ssh!

(to MARTA)

What's the matter? Linda, you look as sad as a sick chicken.

MAGDALENA

She is sad.

ESCONDIDA

Are you sad?

MAGDALENA

Sad-assed.

ESCONDIDA

Sssh!

MAGDALENA

She's "Jose" sad.

ESCONDIDA

We all are.

MAGDALENA

And she's "Mario" sad.

ESCONDIDA

True?

MARTA, hesitates, nods yes, then very quietly begins to cry.

ESCONDIDA

Oh. Oh. You liked -- ?

MAGDALENA

She did. She does.

MARTA

I'm in the room.

MAGDALENA

Maybe you're here, maybe you're not.

MARTA

And I don't "like" him, I just -- like him.

MAGDALENA

She "likes" him -- don't let her fool you.

ESCONDIDA

Does that mean you don't like Fina?

MARTA both nods yes and shrugs her shoulders.

ESCONDIDA

Yeah. Fina did what she had to do.

MARTA

But Mario was her friend.

ESCONDIDA

But only with the person, not with the uniform.

MARTA

Still the same person!

ESCONDIDA gets a pair of scissors and a comb, getting ready to cut.

ESCONDIDA

Nobody can be friends with a uniform. Fina knows that. It comes with the territory. Fina had a job to do and --

MARTA

But that didn't make what she did right.

MAGDALENA

Look, girl, I like Mario as good as the next, you know that, but he, well, he invited what he got.

MARTA

He did not!

ESCONDIDA

Sit still, or I'll nick you.

MAGDALENA

(mockingly)

Justicia, justicia! Like little boys on the playground. Pissing contests.

(imitates peeing)

Whizzzzzz! Sorry. They think muscle is the same as a brain.

MARTA turns around in the chair, enraged.

ESCONDIDA

(moving scissors out of the way)

¡Cuidado!

MARTA

I always knew it about you!

ESCONDIDA

Careful.

MAGDALENA

Knew what, tonta?

MARTA

You don't think Jose deserves --

MAGDALENA

And you can shut your face! You don't think I didn't want them to double-dip his ass for Jose's dying? Jose should not be dead! But let's face facts, moonbrain.

MARTA turns away. ESCONDIDA undoes MARTA's apron.

ESCONDIDA

Short as you want it, I'll hit brain.

MARTA

(sotto voce)

I don't have any.

ESCONDIDA

You can get up now. Go on -- it's Magda's turn.

But MARTA looks as if she is going to fold in on herself.

MAGDALENA

Martita --

MARTA

(whispering)

There is so much pain. People hurt so much.

MAGDALENA

The problem with you, Martita, is that you got a heart too big for your brain. And you got a brain that don't ever shut up.

MARTA

I can't help it.

MAGDALENA

(joking)

It's all those telenovelas you watch. ¡Dios mio! ¡Hijo de puta! Eh, right?

ESCONDIDA

Siempre, siempre, mi corazon.

MARTA

Go ahead, make fun of me.

ESCONDIDA

We're not making fun of you.

MAGDALENA

You always want the moon -- but sometimes you can't afford it. Mario named her a pig, Marta. That was just stupid. He called her a pig when people had their backs up and acting all righteous and shit -- sorry -- and everyone is acting like they got a stick of dynamite up their butts -- sorry again -- like Fina's brother there, Pablo quien no es un Pablo, talking all trash about fighting and injustice and whipping people up like he's some messiah when all he's looking for is to get his ass -- sorry again -- into some politician's pig trough, and your husband, don't mean to be disrespectful, but he's got his nose all browned-up because he thinks Pablo's a big wind and all he's got is a small kite and he better get it up or else he's going to have to be an ordinary fuck for the rest of his life. That's what I think. Sorry about the "fuck."

ESCONDIDA smooths MARTA's hair.

MAGDELENA

You're right -- way too much pain. There is always way too much pain. What are facts in the face of pain? I can get mine cut later.

RAOUL enters, smug. He's dressed in a very nice suit.

MAGDALENA

Definitely get it cut later.

RAOUL

No, you won't.

ESCONDIDA

And what are you saying to my customers?

RAOUL

I got something to say.

ESCONDIDA

So say it.

RAOUL

This is my house --

ESCONDIDA

That's what you want to say?

RAOUL

This is my house, and I can't be seen having anything like this going on.

ESCONDIDA

What "this" are you talking about, Raoul? What "this"?

MAGDALENA

We should go.

ESCONDIDA

No.

(to RAOUL)

Where did you get that suit?

RAOUL

I need to look good now.

ESCONDIDA

Where did you get it?

RAOUL

I bought it.

ESCONDIDA

With?

RAOUL

With my money.

ESCONDIDA

Which is mostly my money because I bring in most of it.

RAOUL

You don't understand a thing.

MAGDALENA

You working on being Pablo's middle leg now?

MARTA
(hissing)

Magda!

RAOUL

Paul -- he's Paul. And you got a mouth you should learn to change.

ESCONDIDA

What is Paul doing?

RAOUL
(that smug look)

Justicia. He's gonna run for mayor.

MAGDALENA

I told you.

ESCONDIDA

And because he's running for alcalde, I can't cut hair in my own home?

RAOUL

My house. This place has to got to look like this suit.

ESCONDIDA picks up a pair of scissors and walks up to RAOUL.

RAOUL

Put those down.

ESCONDIDA

These are real sharp, Raoul. They can take a chunk out of a suit as easy as peeling a plantain. Magda, you ready?

MAGDALENA sits in the chair, and ESCONDIDA swirls the apron over her.

ESCONDIDA

I got customers, Raoul. I got a business, Raoul. Now, Magda, you want that big roll in front, like we talked about?

MAGDALENA

I do.

ESCONDIDA

What you do think about that, Marta?

MARTA

(small voice)

It's okay.

ESCONDIDA

I think it's a fucking good choice.

ESCONDIDA looks directly at RAOUL.

ESCONDIDA

Sorry for the "fuck."

RAOUL, defeated, storms out. For a moment, ESCONDIDA also looks defeated and puts down her scissors.

MARTA

We can come back --

ESCONDIDA

No.

ESCONDIDA picks up the scissors, holds them out straight.

ESCONDIDA

Steady as a rock, eh? We move on. We move on.

Lights dim on them as they come up on PAUL. The three woman watch.

* * * * *

Scene 20

NOTE: These final scenes should be staged as if a film camera were taking one unedited shot.

* * * * *

The REPORTER and PAUL in chairs, at an interview.

PAUL

I don't take up this challenge lightly. I lost a brother, and no matter what the court said and the jury said, a terrible injustice was done to Jose, to my family, to everyone in this city who is poor and who is weak. It is my duty, then, to bring justice back to this city. For you, Jose, that's why I am running for mayor -- justicia, one way or another.

REPORTER

May I ask you a personal question?

PAUL

Of course.

REPORTER

The eye patch --

PAUL

A youthful accident. It's important to Jose --

REPORTER

I think it's quite dashing. Like a pirate.

PAUL

Let's think of it more like Moshe Dayan of Israel. No, like John Wayne in that Western.

REPORTER

Like fighters.

PAUL

Exactly. Maybe it'll start a fashion.

REPORTER

Who knows these days? Thank you very much for being with us this afternoon.

They shake hands.

PAUL

Justicia -- don't forget.

Lights out. Lights up on SERAFINA.

* * * * *

SERAFINA in street clothes, police badge in hand. She drops it to the floor and with her heel grinds it into the floor, stomps on it, destroys it, does her dance of death on it. Then picks it up, pockets it.

Lights out on SERAFINA, up on family.

* * * * *

PAUL

(to ELIÁN)

How is she, abuelo?

ELIÁN shrugs, does not answer.

ESCONDIDA

Serafina is there with her now. It's my shift tonight.

PAUL
(to ESCONDIDA)

How is she?

ELIÁN
(to no one in particular)
They never killed Che Guevara, you know. Someone sacrificed himself for Che. It was a plan so that they would get the wrong man. Che is alive somewhere.

ESCONDIDA
He'd be an old old man, Papa.

ELIÁN
Just like me. Maybe I am Che, eh? Ever think of that? Hiding in the belly of the beast. Waiting. You think about that.

Everyone looks at ELIÁN, who himself looks off into the distance and begins to sing softly.

Lights out on family, up on SERAFINA and MARIA. The family watches the scene.

* * * * *

MARIA, dressed simply, sits and stares, no particular look on her face.

SERAFINA
You would be proud of Paul, I think -- the announcement went well. Where we had the shrine, outside the house?

At this moment, MARIO enters in darkness with his trumpet.

SERAFINA
Paul got the Mayor to name the street corner after Jose. Little sign hung up on the pole, his name, a star. Shrine is still there. Getting bigger every day.

Under the lines MARIO plays Taps, straight or jazz, depending.

SERAFINA

And someone took Jose's sneakers and threw them over the phone line -- Marta said that shows where a young person died. Magda -- what a mouth she has! -- says it was better doing that than some stupid sign hanging on a telephone pole. Papa -- he's doing okay -- he misses you -- he's okay -- he's not okay --

SERAFINA takes out the badge and shows it to MARIA. MARIA takes it, looks at it, hands it back. MARIO blows the last three notes of Taps.

The PRIEST walks in. SERAFINA pockets the badge, rises, gives the chair to the PRIEST, and crosses to MARIO.

The PRIEST takes a string of cowrie shells out of his pocket and offers them to MARIA. She looks, sees what they are, takes them, and wraps them around her hands. She smiles. Lights out on them, up on MARIO and SERAFINA. Everyone watches the scene.

* * * * *

MARIO puts down his trumpet, holds out his left hand.

MARIO

They washed it all off in the hospital.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a pen, offers it to SERAFINA.

MARIO

Nurse refused to make me a copy. Would you?

SERAFINA takes the pen. MARIO holds out his left hand.

MARIO

Ring finger. L - O - R - C - A.

SERAFINA gives the pen back to MARIO.

SERAFINA

I don't know what to say. Does anything hurt?

MARIO

What kind of question is that?

MARTA and MAGDALENA enter. MAGDALENA carries a candle. SERAFINA lights it. MAGDALENA gives it to MARIO. The four look at each other.

Lights come up on the other groupings. Everyone faces the audience. MARIO holds up the candle as if it were a chalice, then blows it out. Lights bump immediately to blackout.

Ain't Ethiopia

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

After local whites lynch his wife as a suspected Communist, African-American Jesse Colton travels to Spain in 1937 to fight Franco. But there he finds that his real battle is with the fascists in the small Mississippi town from which he escaped and that he must return to face them down if his life, and his wife's death, is to have any meaning.

PRIMARY MAJOR CHARACTERS

- JESSE COLTON, 21, African-American
- OLIVER LUMET, 36, African-American
- LUZ BAROJA Y NESSI, 20s, Spanish

SECONDARY MAJOR CHARACTERS

Below are listed the roles for the UTILITY CHARACTERS. In addition to these roles are the following:

- UTILITY 1 -- AWAGU, anarchist from Ethiopia fighting in Spain
- UTILITY 2 -- JAMES, anarchist from Northern Ireland fighting in Spain
- UTILITY 3 -- DEWEY MARLOWE, journalist, Ernest Hemingway and Robert Capa wanna-be

UTILITY CHARACTERS -- The UTILITY CHARACTERS play the roles listed below, along with act:scene designation.

- UTILITY CHARACTER 1 (female, African American)
 - Harlem Speaker -- 1:1
 - Marley Colton (JESSE's wife) -- 1:3, 1:13, 2:16
 - Woman In Church -- 1:7, 1:8
 - Nurse -- 1:14, 1:15
- UTILITY CHARACTER 2 (male, Caucasian)
 - Policeman 1 -- 1:1
 - Red Neck -- 1:3, 2:16
 - Police Sergeant -- 1:7
 - Soldier -- 1:9, 1:10
 - Orderly -- 1:11
 - Blind Poet -- 1:13
 - Nationalist Soldier 1 -- 2:2
 - Hobo -- 2:9
- UTILITY CHARACTER 3 (male, Caucasian)
 - Tom Milocz -- 1:4, 1:8
 - Policeman 1 -- 1:7

- Captain Merriman -- 1:9, 1:14
- Soldier -- 1:15
- UTILITY CHARACTER 4 (male, between light- and dark-skinned)
 - Man On Street -- 1:6
 - Harlem Minister -- 1:7, 1:8
 - Man Handing Out Rifles -- 1:9, 1:10
 - Soldier -- 1:14, 1:15
 - Sniper -- 1:15, 2:1
 - Mayor -- 2:4
 - Republican Soldier -- 2:7
 - Young Boy -- 2:12
 - Bum -- 2:17
- UTILITY 5 (female, Caucasian)
 - Nurse -- 1:11, 1:14, 1:15
 - Doña Ibárruri -- 1:12
 - Isabel -- 2:4
 - Mrs. Swanson -- 2:11
- UTILITY 6 (male, Caucasian)
 - Policeman 2 -- 1:1
 - Jose Luis Alonso -- 1:7
 - Soldier -- 1:9, 1:10
 - Doctor -- 1:11
 - Nationalist Soldier 2 -- 2:2
 - Largo -- 2:6
 - Colonel -- 2:7
 - Mayor -- 2:15, 2:16
- UTILITY 7 (male, Caucasian)
 - Policeman 3 -- 1:1
 - Policeman 2 -- 1:7
 - Soldier -- 1:9, 1:10
 - Orderly -- 1:11
 - Waiter -- 1:12, 1:13
 - Nationalist Soldier 3 -- 2:2
 - Bellarmino -- 2:6
 - Colonel's Aide -- 2:7
 - Sheriff -- 2:15, 2:16
 - Editor -- 2:17

TIME/PLACE

- Republican Spain and Mississippi, 1936 and 1937

NOTES

- Actors must be dialectically versatile, especially in being able to speak

Spanish (or fake it well) and speak a Spanish-accented English. Also, UTILITY 2 will need to do a northern Ireland Irish accent (from near Belfast).

- To compensate for keeping the production set- and prop-light, sound design is crucial.
- Music is always good to add wherever possible.
- All items/props are mimed unless it is absolutely essential to have them on the actor's person, such as MARLOWE's bag or JESSE's photo. Such things as guns, surgical tools, etc. are mimed and, where possible, underscored by a sound effect. Props to a minimum!
- Costumes should be kept simple and follow a pattern of either adding or subtracting small items to make the character stand out.
- The script is written for a bare stage, but director and designers are free to re-shape the space with platforms, ladders, etc. wherever it makes sense (both theatrically and budgetarily) to do so.
- Actors are on stage all the time along with props and costumes, etc. "Exit" simply means they go out of the playing area and sit.
- Scene changes must take place as seamlessly as possible -- no "dead air" between scenes.

* * * * *

Scene 1

Light is tight on UTILITY 1 as a SPEAKER standing on a soapbox. She holds up pamphlets to an imaginary "crowd."

SOUND: Crowd and street sounds.

UTILITY 2, 6, and 7 as POLICEMEN 1, 2, and 3 hang around.

SPEAKER

Brothers and sisters, we stand in Harlem, in 1936, in the modern age, but in democratic Spain the fascists under Franco want to slide back into the middle ages!

Light up on JESSE COLTON, who slinks through the "crowd." His eyes dart, his hands twitch, his clothes are disheveled -- a man at the end of his tether. A dirty gash cuts his left temple.

SPEAKER

Mussolini, who raped our people in Ethiopia -- and Hitler,
with his cock-eyed ideas about the supremacy of white
people --

JESSE finds OLIVER LUMET listening to the SPEAKER. JESSE sidles up
to pick his pocket.

POLICEMAN 1 notices JESSE. He signals his buddies, and they drift closer.

JESSE's eyes dart right, then left. He moves his hand towards OLIVER's
pocket, fingers twitching. The POLICEMEN are close.

SPEAKER

If we don't stop the fascists in Spain -- brothers, sisters --
please listen --

JESSE is just about to close in when OLIVER's hand clamps down over
JESSE's hand and OLIVER turns to face JESSE.

SPEAKER

We need to fight the fascists, not among ourselves --

OLIVER looks at the POLICEMEN, shakes JESSE's hand with a hard
handshake.

OLIVER

Just an old friend playing a joke, officers.

OLIVER claps JESSE on the shoulder, keeps an eye on the POLICEMEN.

SPEAKER

We need to go to Spain --

OLIVER

How are you doing, my man?

SPEAKER

-- because we could not go to Ethiopia to help our brothers
and sisters --

OLIVER

How's tricks?

SPEAKER

-- fight the Italian fascist barbarians --

The POLICEMEN drift back toward the SPEAKER.

OLIVER

My man, you a cat that's been gone too long!

SPEAKER

As my good friend said, "Spain ain't Ethiopia, but it'll do."

POLICEMAN 1

All right, let's move your raggedy black asses outta here.

The POLICEMEN swipe the air in a stylized manner with their batons.

SOUND: Three heavy thuds in the air.

Still holding onto JESSE, OLIVER lets out a shrill whistle. The SPEAKER looks toward OLIVER.

OLIVER raises his finger and circles it, points to the POLICEMEN. The SPEAKER takes note, gives OLIVER a thumbs-up.

SPEAKER

Watch your backs, my friends --

OLIVER

(to JESSE)

Let's go.

OLIVER hustles JESSE along.

The POLICEMEN swipe the air again and move forward.

SOUND: Three heavy thuds again, then crowd sounds, riot sounds.

SPEAKER

-- we got our own fascists coming in now to take away our First Amendment.

The POLICEMEN come to the SPEAKER. The SPEAKER hands each of them a pamphlet.

SPEAKER

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Now come and get me, little piggies!

The SPEAKER jumps off the soap box and melts away, pursued.

OLIVER turns his attention to JESSE, whose hand is still firmly in OLIVER's grasp. OLIVER pulls him away.

OLIVER

Let's get you to some food and a safe harbor, my friend.

Lights shift to a diner.

* * * * *

Scene 2

SOUNDS: Morph from a riot to the inside of a diner.

Two chairs and table set with a "mimed" breakfast that JESSE tears into as they sit. OLIVER waits. JESSE finishes, mops his plate.

JESSE

Thanks.

JESSE gets up, ready to flee.

JESSE

Gotta go.

OLIVER

I lied.

JESSE

What?

OLIVER

You are gonna have to pay me something.

JESSE

I got no money. I got nothing.

OLIVER

You have a name.

JESSE

Everyone's got a name -- look, go -- I gotta [go] --

OLIVER

So tell me your name.

JESSE

Man --

OLIVER

And I'll tell you who just fed a brother.

JESSE

A brother -- that's what I got to pay?

OLIVER

Sit down. Right there. Will not kill you.

JESSE sits.

OLIVER

Now, one more time: what is your name?

JESSE

Jesse. Colton.

OLIVER reaches into his back pocket JESSE winces at the movement. Slowly, OLIVER draws out a small blue booklet and slides it across.

JESSE picks it up, but he flings it back onto the table, his body racked with shivers.

JESSE

That -- that --

OLIVER

What?

JESSE

It says Communist Party!

OLIVER

Harlem Division.

JESSE

Shit shit shit shit --

JESSE's leg pumps hard. OLIVER lays a hand on his forearm, but JESSE snaps it away.

OLIVER

Mississippi in your voice -- right? Am I right?

JESSE

Maybe -- maybe --

OLIVER

Texas myself.

JESSE

So what?

OLIVER

Jesse Colton from Mississippi, how'd you end up trashed in New York City ready to steal from a brother?

* * * * *

Scene 3

Lights up on the figure of UTILITY 1 as MARLEY COLTON standing on a chair, a noose hanging around her neck, her dress torn, her body riddled with bullet wounds.

Behind her, UTILITY 2 as RED NECK holds up the end of the noose as if it were tied around a tree branch. He has a knife in his hand, ready to cut the rope.

JESSE gets up from the table, walks to the hanged figure. MARLEY looks with tenderness on JESSE.

SOUND: A frenzied crowd at a lynching.

JESSE

"Cut that nigger Communist down! Cut her down!" That's one of the nicer things they screamed at my wife. At Marley Colton.

RED NECK mimes cutting the rope. MARLEY falls into JESSE's arms.

RED NECK

"Better dead than Red" --

JESSE

-- they screamed.

JESSE rolls MARLEY to the floor, stands, horrified. RED NECK spits on MARLEY's corpse, spits on JESSE, who reacts as if he'd been touched by acid. RED NECK jumps off the chair and leaves.

MARLEY kneels up and looks at him as JESSE begins to beat himself.

SOUND: Crowd sounds increase in intensity.

JESSE

They burned the house. They burned Marley, dragged her body through the dust tied to some cracker's truck bumper. I hid -- in the kudzu, in the shit, watching, not being able to -- not being able to --

SOUND: Crowd sounds increase to deafening, demonic.

Light grows to white-hot. MARLEY raises her hand. JESSE calms.

SOUND: Crowd sounds die out.

Light softens.

JESSE

Not being able to do nothing for my Marley.

MARLEY stands, goes to JESSE. JESSE touches her bloody wounds.

JESSE

"Better dead than Red," they screamed. "Cut that nigger Communist down!" they barked.

(JESSE howls)

Ah-ooo! Because she wanted people to get work relief.
Because she wanted to help niggers not be niggers.

MARLEY disappears. JESSE moves back to the table.

SOUND: Diner sounds.

OLIVER and JESSE sit in silence while the banging of the diner swirls around them.

OLIVER

I am sorry for your loss, Jesse.

More silence between them.

OLIVER

If you're interested -- hey --

JESSE

Yeah.

OLIVER

If you're interested -- I can give you a chance to fight those bastards, that did that to your wife. I can. But first things first. You need a place to stay.

(pointing to temple)

That needs to be cleaned. Let's go.

OLIVER stands, but JESSE stays seated. JESSE fumbles with the salt shaker.

OLIVER

Don't play with the salt. Let's go.

JESSE

They said she was a Communist just 'cause she asked for some work relief. I didn't do nothing to stop 'em. I just ran. I just ran and ran and ran till I ended up here and --

OLIVER

At some point, first-name Jesse, last-name Colton, whether you gotta piss or they shut the door on you, you are going to have to get up from this table and do the rest of your life.

JESSE still hesitates, his hands spilling the salt. OLIVER throws a pinch of it over JESSE's left shoulder.

OLIVER

Now you're protected. Come on.

Lights out on diner. OLIVER and JESSE move to the flophouse.

* * * * *

Scene 4

OLIVER mimes knocking in a secret code on a metal door.

SOUND: Secret code on a metal door.

UTILITY 3 as TOM MILOCSZ sits at the table that had been the diner table under the brash light of a single light bulb. TOM wears a black eye-patch over his left eye. On the eye-patch he's painted a red hammer-and-sickle.

He reads the Communist Manifesto. On the back of his chair hangs a coat. A chair sits to the side. He speaks with a Polish accent.

TOM presses a "buzzer."

SOUND: A buzzer.

OLIVER mimes opening and closing the "door."

SOUND: An opening and a closing metal door.

OLIVER and JESSE enter.

OLIVER

Jesse, this is Tom.

TOM

I'm the three-headed dog around here.

JESSE

What? What's he mean?

TOM

Another bright fish, eh?

OLIVER

Easy on him.

TOM looks at a "chart" on the desk.

TOM

Fifth row, ninth one in -- 'sgot your name on it, chum-boy.

OLIVER

The name is Jesse Colton.

TOM

Chum-boy Jesse Colton, then.

OLIVER moves to the door.

JESSE

When am I gonna see you --

OLIVER walks back to JESSE, takes out a card.

OLIVER

Tomorrow, 10 AM, if you want.

OLIVER hands JESSE the card, turns to go.

JESSE

Wait! Wait!

TOM and OLIVER look at JESSE.

JESSE

None of you knows me from Adam's off ox.

OLIVER

We already know you, Jesse.

JESSE

No you don't.

TOM

Know all about you and your kind.

OLIVER

Besides, why do we have to know you to do something for you?

JESSE

I wouldn't. I never did.

TOM

Don't'cha just love 'em when they're raw and fresh?

OLIVER, looking at TOM, points to his own left temple, nods at JESSE, then flashes a smile as he leaves.

SOUND: Metal door opens and closes.

JESSE and TOM stare at each other in the sudden silence.

Outside, OLIVER takes out a coin, flips it, looks at the result, heads off into the darkness.

TOM holds up his book.

TOM

Ever read this? You can read, can't you?

JESSE

I can read! What is that, and I'll tell you.

TOM

The Communist Manifesto.

JESSE

No, I never --

TOM

Know what "manifesto" means?

JESSE

No.

TOM

You can read, right?

JESSE

(hesitantly)

Yeah.

TOM

Siddown.

JESSE sits. TOM hands JESSE the book, who takes it as if it were hot metal. TOM points to his missing eye.

TOM

This is what reading the Manifesto got me.

JESSE

Why would I read it, then?

TOM

What's an eye for the truth? I keep reading it to keep reminding me.

TOM reaches under the desk, pulls out "gauze" and a "bottle of alcohol," gestures for JESSE to lean in.

JESSE leans in, and TOM mimes cleaning his temple. JESSE winces but says nothing. TOM closes the "bottle" and throws away the "gauze."

TOM jerks his thumb over his shoulder.

TOM

Fifth row, ninth one in. Now leave me alone.

TOM pulls another book from his jacket pocket and reads. JESSE gets up, grabs a chair, starts to wander into the flophouse.

TOM

Wait.

JESSE stops. TOM takes the coat from off his chair, throws it to JESSE.

TOM

You stink. Peel the one you got off on your carcass and toss it over there.

JESSE takes off his old coat, takes out the envelope with the photo in it. He puts the envelope in the new coat and puts the coat on. He tosses the old coat away.

TOM

Now you can start leaving me alone.

JESSE moves into the flophouse. A dim light comes up. JESSE puts the chair in the light and sits.

SOUND: Snores, farts, creakings, shufflings.

JESSE clutches his Manifesto, then puts it in his coat pocket. He closes his eyes.

He jerks up, sees TOM at the desk. He looks around, listens, then closes his eyes again.

Lights out.

SOUND: A tinny radio playing "Pennies from Heaven" by Bing Crosby.

* * * * *

Scene 5

Lights up.

SOUND: Traffic, crowd.

Somewhere on 125th Street. JESSE finds himself looking at a dark doorway. Looks at the card, looks at the doorway. JESSE opens the door, closes it.

SOUND: Opening a door, closing it.

JESSE listens.

SOUND: Shouts, radios, a heavy thud, crockery breaking, a slap -- a full human symphony.

JESSE looks at the card again, walks several steps, then knocks on another door.

SOUND: Knocking on a door.

No response.

On the other side of the door sits OLIVER at the desk TOM had used. On the walls are "posters," some in Spanish, about coming to fight for Spain against Franco and for the democratically elected government. And a "coffee pot," "bag of donuts," and two bundles of pamphlets. (Posters, coffee, and doughnuts are mimed but not the pamphlets.)

JESSE knocks again.

SOUND: Knocking on a door.

No response.

He knocks once more, using the code OLIVER had used before.

SOUND: Knocking on a door in code.

OLIVER gets up from the desk when he hears the code.

JESSE goes to knock again when OLIVER unlocks the door and swings it open.

SOUND: Lock unlocking, door opening.

OLIVER

He hath arrived. Welcome to the Harlem Division of the Communist Party. Grab a chair.

OLIVER closes the door, locks it.

SOUND: Door closing, lock locking.

He goes to the "coffee pot" and "bag of doughnuts."

OLIVER

Coffee? All we got is black.

JESSE nods yes. OLIVER pours him a "cup."

OLIVER

Doughnuts are a day old, but I think you can still chew 'em.

JESSE

Yeah -- sure. Thanks.

OLIVER brings JESSE "coffee" and a "doughnut." JESSE tries not to wolf but he eats the entire doughnut in almost one gulp.

OLIVER

Another?

JESSE nods. OLIVER brings him a "second doughnut." This time JESSE eats it a bit more slowly as he sips the "coffee." OLIVER grabs a chair, straddles it backwards.

OLIVER

The demonstration yesterday -- remember that? Know what it was about?

JESSE

I don't know. Couldn't hardly hear my own breathing yesterday. Couldn't hardly see my own hands.

OLIVER gestures to the "posters" on the wall.

OLIVER

Can you see these?

JESSE

Yeah, of course --

OLIVER

Read me what they say.

JESSE

Spain. Lots of something called Spain. Espana [said without the "ñ"]. Where's Spain?

OLIVER

You are a delta boy.

JESSE

You don't have to rag on me.

OLIVER

You're no different than most these days.

JESSE

You still don't have to rag on me --

OLIVER

Spain could be a canned meat, for what most people know.

JESSE

Look, I never left Mississippi till now, never had to.

OLIVER

And the Mississippi's never left you, either, huh?

JESSE

And why don't you just quit --

OLIVER

And you're showing a little more kick today than you kicked yesterday.

JESSE

Got fuel in the tank -- makes a difference --

OLIVER

And I don't really care if you're full delta boy or not. Just listen. Yesterday, at the park, we were talking about Spain. We -- the "Communists" -- we organized that meeting, to raise support. That word still bother you?

JESSE

Which one?

OLIVER

Communist.

JESSE

You guys've been nice.

OLIVER gets out of his chair and starts pacing.

OLIVER

The democratic government in Spain -- that place, there -- a government elected by the people, has been attacked by an army general named Franco.

JESSE

Can I have another doughnut?

OLIVER

Third one you get on your own.

JESSE goes for a "doughnut," starts eating.

OLIVER

Franco's connected to the church and the big landowners, who want it the way it was in the middle ages.

OLIVER taps the "posters" as he talks.

OLIVER

These "middle ages"ve got everything to do with you.

JESSE

Don't know "middle ages." And I told you I don't know what Spain is, where Spain is.

OLIVER

Yes you do.

JESSE

No I don't. And anyway why would I care --

OLIVER

Franco is the "massah" -- you know that word?

JESSE

Course.

OLIVER

Franco and his fellow "massahs" want to keep the plantation just the way it's always been -- that sound familiar?

JESSE

As common as a cat.

OLIVER straddles the chair.

OLIVER

And what have you ever done about "massah"?

JESSE

Cain't do nothing about "massah."

OLIVER

You do, they hang you, right?

JESSE

Beat you, burn you, cut your balls off -- kill your wife --

OLIVER

Make you less than a man.

JESSE

To them, you less than a man before you're born.

OLIVER

You're not stupid.

JESSE

I wasn't always like this.

OLIVER

If you could fight back -- you'd fight back?

JESSE

Like to think I would.

OLIVER

Me, too. That's why I went in the Army for six years -- thought I could fight my way up and out that way. But black buck private in comes a black buck private out. In my

dream, Jesse, I take all the motherfuckin' "massahs" in the world, man and woman and even child, and wipe the place clean of 'em. Give the rest of us a goddamn break. You want to know me in a nutshell -- why "Communist" -- that's what I want.

OLIVER slides back into his genial self.

OLIVER

You up for some honest work today, now that you've had three of my doughnuts and coffee furnished by the common people?

JESSE nods yes. OLIVER picks up a bundle of pamphlets.

OLIVER

Put the cup down.

JESSE does.

OLIVER

Finish the doughnut.

JESSE does. OLIVER tosses the bundle to JESSE. JESSE reads the cover.

JESSE

What's "fask" -- "faskism" --

OLIVER

Fascism.

JESSE

Fascism.

OLIVER picks up a bundle.

OLIVER

Just a fancy word for what happened to your wife. You got any lungs on you?

JESSE

For what?

OLIVER

For hog yelling. For field hollering.

JESSE

Course I got lungs.

OLIVER

Then let me hear 'em loud.

JESSE

You crazy?

OLIVER

Don't work with light-weights out there, Jesse. Yell it.

JESSE turns the bundle over and over.

OLIVER

Last chance.

JESSE

(not that strong)

Fascism.

OLIVER

Cat makes more spitting up a hairball.

JESSE

(a little louder)

Fascism.

OLIVER

Guy downstairs beats up his wife with more style. "Like to think I'd fight back," I heard you say. Then say the fucking word, delta boy.

JESSE

(booming)

Fascism.

Then over and over and over again -- the word opens up a floodgate in JESSE. Again and again and again until JESSE finds himself dissolved.

OLIVER comes to JESSE and simply holds him.

* * * * *

Scene 6

SOUND: Busy Harlem street, busy Harlem crowd.

OLIVER and JESSE turn and face the audience, pamphlets in their hands.

OLIVER's booming voice cuts through the street noise and hustle.

OLIVER

Fight against fascism! Couldn't do it in Ethiopia, but we can do it in Spain. Join us in our fight.

OLIVER hands out pamphlets right and left, throwing out "Thank you, ma'am" and "Thank you, sir" as he does. JESSE hangs back.

OLIVER

(to JESSE)

Just jump, man!

Taking a deep breath, JESSE lets out a BELLOW that catches everyone on the street by surprise.

JESSE

Fight against fascism!

OLIVER laughs.

SOUND: Momentary street silence.

OLIVER

Just don't break their ears off!

SOUND: Street sounds, crowd sounds again.

JESSE, smiling, starts handing out the pamphlets and thanks people. He hands out a pamphlet to UTILITY 4 as the MAN ON STREET, who takes it and without reading it throws it away. JESSE runs up to him, another one held out to him.

JESSE

You dropped this.

MAN

Get that trash away from me.

JESSE

It's really important --

MAN

Get that trash away me, you fucking --

JESSE

Look, man, this is all about the plantation -- see, fascism, that's what it's all about -- all about the "massah" -- we know all about this, you and me --

Without warning the MAN roundhouses JESSE to the pavement. OLIVER moves toward JESSE but does not interfere. The MAN flashes OLIVER a look, then back to JESSE.

MAN

Don't be calling me a nigger!

JESSE slowly gets up from sidewalk, nursing his face.

JESSE

(without rancor)

Mister, I been told -- and I'm telling you -- we'll all stay niggers if these guys win.

The MAN gives JESSE a shove back. JESSE holds out a pamphlet. The MAN grabs it and walks away. JESSE looks at the "people" looking at him, looks at OLIVER. JESSE starts to hawk his wares again.

JESSE

Help us fight fascism, folks, just like that man's going to do. Get the "massah" off the plantation.

JESSE looks at OLIVER, who smiles at him. JESSE smiles back, wiggles his jaw back and forth to show he's okay.

Lights out.

SOUND: Harlem street shifts into a congregation's voices ending the Lord's Prayer: "...and deliver us from evil, for thine is the power and glory, forever. Amen."

* * * * *

Scene 7

A church basement in Harlem. In front of the table, OLIVER stands next to UTILITY 6 as JOSE LUIS ALONSO, who wears a red bandana and speaks in a Spanish accent.

UTILITY 4 as the MINISTER stands on the other side of JOSE.

Seated to one side is UTILITY 1 as the WOMAN IN THE CHURCH. Seated next to her is JESSE.

Lights flicker on the WOMAN and JESSE as if from a movie screen.

The WOMAN responds in physical discomfort from what she sees on the screen.

SOUND: Movie projector.

JOSE LUIS

Francisco Franco rapes our country -- has taken away our government, elected by the people. People like you. And Benito Mussolini is now doing in Spain what he did to your people in Ethiopia.

WOMAN

Oh my God! Look -- they using black people!

JOSE LUIS

Yes, Franco uses Africans to kill our people, to kill freedom -- the Army of Africa, it is called.

WOMAN

My God, my God, oh my God --

Images in silence, then the film runs out. Silence. Lights come up.

WOMAN

Amen, brother.

JOSE LUIS gives a confused look to OLIVER.

OLIVER

That's a good thing.

JOSE LUIS

Ah. Amen, comrade, to you, too. I am touched you listen to what is happening to my country. We need people who love freedom to fight for us.

OLIVER

Hundreds of volunteers, folks, from the world over, have been coming to Spain to fight the plantation mentality.

JOSE LUIS

Your government will not help us --

OLIVER

Our government actually supports Hitler and Mussolini --

JOSE LUIS

But we know the people are not the same as the government. I know your hearts love freedom -- that is why I am here -- to ask you to stand shoulder to shoulder with us.

The WOMAN raises her hand.

WOMAN

Brother Oliver?

OLIVER

Sister Vernon?

WOMAN

He means -- don't get me wrong about this -- but he means fight for white people, right?

OLIVER

He means fight for freedom -- bigger than any one of us, white or black.

(shaking his hand)

Thank you, Jose Luis. This man's come a long stretch to talk -- and his cause is good. I love his cause. I truly do. But what you say is true, Sister. Spain's a long way from 125th Street. Why fight there when we got our own battle out there?

WOMAN

That's what I was meaning, Brother Oliver.

OLIVER gestures to the MINISTER.

OLIVER

Reverend, if you don't mind, I have one more to testify.

UTILITY 2 as the POLICE SERGEANT steps into his own light along with
UTILITY 3 as POLICEMAN 1 and UTILITY 7 as POLICEMAN 2.

OLIVER

(pointing)

Jesse Colton.

JESSE slowly stands, looking at the people looking at him.

OLIVER

This is Jesse Colton, newly come to us.

WOMAN

Welcome, Brother Jesse.

(to OLIVER)

He's a good-looking young brother.

OLIVER

Could always trust your eye, Sister Vernon.

MINISTER

Just make sure it don't wander from the page, Sister Vernon.

WOMAN

Reverend, you want to let Brother Oliver finish with his business and get off of my business? Amen.

OLIVER

Brother Jesse has a story to tell you. About his former life in Mississippi.

(to JESSE)

You got the lungs for this?

JESSE smiles, nods yes.

OLIVER

Any of you here from Mississippi? Alabama? From the dark hold of the South? Thought so. Then you'll know his story.

OLIVER steps back. JESSE scans the crowd. The POLICE SERGEANT and the two POLICEMEN pivot, face the church, pull out their batons.

MINISTER

Give him an amen.

WOMAN

Amen.

JESSE

My name is Jesse Colton. My story, plain and simple. They hung my wife from a streetlamp in front of the town hall. They shot her, dragged her behind a truck, threw her body into a fire -- a fire made from our house.

He lets these images settle.

WOMAN

I know what Brother Jesse speaks of.

JESSE

Not much different than the pictures our friend Jose Luis brought us.

MINISTER

Amen.

WOMAN

Amen.

The POLICE SERGEANT raises his baton.

OLIVER watches JESSE closely, how his breathing races, his body tenses, as he leans in to connect with the people.

JESSE

Just like the way Mussolini lynched Ethiopia. Just like this
Franco --

JESSE's right arm shoots outward in a "Heil."

JESSE

"Il Duce" and the "Generalissimo" -- they ain't nothing
but the masters on the plantation -- ain't they? They ain't
nothing but "the boss."

WOMAN

Say it!

The POLICE SERGEANT raises the baton even higher.

JESSE

My old thinking? The white people killed my wife. White
killed my wife. But here's my new thinking. I don't think it's
white or black, white against black. I think it's about those
that got wanting those who ain't got to never get anything.
And how's that gonna stop? Because it's gotta stop.

JESSE pauses to catch his breath.

JESSE

It's gonna stop when we say it's gonna stop. When "we"
say it --

WOMAN

Say it!

The POLICE SERGEANT bangs his baton on the church door.

SOUND: An enormous ringing crash of doom.

Everyone freezes. The POLICE SERGEANT bangs again.

SOUND: Another crash of doom.

MINISTER

(to OLIVER, JESSE, JOSE LUIS)

Get in the back room! Tear down the sheet. Get the projector in there.

JESSE does not move. OLIVER guides JOSE LUIS to a "small room," opens the "door."

SOUND: Door opening.

OLIVER reassures JOSE LUIS, then steps back out.

SOUND: Door closing.

MINISTER

(to them both)

You, too.

JESSE

I'm not sitting it out for no one.

OLIVER

Gotta protect my witness.

The POLICE SERGEANT bangs several times.

SOUND: Several more crashes of doom.

MINISTER

(to JESSE)

Then you're my deacon. Shut up and look holy.

(to OLIVER)

Get 'em singing. "Down By The Riverside."

OLIVER, in a deep baritone, begins singing.

OLIVER

"Gonna lay down my sword and shield"

SOUND: Congregation singing.

WOMAN & JESSE

(joining in)

"Down by the riverside"

The POLICE SERGEANT and the POLICEMEN enter. The MINISTER sings.

PEOPLE

"Down by the riverside, down by the riverside"

OLIVER

"Gonna lay down my sword and shield"

POLICEMAN 1

Everyone shut up!

But the VOICES don't shut up.

PEOPLE

"Down by the riverside"

POLICEMAN 1

I said shut up!

PEOPLE

"Ain't gonna study war no more."

The MINISTER holds up his hand, and silence falls.

MINISTER

Amen.

ALL

Amen.

MINISTER

Sergeant?

The POLICE SERGEANT surveys the "congregation."

SERGEANT

(tired)

Tell me where they are. The reds. The Communists. We know you got 'em here.

JOSE LUIS huddles, scarcely breathing.

MINISTER

In the Lord's house, nothing is hidden.

WOMAN

Let's offer up Psalm 90.

SOUND: Congregation speaking.

PEOPLE

Who considers the power of your anger?

SERGEANT

(to MINISTER)

Tell 'em to be quiet.

The MINISTER says nothing.

PEOPLE

So teach us to count our days --

SERGEANT

(with low menace)

Tell them to shut up.

PEOPLE

-- that we may gain a wise heart.

JESSE

They just want to pray.

MINISTER

Deacon --

PEOPLE

Turn, O LORD!

POLICEMAN 2
(to JESSE)

Button it!

PEOPLE

How long?

JESSE

We're just praying for you!

The MINISTER puts a hand on JESSE, but JESSE leans forward.

PEOPLE
Have compassion on your servants!

POLICEMAN 2
Back off!

JESSE
Just wasted on you, though --

Without hesitation POLICEMAN 2 cracks his baton against JESSE's head, and JESSE drops to the floor like a stone.

No one moves.

The POLICE SERGEANT lets out a disgusted sigh as he peers at JESSE. He nods to POLICEMAN 1 and POLICEMAN 2. They leave. The POLICE SERGEANT gives the MINISTER a sharp look, then leaves.

OLIVER goes to JESSE. The MINISTER nods, and the WOMAN opens the door to the "back room."

SOUND: Door opening and closing.

JOSE LUIS emerges, sees everything.

WOMAN
Welcome to America.

JOSE LUIS
Welcome to Spain.

JOSE LUIS takes off his red bandana and ties it around JESSE's neck.

JOSE LUIS

El toro, eh?

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 8

JESSE sits in a chair, eyes closed. He holds JOSE LUIS' red bandana.

SOUND: The murmuring of voices.

The murmuring morphs into the arguing voices of the MINISTER, OLIVER, the WOMAN, and TOM gathered around the table and chairs.

JESSE's eyes open, but he doesn't move.

TOM

Oliver --

OLIVER

Tom --

TOM

Handing out the pamphlets is bullshit.

OLIVER

You have an army you aren't telling us about? Because if you do --

WOMAN

Just get so gosh-darn tired of --

OLIVER

We have got to keep the work going --

JESSE stands, grabs his head in pain, manages to stay up.

MINISTER

But you cannot meet anger with anger --

JESSE walks to the door, opens it.

SOUND: Door opening.

The MINISTER, OLIVER, TOM, and the WOMAN stare at JESSE. JESSE lifts the red bandana.

OLIVER

We took him back to his group. He gave you that -- and an amen.

WOMAN

He called you "el toro."

TOM

Yeah, the bull in the goddamn china shop -- leading with his head.

OLIVER

The part of him least likely to get hurt.

Laughter. JESSE tries to tie the red bandana around his neck. OLIVER helps him, pats it down flat. JESSE admires it around his neck.

JESSE

You told me once I had to figure out something good to do with my life. Jose Luis -- "el toro" -- Spain ain't Ethiopia -- but it'll do. Can you get me there?

OLIVER

Can't let you do that, Jesse.

JESSE

Why not?

OLIVER

Because with you gone I'd be stuck with the one-eyed jack over there.

TOM

I think I like that -- I think I'm preferring being called the "one-eyed jack."

OLIVER

You've wanted to run the show, right?

TOM

Yeah.

OLIVER

Yours now to run. We'll get the Committee to turn it over to you.

(to JESSE)

It ain't Ethiopia, like the young bull says -- but it'll do.

MINISTER

You two are crazy --

OLIVER

That a benediction, Reverend, right? "Crazy" may not disadvantage us where we're [going] --

MINISTER

You two are still crazy --

WOMAN

Reverend --

MINISTER

I'm getting to it, I'm coming around to it. So go crazy -- with my blessing.

Lights out, then gradually up on UTILITY 2, UTILITY 6, UTILITY 7, OLIVER, and JESSE.

Table and chairs off.

MUSIC: "Llegó Con Tres Heridas," performed by Eliseo Parra

* * * * *

Scene 9

SOUND: Heavy-duty diesel trucks.

Light on the upper bodies of UTILITY 2, UTILITY 6, UTILITY 7, OLIVER, and JESSE, in winter coats and boots, in a "transport truck." They shake and rattle as the truck moves over uneven ground.

UTILITY 2

Where the fuck are we again?

OLIVER

Jarama.

UTILITY 2

Jarama? [pronounced in English, with a "J" sound]

OLIVER

Jarama. [pronounced in Spanish] The valley of Jarama.

UTILITY 6

That's in Spain?

OLIVER

Just outside Madrid.

UTILITY 7

Because it still feels like we're on the fucking transport ship.

JESSE

'Cept I'm not throwing up.

UTILITY 2

Barely had time to piss. What about you?

JESSE

Pissing your pants count?

UTILITY 6

Counts for something.

JESSE

Then I had time.

UTILITY 7

Don't know what's worse -- peeing yourself or puking yourself.

OLIVER

There's four hundred of us all in the same boat -- so to speak.

UTILITY 2

Friend's a wise-ass.

OLIVER

As long as I ain't a dumb-ass.

SOUND: Truck stops. Sudden silence.

OLIVER

And now, compadres, the fun begins.

Several moments of silence.

OLIVER

Let me check.

JESSE

Wait --

OLIVER

It's fine -- Franco ain't in the neighborhood.

OLIVER steps into the darkness.

JESSE

(sotto voce)

Jarama, Jarama, Jarama --

UTILITY 2

That's the only way I can remember things, too.

UTILITY 7

Christ, who'd've thought Spain'd be this fucking cold!

OLIVER reappears. He raps the flat of his hand against the side of the truck.

SOUND: Hand against wood.

OLIVER

Afuera! Afuera! That means "Out! Out!" in Mississippian!
And it means now!

JESSE, UTILITY 2, UTILITY 6, and UTILITY 7 pile out of the "truck" and follow OLIVER.

Light changes to a sky bursting with stars, but the orange/red light of the sunrise is already snuffing them out.

In the morning light JESSE sees UTILITY 3 as CAPTAIN MERRIMAN, a tall man wearing wire-rim glasses. He gestures to OLIVER.

OLIVER

Yes, Captain Merriman?

MERRIMAN

Bring 'em to the supply trucks. Make it quick -- keep 'em warm.

(to the group)

Stay quiet.

MERRIMAN passes into the darkness. OLIVER turns to his group.

UTILITY 2

Who's that?

UTILITY 6

What's that? Looks like a college boy.

OLIVER

Captain Merriman -- brigade commander, for the Americans over here. And our boss. Come on, folks --

UTILITY 7 stands for a moment.

OLIVER

Come on.

UTILITY 7

I'm trying to remember that song when we got off the train --

UTILITY 6

He's having a moment of mental bupkis. Come on -- my balls are churning to ice cubes.

UTILITY 7

(in very bad Spanish)

Llegó con tres heridas:...

UTILITY 2

Oh Christ!

UTILITY 7

...la del amor,
la de la muerte,
la de la vida.

Don't know what it means, but, man, it stuck in my ears.

UTILITY 6

And you're making my ears fall off.

UTILITY 2

Let's go.

OLIVER

(nudging UTILITY 7)

Let's go -- it's time to meet your date. You can speak Spanish to her.

JESSE, UTILITY 2, UTILITY 6, and UTILITY 7 follow OLIVER to another area of the stage.

Lights up on UTILITY 4 wearing a black beret. He mimes handing out the "guns" with a terse "aquí" to all the SOLDIERS.

SOUND: Guns being handed out.

OLIVER gives UTILITY 4 a hand.

A "gun" appears in UTILITY 2's hands. He moves away. The same for UTILITY 6 and UTILITY 7. OLIVER hands a gun to JESSE.

JESSE

Ain't ever held a gun really.

OLIVER

Most here haven't. Grip it -- here, take this! -- like it's a very dangerous woman.

JESSE

That's crazy.

OLIVER

"Crazy's" what we need, remember?

JESSE walks away, his "gun" squeezed to his body as if embracing it.

Dawn light.

SOUND: Murmuring of 400 men.

MERRIMAN waits. OLIVER and UTILITY 4 join them.

OLIVER

Listen to Captain Merriman. Listen up.

Everyone quiets.

MERRIMAN

Here's how it lays out. Franco's troops -- about five to six miles that way. If they move forward, they cut the Madrid-Valencia road -- and Madrid's gone. Your job? Stop Franco. That's it. That's why we're here -- as Americans, as human beings.

SOUND: Birds singing.

MERRIMAN

I have permission from General Gal to test your guns -- five shots a man.

SOUND: Birds singing.

MERRIMAN

No brave words. Just this: I am proud of you, very proud of this Abraham Lincoln Battalion -- I couldn't think of a better name for it.

(seems lost for words)

Group leaders -- organize your ranks.

Everyone raises a gun and fires.

SOUND: Volleys.

Light comes down to JESSE. JESSE fires, and the recoil almost levels him. He fires again -- the recoil less violent. By shot five, he stands firm.

Light changes to overcast grey.

Sudden silence. Then all hell breaks loose.

SOUND: Total artillery bombardment -- loud, loud, loud!

JESSE, UTILITY 2, UTILITY 6 and UTILITY 7 drop to the ground.

OLIVER scuttles up to them, carrying a "field telephone," followed by UTILITY 4 in his black beret unrolling the "wire."

OLIVER rings the phone.

OLIVER

Captain Merriman, the 24th hasn't moved a fucking inch!

OLIVER listens, then jumps up, jumps back down.

OLIVER

I don't care what General Gal said, Captain, the 24th ain't moving up!

OLIVER listens.

OLIVER

What about our artillery?

OLIVER listens, a troubled look on his face.

OLIVER

And what about our planes?

Face still troubled as he hears the answer.

OLIVER

All right, Captain -- yes. Understood. Out.

OLIVER hangs up the "phone," hands it back to UTILITY 4, who begins coiling the "wire" as he leaves.

OLIVER

(pointing)

That's where we're headed. Pingarrón Hill. Say the word -- Pingarrón. Pingarrón -- get it in your mouth, guys. Pingarrón.

JESSE & UTILITY CHARACTERS

Pingarrón. Pingarrón.

UTILITY 4 scuttles back, holding his "gun," and joins the line.

JESSE & UTILITY CHARACTERS

Pingarrón. Pingarrón.

OLIVER

We command that, we control the road. It's that simple. That's the job we Americans got to do.

OLIVER checks his watch.

Overhead, the grey breaks and sun suddenly floods the land.

As if this were a sign.

OLIVER

(shouting)

Let's go!

With a RAGGED SHOUT, OLIVER, JESSE, UTILITY 2, UTILITY 4, UTILITY 6, and UTILITY 7 rise up and take their fighting pose.

SOUND: Four hundred untrained men pouring over the parapet into

a hail of bullets until there is an ear-splitting explosion that cuts to full silence.

Lights bump to black.

* * * * *

Scene 10

Lights up on JESSE down center stage, alone.

[NOTE: The following in quotation marks is an account of the battle from Robert Rosenstone's *Crusade of the Left*. The delivery of the lines is done with passion but without histrionics.]

JESSE

"Elsewhere on the rolling hills of the battlefield, in the dips of earth and through groves of trees, the men of the Lincoln Battalion were slowly and painfully moving upon Pingarron. They were going forward into a curtain of steel as the blue sky of Spain sang with death."

Lights up on OLIVER.

OLIVER

(pointing)

We can't bunch up. Jesse, over there. You three, over there. Move it, move it, move it, move it!

JESSE

"As they went, hidden machine guns high on the right opened with a deadly crossfire."

Lights up on UTILITY 2 pinned down, utterly terrified. He starts pounding his gun to dislodge a jammed shell. OLIVER drops down beside him. JESSE watches the scene.

UTILITY 2

(pounding it)

Fucking thing's jammed, fucking thing's --

OLIVER goes to take the gun, but the man grabs it back.

UTILITY 2

Mine! Mine!

OLIVER

Gonna help you --

UTILITY 2

Keep away from me, nigger!

The two glare at each other. UTILITY 2, sudden realization in his face, hands OLIVER the rifle. OLIVER knocks the bolt loose and digs out the jammed shell. He hands it back.

OLIVER

There you go, cracker.

UTILITY 2, hyperventilating, takes the gun, laughs crazily at OLIVER's "cracker." OLIVER laughs, too, barely able to breathe steadily.

OLIVER

Gotta go.

MAN

Yeah, yeah --

Lights out on the scene. Back to JESSE.

JESSE

"Still they blundered on, the enemy's guns piling up a heavy toll as man after man slumped to earth, some dead before they hit the ground, some almost sliced in two by the intense fire."

Lights on UTILITY 6 miming a long howl of pain.

SOUND: A long howl of pain.

Lights out.

JESSE

"Those with bodies shredded by machine gun bullets writhed on the ground and screamed for the first aid men who could not reach them through the barrage."

JESSE drops to the ground, now terrified and frozen.

UTILITY 7 brings a small yellow flower which he holds in front of JESSE.

JESSE

The strangest of things get noticed. Screams. The air cracking. My face ground into the dirt. And this small, withered, yet definitely yellow flower, no larger than a dime, swims into my eye. And crawling up its stem is an ant calmly going about its business.

JESSE touches the stem of the flower.

JESSE

(to ant and flower)

Gotta go. Sorry. Gotta go.

UTILITY 7 leaves with the flower. JESSE rises.

JESSE

"Those who were still untouched deafened their ears to their comrades' cries as they pressed forward, advancing in little rushes from mound to olive tree to fold of earth, moving toward the enemy with an audacity later called 'insane.'"

JESSE, joined by UTILITY 6 and UTILITY 7, dodge, zig-zag, roll, dive, fire, scuttle, scamper, fire again -- all choreographed as if there were art in the middle of mayhem.

At one point, pitching himself to the ground, JESSE finds that the only cover is a corpse -- UTILITY 2, the man whose gun had jammed.

JESSE pulls the corpse close to him, rests his gun on the unresisting shoulder, and fires five times.

SOUND: Five gun shots.

JESSE kneels.

JESSE

"The bravest and luckiest of them even reached the naked approaches to the crest of Pingarron."

JESSE mimes slinging his gun over his shoulder, then grabs UTILITY 2 and drags him across the stage.

JESSE

"The bravest and luckiest..."

JESSE drops UTILITY 2, who sits up, dusts himself off, and leaves.

JESSE

But we never took the hill.

SOUND: A rain storm.

A gray pall falls over everything.

JESSE

The rain turned everything to mud. I could see the retreat.
I could see Oliver leading his men back through the olive
trees. So I made my way back to the trench.

JESSE drops to the floor, starts crawling. UTILITY 4, black beret still on, appeals to him.

UTILITY 4

Mi pierna. [My leg.]

JESSE

He had no fucking leg to speak of.
(to UTILITY 4)
Get on my back. Mi espalda.

JESSE indicates his back. UTILITY 4 rolls himself on top of JESSE, and JESSE dragging his gun, slithers several feet forward and then rolls him off.

JESSE

Into the hands of the medics in the trench.

UTILITY 4 sits up, brushes himself off, thanks JESSE, leaves.

MERRIMAN appears in a separate light, exhausted and dirty, his arm in a splint.

JESSE gets to his hands and knees, then rises. He pats himself all over to see that everything is intact.

He undoes his pants.

JESSE

The only thing I could think of doing to celebrate my ongoing life was to piss in the mud. But nothing came. Even that had been scared out of me.

JESSE does up his pants. Then, with slow heavy steps, he makes his way to MERRIMAN.

* * * * *

Scene 11

SOUND: Battlefield medical unit.

UTILITY 2 comes on, white apron soaked in blood, hands in rubber gloves, followed by UTILITY 5 in her nurse's uniform, blood-spattered. At an operating table, they assist UTILITY 6 as the Doctor as he mimes "operating" with a meat cleaver, a saw, a hammer, and other "surgical tools." The body parts they cut away and sew up are mimed.

On the other side of the stage, UTILITY 4 screaming -- as if UTILITY 2, UTILITY 5, and UTILITY 6 were working on him.

JESSE sees MERRIMAN's left arm splinted, his undershirt bloody and torn. UTILITY 4 goes silent. UTILITY 2, UTILITY 5, and UTILITY 6 stop, forlorn. Lights out on them. UTILITY 4 exits.

JESSE

Sir? Sir?

MERRIMAN, his glasses fogged, turns what look like blind eyes to JESSE. JESSE takes off the glasses, and using MERRIMAN's tee-shirt, cleans them and puts them back on.

MERRIMAN

Sorry, I don't know your --

JESSE

Colton. Jesse. From Mississippi.

MERRIMAN

Mississippi to Madrid.

JESSE

Yes sir. Your arm --

MERRIMAN

Bullet in the left shoulder -- bone just pfft. You?

JESSE

Still one piece. Sir -- yes or no?

MERRIMAN

It's still our road, Jesse.

UTILITY 6 and UTILITY 7 walk up.

OLIVER

Let them put him in the ambulance, Jesse.

UTILITY 6 and UTILITY 7 lead MERRIMAN away. JESSE watches them leave.

JESSE walks to OLIVER.

UTILITY 5 walks up to JESSE with a cloth and a bowl of water. JESSE washes his face, leaving a smear of blood and dirt. UTILITY 5 leaves.

OLIVER fingers through the filthy ragged clothes JESSE wears and uncovers, under the tee-shirt, the red bandana stained with sweat. OLIVER laughs.

OLIVER

Let's get you something to eat.

JESSE

How many dead?

OLIVER

Almost everybody's dead, Jesse. They almost cleaned our entire clock. Come on.

JESSE, holding his gun, simply starts to cry.

OLIVER doesn't move, doesn't touch, doesn't urge JESSE along.

SOUND: The rain falls. Transition.

* * * * *

Interlude

SOUND: The rain continues to fall.

LIGHTING: Ghost light on stage that gradually brightens to a sun-filled day.

MUSIC: "Jarama Valley," adapted from "Red River Valley" by Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie and Lee Hays, by Seeger himself and Arlo Guthrie.

* * * * *

Scene 12

Lights up to sunlight filling the plaza at Albacete.

SOUND: Water in a fountain.

JESSE, wearing clean ragged clothes, sits on a fountain, mimes soaking the red bandana, wiping his head and neck with it.

SOUND: The bandana being dipped, wrung out.

JESSE reties the bandana around his neck, soaks in the sun.

SOUND: Sounds of a concert, with shouts and whistles and stomping.

JESSE rises and simply turns upstage. He is now in a theatre. And on the stage he sees UTILITY 5 as DOÑA IBÁRRURI.

SOUND: A noisy concert hall.

DOÑA IBÁRRURI sees JESSE enter and calms down the audience. She points at JESSE.

[NOTE: When characters speak in Spanish, they speak accented English.]

DOÑA IBÁRRURI

Come, friend. Come here.

At that moment, LUZ BAROJA Y NESSI walks in and puts her arm though JESSE's arm.

LUZ

Do you know what Doña Ibárruri is saying?

JESSE

No.

LUZ

Then I will translate for you.

JESSE

Am I gonna have to say her name?

LUZ

Can you roll your "r's"?

JESSE

Never rolled an "r" in my life.

LUZ

Then just hang on -- I'll roll them for you. Let's go.

LUZ escorts JESSE to DOÑA IBÁRRURI, who takes JESSE's other arm. As DOÑA IBÁRRURI speaks, LUZ leans in to JESSE as if she is translating.

DOÑA IBÁRRURI

Mothers! Women! Men! Children! When we have once again a present of freedom, love and well-being, felt equally by all Spaniards, then give thanks to him.

With that, she points at JESSE, and the crowd goes wild.

SOUND: Crowd going wild.

SOUND: Someone begins singing the following song, joined in by everyone else except JESSE. DOÑA IBÁRRURI and LUZ sing lustily.

CROWD

Si los curas y fieles supieran la paliza que van a llevar,
estarían todo el día gritando:

"Libertad, libertad, libertad"

[If the priests and the faithful knew the beating they will get,
they would be shouting all day long, "Freedom, freedom,
freedom"]

Si los reyes de España supieran lo poquito que iban a
durar, subirían al trono gritando:

"Libertad, libertad, libertad."

[If the king and queen of Spain knew how short they'd last,
they would raise to the throne shouting, "Freedom, freedom,
freedom"]

Yo me cago en la manzanilla que bebió Queipo de Llano.

En la madre y el hermano de Franco y en Franco mismo.

[I shit on the manzanilla that Queipo de Llano drunk. And I
shit on the mother and the brother and on Franco himself.]

Yo me cago en el reinado de Juan Carlos de Borbón, en la
iglesia disoluta y en los cien mil hijos de puta que adoran
la religión.

[I shit on the kingdom of Juan Carlos de Borbón, on the
dissipated Church and the one hundred thousand sons of
bitches that adore religion.]

Si los curas y fieles supieran la paliza que van a llevar,
estarían todo el día gritando:

"Libertad, libertad, libertad"

[If the priests and the faithful knew the beating they will get, they would be shouting all day long, "Freedom, freedom, freedom"]

Si los reyes de España supieran lo poquito que iban a durar, subirían al trono gritando:

"Libertad, libertad, libertad."

[If the king and queen of Spain knew how short they'd last, they would raise to the throne shouting, "Freedom, freedom, freedom"]

SOUND: More wild cheering.

DOÑA IBÁRRURI quiets everyone down again. When silent, she turns to JESSE and speaks to him. The crowd, as one, speaks to JESSE.

DOÑA IBÁRRURI & CROWD

Gracias por todo.

SOUND: Crowd saying "gracias por todo"

DOÑA IBÁRRURI

Thank you for everything.

Arm in arm, LUZ and JESSE leave the theatre and come to a café, where UTILITY 7, as a WAITER, sets the table for them.

* * * * *

Scene 13

JESSE and LUZ sit. LUZ gestures to the WAITER, who leaves to get coffee.

JESSE

That song they were singing?
(trying to pronounce)

"Libertad, libertad" --

LUZ

"Liberty, liberty, liberty."

JESSE

I got that much -- I mean, about the other words --

LUZ

Something stupid about priests and shitting in someone's manzanilla and sons of bitches in the church -- like they always sing -- like they always sing --

LUZ trails off, stares into the distance. JESSE gives her shy glances. His leg jitters. The WAITER brings "coffee." LUZ pays him.

JESSE

Hey, I can --

LUZ waves him away. The WAITER leaves.

JESSE

Well, thank you -- that was nice -- what they did -- what you did --

JESSE trails off when he sees LUZ is not listening to him. Suddenly, she turns and faces him.

LUZ

What are you doing here?

JESSE

(keeping it light)

Having cof[fee] --

LUZ

What are you doing here? Here! In God-forsaken [Spain] --

JESSE

I'm fighting to keep your government [alive] --

LUZ

As bad as all the others. Come on. Next you will say "fascism." Come on.

JESSE

I am fighting against fascism --

LUZ

See -- I told you. Fascism -- a noun. A word. A gobble-gobble-gobble like a turkey. And this "word" -- this is why you were put on this earth? To come save a government full of tired depressed old men, like my father, the diplomat extraordinaire -- You will go off and be killed for old bones and rusted nails --

JESSE digs his Communist Party card out of his pouch, slides it across the table.

JESSE

Not just your "government," Luz Baroja y Nessi --

JESSE taps the Party card. LUZ picks it up.

JESSE

Bigger than just "government" --

LUZ

El comunista --

LUZ tosses the card onto the table. JESSE slides it back.

JESSE

It's about a whole world --

UTILITY 1 as MARLEY COLTON appears, noose around neck, bloody dress. LUZ looks at her, walks up to her.

JESSE

That is my wife, Marley --

LUZ

I'm sorry.

JESSE

Murdered -- hanged --

LUZ

Jesse --

JESSE

By people where I come from --

LUZ caresses MARLEY's face.

JESSE

-- who don't have a dime's worth of difference between themselves and this Hitler or Mussolini --

LUZ kisses MARLEY on the cheek. MARLEY exits. LUZ sits.

LUZ

Sssh.

JESSE

So I don't forget.

LUZ

Sssh. Sssh.

JESSE puts away the Party card.

JESSE

Maybe why I'm on this earth is to ask you why you're on this earth.

LUZ

You know what we say about Communists?

LUZ hawks up a gob of spit and expertly lobs it. This takes JESSE completely by surprise. She smiles.

LUZ

Spit anywhere around here, you hit a Communist.

JESSE

Glad it went over there --

LUZ

Only the anarchists ever really know what's what.

JESSE looks at the gob of spit, still fascinated. LUZ gives him a direct playful Cheshire Cat half-smile.

LUZ

I have many other such anarchist skills.

JESSE

And as "comunista" I'm supposed to hate anarchists.

LUZ

All?

JESSE

Maybe it's not a good idea to hate anarchists at all.

LUZ puts her hand on his forearm, pats it, rests her hand there. JESSE looks at the hand, then at LUZ.

LUZ gestures to him to lean towards her. Hesitantly, JESSE leans toward her. She touches his hair.

LUZ

Hair -- the mind underneath it --

LUZ winds a piece of JESSE's hair around her finger.

LUZ

It's so --

JESSE

Nappy -- it's called nappy --

LUZ

Nappy!

(softer)

Nappy.

LUZ hesitates, then strokes his cheek, his nose.

LUZ

Not only about ideals, Jesse Colton.

JESSE leans into her touch, then pulls away.

JESSE

Maybe the ideals come out as stupid to you --

LUZ

No --

JESSE

But in the time I been here -- I felt more like a man than ever. That, Luz Baroja y Nessi -- from where I come from, that is not nothing.

LUZ lays her hand on the table, wiggles her fingers to get JESSE to give her his hand -- which he does.

LUZ

When do you have to leave?

JESSE

Soon -- we start our training --

LUZ

Can I show you something?

LUZ gets up, holding on to JESSE's hand.

LUZ

(playfully)

It's not that! Come with me.

They get up from the table. Arm in arm they cross the stage. UTILITY 7 removes the table and chairs.

They come to UTILITY 2, now the BLIND OLD POET, sitting in a chair and reciting to a "gathered crowd." He speaks underneath LUZ's lines.

POET

(reciting quietly)

...así, que casi me es forzoso seguir por su camino, y por él tengo de ir a pesar de todo el mundo...

LUZ

(whispering)

They call him El Caballero -- the Knight, the Gentleman.

JESSE points to his own eyes, and LUZ nods yes.

POET

(reciting quietly)

... , y será en balde cansaros en persuadirme a que no quiera yo lo que los cielos quieren, la fortuna ordena y la razón pide, y, sobre todo, mi voluntad desea; pues con saber, como sé, los innumerables trabajos que son anejos a la andante caballería, sé también los infinitos bienes que se alcanzan con ella...

LUZ

(whispering)

He's reciting Don Quijote de la Mancha. Our Bible. By heart. When the fever comes upon him, he just has to speak it out to us -- Look around you -- isn't this beautiful? All at once listening to this beautiful old man -- all at peace -- soldiers -- peasants -- the butcher --

LUZ pulls JESSE around to face her directly.

LUZ

(whispering)

This is why I was put on this earth. This is why.

LUZ turns JESSE away, and they find themselves in a room where sunlight shines through the slatted shutters. UTILITY 2 moves the chair to the room, leaves.

LUZ slowly unties JESSE's red bandana, slides it off, lays it on the chair.

LUZ unbuttons JESSE's shirt, puts her hands on his chest. JESSE touches her face. She leans forward to kiss him, but as her lips touch his, JESSE starts crying without restraint.

She sits. JESSE kneels and lays his head in her lap.

JESSE

I'm sorry.

LUZ

Sssh.

LUZ strokes his back and lullabies him.

LUZ

Sssh. Sssh. Porque el del vicio de la virtud, angosto y trabajoso, acaba en vida, y no en vida que se acaba, sino en la que no tendrá fin...

Her voice soothing him, her hand stroking his hair.

LUZ

For the narrow and exhausting road of virtue, Jesse Colton, ends in life, and not momentary life, but in life which has no end... Sssh, El Caballero.

LUZ strokes his nappy hair.

SOUND: A convoy truck.

Lights up on OLIVER, by the truck. JESSE stands, buttons his shirt, takes the bandana. LUZ and JESSE stand close to each other, then face the truck. OLIVER sees them.

LUZ touches his hair, then takes a book out of her own bag and gives it to him. She puts her hand on his shoulder and, with soft pressure, turns him and gently pushes him toward OLIVER. LUZ laughs.

LUZ

Your brother?

JESSE
(sheepish)

Oliver, Luz Baroja y Nessi.

OLIVER shakes LUZ's hand.

OLIVER

His Spanish is better already. But I have to steal him from you.

LUZ

Adios, Caballero.

JESSE reaches back to touch her cheek but hesitates. She grabs his hand and lays it against her face, then lets it go. She turns and leaves without looking back.

OLIVER looks at JESSE watching the figure of LUZ disappear.

OLIVER

What's the book?

JESSE

Don Quijote [pronounced "quih-hoat"].

OLIVER

(correctly)

Quijote. Wait till you get to the part about Dulcinea.

Transition to the Battalion.

* * * * *

Scene 14

The Battalion at dinner in a barn. UTILITY 1 as NURSE; UTILITY 2 as SOLDIER; UTILITY 3 as MERRIMAN; UTILITY 4 as SOLDIER; UTILITY 5 as NURSE; UTILITY 6 and UTILITY 7 as SOLDIERS; JESSE.

OLIVER stands next to MERRIMAN, who stands on the chair. He still has his splint.

MERRIMAN

Pardon my broken wing here. And thank you very much for laughing at it. First -- and always -- I am proud of you and the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. No deep speeches -- you each know your own private devils. I am just glad I'm with you. Oliver --

OLIVER steps forward.

MERRIMAN

Tonight I'm making official what most of you already know -- I'm getting kicked upstairs as chief of staff. It bothers me to leave you, but you're going to be in good hands.

OLIVER helps him get off the chair.

MERRIMAN

See, I really am stepping down. Oliver, the command of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion is now yours.

JESSE jumps up on the chair and waves his arms for silence.

JESSE

Hold up! Hold up! Grab sumpin, y'all, and give up an "amen."

They all raise their "glasses."

JESSE

To Oliver Lumet -- not just because he's a goddamn good soldier who's saved our asses, which needed a lot of saving.

SOLDIER

The fucking truth.

JESSE

Do y'all realize what is happening here? Captain Merriman, do you know? Oliver Lumet, you are the first black man in our country's history who gets to tell white soldiers what to do -- and they gotta do it. We all gotta do it. We -- we -- are the real American army. As mongrel as mongrel can get. To Oliver. Because of you, Franco is gonna kiss our saved asses and whatever else he finds down there.

JESSE and OLIVER toast each other.

SOUND: Intense artillery bombardment.

* * * * *

Scene 15

Without hurry, the men finish the toast and move into place for the next battle. MERRIMAN takes off his splint, now becomes a SOLDIER. UTILITY 1 and UTILITY 5 as NURSES wait upstage, the MEN gather downstage.

[NOTE: All movement in this scene is stylized and choreographed.]

OLIVER scans his troops.

OLIVER

When I move, everyone moves! We do that, Brunete will be ours!

OLIVER looks at his watch. He waves his arms to the right, and then to the left.

The men grab their "guns." All eyes forward, all mouths set.

OLIVER steps out of his cover. The MEN step with him. As they do, each one takes a stylized combat pose. In slow motion they move into their next pose. And then their next. Lighting from underneath casts their faces with shadows.

SOUND: More intense firing and artillery, screams of pain.

The MEN hold their classic fighting positions. Then a bullet slams into OLIVER's chest.

SOUND: Complete and utter silence.

OLIVER holds his contorted position for several beats, then collapses into the arms of JESSE, UTILITY 2, and UTILITY 3. UTILITY 4 exits.

The NURSES slowly move downstage. UTILITY 6 and UTILITY 7 join JESSE, UTILITY 2, and UTILITY 3 to get OLIVER to safety. As they do, an invisible SNIPER fires on them, causing them to swerve and duck. The NURSES move without flinching.

SOUND: Individual sniper fire.

Everyone finally meets downstage. The SOLDIERS lay OLIVER down, the NURSES kneel.

JESSE

(indicating stretcher)

It's the battalion commander.

UTILITY 5 reaches inside OLIVER's shirt and pulls away a bloody hand. Everyone reaches in and pulls away a bloody hand.

UTILITY 5

We have to get back --

JESSE gets up to leave.

UTILITY 1

We could use you here.

JESSE shakes his head no. He smears OLIVER's blood on his face, walks upstage. Lights out on everyone except JESSE.

JESSE raises his gun, aims. Changes focus with a snap. Changes focus again with a snap. Changes focus again with a snap.

Lights up downstage left. UTILITY 4, wearing the red and yellow of Franco's army pinned above his heart, stands on the chair as a SNIPER in a tree. JESSE sees him. The SNIPER does not see him. JESSE aims. Lights to black.

SOUND: A single gunshot with echoes.

MUSIC: As lights comes up, "Himno de Riego."

INTERMISSION

Scene 16

SOUND: Insects in the hot afternoon.

SNIPER is on the ground, JESSE over him.

JESSE stares into the terrified dark sweating face of a Moor from the Army of Africa. His legs twist underneath him, his head cocked at a grotesque angle.

JESSE pulls a "knife" from the SNIPER's belt.

SNIPER

(hoarsely)

No, no -- mi cuello -- está roto.

(straining)

My neck. It broke. Broke.

JESSE touches the point of the knife to the palms of the SNIPER's hands -- no response.

SNIPER

No, no -- por favor, no --

JESSE touches the knife to the SNIPER's neck, moves the head just slightly, lets the head roll back.

SNIPER

Negro. Black. Black. Brother. Hermano.

JESSE places the knife tip against the colors over the SNIPER's breast.

SNIPER

No, no, no, no --

JESSE rams the "knife" through the SNIPER's heart.

The SNIPER lets out a sharp exhale, dies.

SOUND: A sharp exhale.

JESSE stares at the open dead eyes.

SOUND: The woods erupt with buzzing and chirping and sawing, louder and louder and louder and louder.

JESSE

Marley Marley Marley Marley Marley --

Until his breathing slows down, his hands stop shaking. The high-pitched sizzling fades away to the silence of the hot windless woods.

He takes the SNIPER's "knife," hooks it to his belt, walks off.

* * * * *

Scene 17

An enormous explosion blows him off his feet.

SOUND: An enormous explosion.

JESSE gets to his feet, finds he's bleeding from shrapnel in his right side.

UTILITY 2, UTILITY 6, and UTILITY 7, as three of Franco's NATIONALIST SOLDIERS, step out, guns raised, and stop him. But they see his black face and lower their guns.

SOLDIER 1

A Fucking Moor.

SOLDIER 2

The fighting's that way, cobarte.

JESSE grins stupidly, shows them his bloody hand.

SOLDIER 3

I didn't know monkeys could bleed.

SOLDIER 1 comes over, looks at JESSE's side, sees the tip of the shrapnel. He reaches into his bag and comes up with a "pair of pliers." He grabs the tip of the "shrapnel" and pulls it out, then drops it into JESSE's hand.

SOLIDER 1

Hey, monkey, take it back to your filthy little village.

(to others)

Come on.

They leave JESSE and move toward the battle.

JESSE takes the bandana and stuffs it into his shirt to cover the wound, puts the "shrapnel" in his pouch, moves away from the battle.

JESSE wanders. Lights down to a bare ghost light.

In the ghost light, shadows move in closer to him.

SOUND: Water.

JESSE finds the water, scoops some into his mouth, then falls backward, overcome. The shadows move in closer, hover over him. JESSE reaches up.

JESSE

Quijote?

* * * * *

Scene 18

SOUND: Wind.

Sitting by JESSE is UTILITY 2 as JAMES, UTILITY 1 as AWAGU.

JESSE rises, but the pain in his left side stops him. The stained red bandana hangs from his neck.

JAMES speaks in his thick Irish accent.

JAMES

Like a babe from his mama's twat.

LUZ enters.

LUZ

A niño, yes -- he wants to fight to protect the government.

JAMES

You know him?

LUZ

From Albacete.

(to JESSE)

Hey, nappy. I told you it was a new world.

(to the others)

He's American.

AWAGU spits into the dust.

AWAGU

Another American?

JAMES looks around.

JAMES

Where is our baby Hemingway?

A SHOUT. Instantly, JAMES, AWAGU, and LUZ grab their weapons.

Walking into view, a "dead rabbit" in each hand, a smile across his face is UTILITY 3 as DEWEY MARLOWE, a battered fedora on his head, kit bag slung across his shoulder. He looks completely happy.

DEWEY

Two Bugs Bunnies -- anybody for lunch?

JAMES

You're a bloody idiot.

AWAGU takes the "rabbits."

MARLOWE

But undeniably handsome.

AWAGU

I agree with James.

MARLOWE

But you'll eat my rabbits.

AWAGU

We will eat your rabbits.

MARLOWE

Then handsome is as handsome does.

AWAGU exits. MARLOWE slings his bag around, rummages through it.

MARLOWE

(to LUZ)

And what is your opinion, "luz" of my life?

LUZ

I think it's nice we have a mascot.

MARLOWE pulls a notebook and a pencil from his kit bag.

MARLOWE

He's awake, it looks like.

MARLOWE sits in front of JESSE, flips a few pages, licks his pencil tip, stares at JESSE. AWAGU enters, wiping her hands.

JAMES

Oop, here goes Hemingway again.

MARLOWE

Do not use that infidel's name in my presence -- holed up in Madrid --

(to JESSE)

Now, tell me what happened at Brunete --

JESSE

Who are you?

(to LUZ)

Who is he?

(to MARLOWE)

And why are you asking me questions?

MARLOWE

You're American, Luz told me --

LUZ

Jesse Colton, for better or for worse, meet Dewey Marlowe.

MARLOWE

But an American from where? Inquiring minds want to [know] --

JESSE

Mississippi. And why are you fucking asking me questions?

MARLOWE

You kill -- I preserve. Now --

AWAGU

Just like I put salt on the rabbits --

MARLOWE

Awagu --

AWAGU

-- our dewy American here --

MARLOWE

Awagu --

AWAGU

-- saves the carcasses. Ain't that right, querido?

MARLOWE

I get no respect. Now --

JESSE

Awagu?

AWAGU

Ethiopian.

JESSE points at LUZ.

JESSE

You I know.

JESSE points to JAMES, taps his own ear.

JESSE

Can't hear where you're from --

JAMES

Bangor, outside of Belfast, Ireland -- and a Catholic, which makes me a nigger in the Emerald Isle.

LUZ

There are others -- around -- keeping watch.

MARLOWE

Could we, please -- I'm working -- now, we saved your bacon from the --

JAMES

This white man just called the black man a pig part.

MARLOWE

Did not.

LUZ

(to JESSE)

We took you from the Local Falange -- the Carlistos --

MARLOWE
(writing)

Falange -- right --

LUZ

Not soldiers, really -- just people who wait for Franco their Savior.

JAMES

Franco the snake.

MARLOWE
(finishing writing)

Carlitos -- great. Now, Brunete --

JESSE

Brunete.

MARLOWE

Yeah.

JESSE

My best friend Oliver -- Lumet -- L-U-M-E-T --

MARLOWE
(overlapping)

M-E-T -- okay --

JESSE

Had his heart blown open running up Mosquito Hill.

LUZ

The one I met.

JESSE

The one you met. For your government.

(to MARLOWE)

A sniper pinned us down when we took Oliver for medical help.

JESSE pauses.

SOUND: Ravens.

Everyone looks up and around at the interruption, waits. Nothing. Everyone turns back to JESSE.

JESSE

I went back for him. The sniper. I shot him, he fell -- broke his neck. No danger to anyone. But I took a knife -- where's my knife?

LUZ

It's still on your belt.

JESSE

Where is it?

LUZ

It's there.

JESSE holds up the "knife."

JESSE

And I shoved it through a defenseless man's heart.

MARLOWE scribbles in his pad.

JAMES

He was the enemy -- the one you came to fight.

AWAGU

The thing that was the right thing to do.

JESSE

(looking at LUZ)

Then why do I feel like --

AWAGU holds up her hand, and everyone falls silent. AWAGU listens, smells the air.

AWAGU

The dead are on the march.

LUZ

Come on, comrades, let's move it.

Everyone stands. MARLOWE gives JESSE a hand up.

JAMES

Plan B, as you Yanks say.

AWAGU, JAMES, and LUZ move off.

MARLOWE

I got a million questions.

JESSE

Shut the fuck up.

(gasping)

I don't have to give you nothing.

MARLOWE

(hitching up his load)

Who said anything about "have to," man? Come on, at least give me your arm.

JESSE throws his arm across MARLOWE's shoulder.

MARLOWE

We're all about anarchist liberty around here -- even if it kills us. Come on.

The two of them move off. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 19

Lights up on UTILITY 4 as MAYOR and UTILITY 5 as ISABEL. They have their "guns" raised.

MAYOR

Don't take another step!

SOUND: Sniper fire throughout scene.

MAYOR and ISABEL flinch, and flinch each time the sniper fires, but they don't take their aim off LUZ, JAMES, AWAGU, MARLOWE, and JESSE.

MAYOR

Anarquista, comunista, o socialista?

LUZ approaches with hand raised, black bandana in her hand.

LUZ

Somos anarquistas.

MARLOWE

(whispering)

And the dice are rolled.

The MAYOR points at JESSE, at his bandana.

LUZ

(to JESSE)

Take it off.

She hands him her black bandana. JESSE takes off the red, stuffs it into his pocket, puts on the black. The MAYOR lowers his gun.

MAYOR

Good answer. We need your help.

LUZ

You have it, señor.

MARLOWE takes a Leica (or something that looks like a Leica) from his kit bag.

MARLOWE

(to JESSE)

Gunning for Robert Capa, too.

JAMES

His huevos are bigger than his brain -- which wouldn't be hard.

MAYOR

Sniper up in the church tower.

ISABEL

Soldiers in the oligarch's house --

(spits)

-- like they're Don Valera's fucking personal bodyguards.

MARLOWE

(whispering to JESSE)

Sniper up there -- and she hates the landowner.

MAYOR

I think it is time for a housecleaning.

AWAGU

They must've got cut off.

JAMES

And so nothing to lose. All right. Awagu, the landowner or the sniper?

JESSE

I'll get the sniper.

MAYOR

What did he say?

JESSE looks at the MAYOR, points to himself, points to the tower.

LUZ

This doesn't have to be your fight.

JESSE

Right, Dulcinea -- that's where you're wrong.

MAYOR points to JESSE, then the tower.

MAYOR

(to LUZ)

Yes or no?

JESSE

Yes. Sí.

MAYOR

That is a word I like.

JAMES

Awagu, I guess we're stuck lugging back the filthy rich. See you for dinner.

JAMES and AWAGU move out.

MAYOR

We have to go.

(to JESSE)

There's a door at the back, and windows.

JESSE

Una puerta -- door, right? Ventanas?

LUZ

Windows. At the back of the church.

The MAYOR gives JESSE an embrace, as does ISABEL, and they both move out.

LUZ turns to JESSE. JESSE gets himself ready. MARLOWE hovers around them, camera in hand, kit bag slung over his shoulder.

JESSE

I'll have to get inside.

LUZ

A door and windows. So you've been reading my book.

JESSE

Yes. And why am I gonna do this?

LUZ pulls JESSE to one side so that MARLOWE can't hear, though he desperately wants to.

LUZ

You have been re-born -- you have found me again -- you're fighting for something real now -- don't let Oliver die for nothing -- your Marley -- how much better do you want life to be?

LUZ and JESSE share a look. Then JESSE picks up his "gun," checks himself one more time.

MARLOWE

I want in on this.

JESSE

You have a gun?

MARLOWE holds up his camera.

JESSE

That's it?

MARLOWE

I have to go with you.

JESSE

Is that all you got?

MARLOWE

Pistol in the bag.

JESSE

Then put the fucking pistol in your belt. Make sure you know the difference between the two if you have to save my ass.

(pointing to camera)

Got any dead bodies in it?

MARLOWE

Not up close.

JESSE

Christ.

(to LUZ)

Tell the Mayor -- on my signal, have everyone pour fire up there for cover.

LUZ touches JESSE's cheek, then leaves.

MARLOWE

Man, you are so lucky.

JESSE

Get in my way, I will shoot you.

MARLOWE

Get in my way, and I'll shoot you, too.

JESSE

I met Hemingway -- he's no great shakes.

MARLOWE

My thoughts exactly.

JESSE

And neither are you.

MARLOWE

You don't know about my "shakes" -- you don't know this yet, but you need me. You don't know it yet, but you will.

JESSE

Just stay out of my way, white boy.

MARLOWE

You're so full of shit.

JESSE raises his hand and then drops it.

SOUND: Gunfire erupts.

* * * * *

Scene 20

Time shift: JESSE has the gun pointed at the SNIPER.

SOUND: Gunfire stops.

[NOTE: The SNIPER's presence is mimed. The audience becomes the SNIPER.]

JESSE
(to SNIPER)

No.

(to MARLOWE)

Tell him to put the gun down.

MARLOWE

Deja esa arma -- bajála.

JESSE

Good. Tell him to raise his hands.

MARLOWE

Levanta los brazos.

JESSE

Good. Bueno.

Without hesitation, JESSE shoots the SNIPER.

SOUND: A single gunshot.

MARLOWE

No!

A frozen moment between the two of them, their eyes locked.

JESSE, hard-faced, nods toward the corpse.

MARLOWE lifts his camera, takes four shots, each from a different angle.

JESSE takes off the black bandana, steps to the parapet, waves it.

JESSE then puts his gun down, takes the SNIPER by the lapels of his uniform, and slides him up the wall.

MARLOWE

What're you doing?

JESSE now has the body almost over the parapet.

MARLOWE

You can't just dump him --

JESSE gives him a dead-eyed stare.

MARLOWE stuffs the camera into his bag. He walks over to the body and grabs it out of JESSE's hands and heaves the body over his shoulder.

MARLOWE

He was somebody's son, still goddamn it a human being.

MARLOWE settles the corpse on his shoulder.

MARLOWE

Fucking guys, their fucking ideals --

MARLOWE and the body turn upstage. The MAYOR and ISABEL appear, with LUZ. MARLOWE dumps the body, and the MAYOR and ISABEL methodically pulp the corpse with their rifle butts.

MARLOWE and LUZ move away from the mutilation. Lights out on the MAYOR and ISABEL.

JESSE joins them. JESSE lays a hand on MARLOWE's shoulder, squeezes it. MARLOWE shrugs it off.

LUZ

James and Awagu extracted the patrón and his family -- it took the people all of five minutes to put them against the wall and shoot them. Several times. Along with the priest.

MARLOWE walks off, camera in hand.

JESSE

Where are you going?

MARLOWE

Got space for more bodies.

MARLOWE leaves.

JESSE

Now what?

LUZ

As usual -- after a cleansing slaughter, being anarchists, they'll have a meeting about it.

* * * * *

Scene 21

Four chairs and a table. The audience is the rest of the village. UTILITY 6 will play LARGO; UTILITY 7 will play BELLARMINO, wearing an eye patch. LUZ translates for JESSE. JAMES and AWAGU to the side.

The MAYOR bangs the table to get everyone's attention.

MAYOR

All right -- here are my words. The priest is gone, Don Valera is gone, but the land is still here. What do we do?

JESSE leans down to LUZ to listen. MARLOWE, overhearing, leans into them both.

MARLOWE

(exaggerated drawl)

They're breakin' up the plantation, boy.

JESSE looks at MARLOWE, then LUZ. LUZ nods yes. MARLOWE nods yes.

LARGO raises his hand.

MAYOR

Largo, don't hold your tongue.

LARGO

The patrón's land -- we could divide it up --

SOUND: General murmurs of agreement.

LARGO

(encouraged)

And give a piece to Francisco over there, and Juan --

BELARMINO hisses in disgust.

BELARMINO

(points to patch)

I got this in Asturias, in 1934, and it gives me the right to call you a shit!

SOUND: Murmur of shock and pleasure.

MAYOR

Everyone be quiet.

LARGO

(appealing to MAYOR)

Alcalde --

BELARMINO

(appealing to CROWD)

Of course Largo wants to chop it up and give it out to everyone who's already got land because he really wants to be Don Valera himself. Always with his airs --

ISABEL slams her hand down.

ISABEL

And always a goddamn pissing contest between you two.

LARGO

I have the right to keep my land and get more if it if I can!

ISABEL

Not any more.

(to CROWD)

And you all know it, too. Not going to do it that way any more.

SOUND: Crowd murmuring.

ISABEL

The choice is as plain as the hairs in your nose.

LARGO

What choice?

ISABEL

We either do it the old way or we don't.

LARGO

I don't disagree -- new ways are good.

ISOBEL

Wipe it all away.

LARGO

But people like me, owning what we own, we can be more efficient --

ISABEL

And make more money -- that's all you and Francisco and Juan --

LARGO

What's wrong with --

ISABEL

-- and the ones like you want --

LARGO

What's wrong with making --

ISABEL

"Making more money" -- there are better things in life. There is working together for the greater [good] --

LARGO

Oop, now she's in her pulpit!

ISABEL

A nasty thing to say to an atheist!

SOUND: Laughter.

BELARMINO

Pay attention! You think Franco's shits care about fine points? They want the old ways, and they'll kill us to bring them back. I say this: the patrón's land belongs to all of us. It has always belonged to all of us because it was our sweat that made it rich. And I say this, too --

(pointing to LARGO)

-- your land now belongs to us.

(to JUAN and FRANCISCO)

And yours, too. No more private property -- collectivize!

LARGO

That's not right!

(appealing to MAYOR)

That's not right!

SOUND: Everyone talks at once.

LARGO appeals, ISABEL and BELLARMINO also make their points overlapping.

BELLARMINO

Collectivize or die -- that's it, that's all of it --

ISABEL

No more making some pig fatter --

LARGO

I am not a pig, and I will not put up with --

The MAYOR pounds the table again and again.

A tense silence falls.

The MAYOR turns to JESSE, LUZ, JAMES, AWAGU, and MARLOWE. He points to JESSE as he speaks to the crowd. LUZ translates for JESSE.

MAYOR

This man was a slave in his own country and he comes to fight for us. What you do think we should do?

LUZ translates the MAYOR's words. MARLOWE writes.

JESSE, sheepish, steps forward into the silence. LUZ translates.

JESSE

I don't think I have the right to say anything here.

LUZ

No creo tener derecho a decir nada en este asunto.

MAYOR

(to LUZ)

He defended us -- that makes him one of us.

LUZ

(to JESSE)

You fight -- you get to talk.

JESSE

A story, then -- un cuento. You can do what you want with it.

(to LUZ)

Tell them as I tell it. Once I had four uncles -- cuatro tíos --

LUZ

Yo tenía cuatro tíos ---

JESSE

-- with my father they owned land together.

LUZ

Con mi padre ellos compartían la propiedad de algunos terrenos.

JESSE

They shared everything -- good, bad, money, sorrow -- everything.

LUZ

Lo compartían todo -- lo bueno, lo malo, el dinero, las tristezas --- todo.

JESSE

All I can tell you is that it was the happiest time of my life.

LUZ

Lo que puedo decirte con certeza es que fueron los tiempos más felices de mi vida.

JESSE

Not easy. They fought like dogs about everything. But nobody was at the mercy. Nobody was alone. Nobody went hungry.

LUZ

No fueron fáciles. Peleaban como perros por cualquier cosa. Pero nadie estaba sin amparo. Nadie estaba solo. Nadie sufría de hambre alguna.

BELARMINO

¿Qué les sucedió?

LUZ

What happened to them?

JESSE

Our own fascists took the land from them.

LUZ

Nuestros propios fascistas les quitaron la tierra.

JESSE

It's an old story in my country.

LUZ

Es una vieja historia en nuestro país.

The MAYOR points to the rest of the crew.

MAYOR

¿Qué va con el resto de ustedes?

JAMES, laughing, gives the anarchist salute, as does AWAGU. LUZ, looking at JESSE, also gives the salute. JESSE gives the salute. ISABEL and BELLARMINO give the salute. LARGO does not.

The MAYOR, slamming the table again, stands and gives the salute.

MAYOR

All right -- the time has come. We vote, eh? Land and freedom, or land and money.

LARGO

That's not fair!

MAYOR

Land and freedom?

Everybody but LARGO.

MAYOR

Land and money?

LARGO only.

MAYOR

We collectivize!

SOUND: Applause, shouts of approval.

JESSE looks at LUZ, and she smiles as if completely satisfied.

MUSIC: The chorus of "A Las Mujeres":

Debeis las mujeres colaborar,
en la hermosa obra de la humanidad;
mujeres, mujeres, necesitamos vuestra unión
el día que estalle nuestra grande revolución.
Hermanas que amais con fe la libertad
habeis de crear la nueva sociedad...
El sol de gloria que nos tiene que cubrir
a todos en dulce vivir.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 22

Campfire.

JESSE, JAMES, LUZ, AWAGU stare into the fire. MARLOWE wears his fedora, scribbles in his notebook.

Overhead, at a great height, they hear planes.

SOUND: Planes.

JAMES

Heinkels. Not good.

(to JESSE)

So that's what your fellow communists, your comrade Stalinists, are doing.

LUZ

James -- let's let today --

JESSE

That's not true.

MARLOWE

Yes it is.

JAMES

The man does not even know himself.

LUZ

Leave him alone.

JAMES

They're killing off the anarchists, chum --

MARLOWE

It's true.

JAMES

They're cutting the balls off the socialists, and even cannibalizing themselves --

JESSE

You're wrong.

MARLOWE

It's true.

JAMES

And they're killing off the revolution.

JESSE

That can't be true.

JAMES

Then let it not be true for you.

(to MARLOWE)

Hey, Hemingway --

MARLOWE

Marlowe --

JAMES

Who in the land of pig-faced capitalism is gonna want to read about a bunch of anarchists? They shoot anarchists there, too!

An embarrassed moment. JAMES looks hard at JESSE.

JAMES

I got the wine in my tongue --

AWAGU

And your head.

JAMES

-- but it's still true. You watch -- you know we're on the chopping block. We are all alone out here. It's hard when you love something so much -- an idea you'll die for -- then to have these fucking "comrades" --

AWAGU

I just want to kill Italians for Ethiopia.

JAMES

For me -- they're all Brit wankers from northern Ireland!

(to JESSE)

And you? Who are these fuckers to you?

JESSE stares into the fire. LUZ puts a hand on his arm.

JESSE

White people hung my wife from a tree and burned her to ashes.

MARLOWE closes his notebook.

MARLOWE

And that's why they're not going to want to know about any of you suckers. A Negro whose wife was lynched fighting for freedom in a foreign land against white folks -- that is primo stuff.

JESSE gets up and walks off into the darkness.

JAMES

Your bedside manner's a fucking marvel to behold.

MARLOWE

I learned everything from you.

SOUND: The crackling of the fire.

LUZ follows JESSE.

JESSE

Is James telling the truth?

LUZ

Yes. Jailing and killing all the anarchists they can get their hands on -- orders from Stalin -- militia units like ours either have to join the army or we get no weapons, ammunition, supplies -- I'm not supposed to even be carrying a gun -- yes, me! -- women are being turned back into maids --

JESSE

I am so far from home.

MARLOWE

Mind if I join you?

LUZ

You're already here.

MARLOWE

The world out there thinks "the war for ideals." "The war of poets." There's no revolution here -- the Communists have choked that off.

LUZ

Not all of it.

MARLOWE

That village? How long do you think they'll last, Luz? Franco could spit on us, he's so close. And the Communists? From Valencia soon enough.

JESSE

Enough!

LUZ puts a hand on him, then walks back to the fire.

MARLOWE

I wrote about a lynching once -- I am really sorry about your wife, Jesse. What a country, huh?

MARLOWE starts to walk away, then turns back.

MARLOWE

Today -- up in the tower --

But JESSE is crying.

MARLOWE comes back. He pulls down his shirt sleeve and uses the end of it to wipe JESSE's face.

JESSE moves MARLOWE's hand away.

JESSE

You write all this down. Everything. All of it.

MARLOWE

I'm gonna write the truths that people tell me. I'm hoping that covers it. Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable -- that's me -- I hope. That's my civil war.

MARLOWE walks back to the fire.

SOUND: A convoy of trucks grumbling along.

JESSE quickly moves back to the fire just as JAMES stamps it out.

JAMES

The fascists have arrived.

MARLOWE

But they're coming from Valencia.

JAMES

You're right. Say hello to Stalin. Say goodbye too.

SOUND: Now gunfire and screams.

LUZ

We can't stay here.

AWAGU

There is not any place we can stay.

A flashlight catches them all in its beam. UTILITY 4, wearing the Republican uniform, a red star on his hat, "pistol" raised.

UTILITY 4

El que se mueve, muere.

JAMES

He's got the universal translator in his hands, chums.

JAMES raises his hands. Everyone raises his or her hands.

SOUND: Trucks pull up, stop.

The scene is flooded with light from the trucks' headlights.

UTILITY 6 enters as the COLONEL, his military cap bearing a red star. He is followed by UTILITY 7 as his AIDE.

The COLONEL spits.

COLONEL

Anarquistas.

LUZ

(fierce whisper to MARLOWE)

Say something or you'll die with us.

COLONEL
(to LUZ)

¡Cállete, puta!

LUZ steps forward.

LUZ
¿Qué piensas hacer con nosotros?

Without hesitation, the COLONEL pulls his "pistol" and shoots LUZ through the eye. LUZ's body drops like a stone.

SOUND: Single pistol shot.

COLONEL
Mátalos a todos.

MARLOWE
(shouting)
I'm a journalist! Periodisto! I'm a journalist! From the
United States! ¡Los Estados Unidos!

MARLOWE holds up his camera bag and notebook.

COLONEL
(in English)
You know Paul Robeson?

MARLOWE
Not personally. But I've heard him sing.

COLONEL
He sang to us -- he's a good Communist. You American,
too?

JESSE
Yes.

COLONEL
You look just like Jesse Owen -- a very fast man -- I love
jazz. Harlem.

The AIDE whispers to the COLONEL, who points to MARLOWE and JESSE.

COLONEL

Put them in the truck.

UTILITY 4 prods MARLOWE and JESSE out of the light.

MARLOWE

(shouting)

Colonel, Colonel, they all work with me -- they're my assistants --

But before MARLOWE finishes, the AIDE pulls out a pistol and executes JAMES and AWAGU.

SOUND: Pistol shots.

MARLOWE and JESSE stare at the corpses of their friends.

COLONEL

The base for the International Brigades -- we'll drop you off on the road that goes there. You should reach it without much trouble. When you get there, say hello to Paul Robeson for me. Put them in the truck. Before I change my mind.

MARLOWE and JESSE leave, followed by UTILITY 4.

SOUND: Trucks pulling away.

Transition.

MUSIC: Verse from "No Pasarán" by Leopoldo Gonzalez

Matan mujeres, niños y ancianos,
que por las calles suelen andar.
Esta es la hazaña de los fascistas,
que allá en la historia se ha de grabar.
Si sangre de héroes regó los campos,
bellas simientes resurgirán.
El cañón ruge, tiembla la tierra,
pero a Madrid ¡No pasarán!

* * * * *

Scene 23

SOUND: A ship's horn, wind and waves.

A steerage cabin, lit by a single bulb. JESSE lies on a bench. MARLOWE tries to write. Their knapsacks sit under the bench.

SOUND: The ship creaking.

MARLOWE slams the notebook shut.

MARLOWE

I can't get it to work! Notes, impressions, but it's like --
Hemingway's just churning it out --

JESSE

You want a real story about Spain?

JESSE swings to a sitting position.

MARLOWE

He finally speaks!

JESSE

I asked you a question.

MARLOWE

Yeah, I could use a real story.

JESSE

I'm going back.

MARLOWE

To Spain?

JESSE

To Mississippi.

MARLOWE

No you're not. No you're not!

JESSE

I went all the way to Spain just to fight the people who live in my town.

MARLOWE

No you didn't! That's crazy! What -- bang bang? They ain't like the guy in the tower!

JESSE

No.

MARLOWE

(realizing)

No you're not.

JESSE

I'll need a friendly witness. Think about it --

MARLOWE

You're just using me.

JESSE

-- front page -- all American --

MARLOWE

You're just using me.

JESSE

-- yet strange, too, you know -- love and death -- you got it all --

MARLOWE

You can't -- you can't -- it'd be like --

JESSE

They've killed, and I've killed, and it ain't done anything for either of us.

MARLOWE

You could go anywhere -- Paris -- the women'll love your ass to death there.

JESSE

Uh-huh.

MARLOWE

Africa -- South America -- Caribbean --

JESSE

But I want to go home. I want to go home to Marley. You said, afflict the comfortable, comfort the afflicted, not me --

MARLOWE

I didn't say yes. I didn't say yes!

MARLOWE tries to write but can't.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 24

SOUND: Train with occasional whistle.

JESSE and MARLOWE, wearing knapsacks, standing. UTILITY 2 as HOBO sitting on the bench.

JESSE

Bulls been here?

HOBO

Just kicked a nigger off.

JESSE

I'm his replacement.

HOBO

Dining car's closed for the night.

JESSE and MARLOWE sit down. They all pitch back and forth as the train plows through the night.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 25

SOUND: Summer buzzing of insects.

JESSE and MARLOWE sit facing each other on the bench.

JESSE

There's a boarding house near the town hall -- you can get a room there. Woman named Swanson runs it -- her son is the Mayor.

MARLOWE

And I'm just a young writer on a journey through the South.

JESSE

Wouldn't want to lie, would you?

JESSE reaches into his knapsack and pulls out a leather pouch that he opens. Inside is papers, clippings, and LUZ's copy of Don Quixote. He hands it all to MARLOWE. MARLOWE puts them away.

Then he pulls out the black bandana, unties it -- it's full of dirt. MARLOWE touches the dirt.

MARLOWE

From Spain.

JESSE

I'm keeping this with me for now. Make sure you get it -- Ten o'clock.

MARLOWE

And I don't know who you are.

JESSE wraps up the bandana, puts it away, gets up.

JESSE

Okay.

MARLOWE gets up.

MARLOWE

This man of words ain't got any words.

JESSE walks away from MARLOWE, then turns and comes back. He holds out his hand. MARLOWE shakes it. Then JESSE leaves.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 26

UTILITY 5 as MRS. SWANSON.

MARLOWE
(with great charm)

Good day.

SWANSON

Yeah?

MARLOWE

Mrs. Swanson?

SWANSON
You ain't got a voice from around here.

MARLOWE
Which is why I need a room. I was told you have the nicest rooms in town.

SWANSON
That may be true.

MARLOWE
I'd like a chance to find out.

SWANSON
Northern?

MARLOWE
North of here, anyway.

SWANSON

You a communist? You a "nigger-ist"?

MARLOWE

I'm not any kind of "ist." Just a writer. Working on a book.
A "writer-ist," I guess.

MARLOWE flashes SWANSON his biggest falsest smile.

SWANSON

I got a nice room for a writer.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 27

JESSE's camp.

SOUND: Insects on a hot summer day.

JESSE sits. UTILITY 4, as a YOUNG BOY, looks at JESSE. JESSE gestures for him to come over. The BOY comes over.

JESSE

You have a name?

The BOY shakes his head no, then yes.

JESSE

I know your name -- you're Miz Riley's "slow" boy, ain't ya?

The BOY nods yes. JESSE pulls the black bandana from his knapsack and opens it, picks a rock from the dirt.

JESSE

But I am going to call you a special name. I am going to call you Oliver.

(hands him the rock)

And this is a magic rock. It's got a name, too -- Spain. Can you say Spain?

The BOY shakes his head no. Then he speaks.

BOY

Spain.

JESSE puts his hand tenderly on the BOY's head.

JESSE

Go home now.

The BOY runs away. JESSE adds a handful of Mississippi dirt to the pile, re-ties the bandana, puts it away.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 28

MARLOWE sitting on the edge of the bench.

SOUND: A clanking fan.

MARLOWE has his notebook open. Beside him is his camera and lenses, with a cleaning cloth and brushes and rolls of film. He cleans the lenses. He writes a line.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 29

A small fire. JESSE stares. Partway through the scene MARLOWE turns and listens, as if he were there with the group. As he listens, he puts away his equipment.

SOUND: The barest breeze. The small fire crackling.

Suddenly, JESSE sits bolt upright -- all the UTILITY CHARACTERS plus OLIVER and LUZ move out of the darkness and sit at the edge of the fire's glow.

UTILITY 1

Really you, Jesse Colton?

UTILITY 2

You really back?

UTILITY 3

Where you been?

OLIVER

You been a dead man, we heard.

UTILITY 4 as the BOY sits next to JESSE.

JESSE

I been dead, yeah. I also come a long way back to being alive.

LUZ

But you a dead man here again if they see you.

JESSE

You all think that's so?

UTILITY 5

Yeah.

SEVERAL VOICES

Yeah.

UTILITY 6

They got a hate longer than God's tapeworm.

JESSE

Where is my Marley?

The BOY lays down next to JESSE and closes his eyes.

UTILITY 7

We don't know.

OLIVER

No one knows.

JESSE rests his hand on the BOY's shoulder.

JESSE

Doesn't matter.

LUZ

Jesse, we couldn't've --

JESSE

Doesn't matter, I said. I wanta tell you a story about "stopping."

UTILITY 5

Nothing's stopped --

JESSE

Anybody know where Spain is?

They think.

UTILITY 7

Near Biloxi, maybe?

OLIVER

Ain't no Spain near Biloxi, knucklehead.

JESSE

Not so hard -- he ain't that far off. It's a country, not a county -- let me tell you all a story -- Spain --

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 30

JESSE stands at the foot of the town hall steps, keeping vigil.

MARLOWE watches JESSE. SWANSON stands behind him.

SWANSON

You gonna need the room another night?

MARLOWE

I don't know just yet. Who's that?

SWANSON

He's supposed to be a dead man.

MARLOWE moves to JESSE's side. UTILITY 6 as MAYOR and UTILITY 7 as SHERIFF comes out, stand on the bench. SWANSON leaves.

SOUND: Crowd milling.

MAYOR

What the f[uck] --

He catches himself.

MAYOR

What are you doing here?

JESSE

I live here.

MAYOR

You lived here. Now get the f[uck] --
(catches himself again)

Just get out of here.

JESSE

I come to see my wife's grave. Where'd you bury her, Mayor? Sheriff? That's all right -- I'll save you the trouble of lying. I'll bet her bones've been buried by every dog in town. That's okay, too -- don't blame dogs for being dogs. But I won't be leaving until I find every bone.

JESSE reaches into his back pocket. SHERIFF reaches for his gun.

JESSE

One more thing.

He pulls out his blue Communist Party membership card. He gestures to MARLOWE.

JESSE

Sir -- help me out?

MARLOWE steps forward. JESSE hands him the card.

JESSE

Would you take that up so as the Mayor can read it?

MARLOWE hands the MAYOR the card. The MAYOR reads it, hands it to the SHERIFF, who reads it, then tosses it. MARLOWE picks it up.

JESSE

Just so you know you have a real one this time.

JESSE leaves and begins SINGING the Internationale. As he does so, he does a little cake-walk dance, his smile wide and taunting.

JESSE

Arise ye workers from your slumbers
Arise ye prisoners of want
For reason in revolt now thunders
And at last ends the age of cant.
Yowser, yowser, yowser, yowser!

JESSE leaves. Everyone else leaves.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 31

Headlights. UTILITY 2 as RED NECK drops a noose on the bench. UTILITY 6 as MAYOR and UTILITY 7 as SHERIFF follow RED NECK.

MARLOWE stands to one side.

UTILITY 1 as MARLEY, LUZ, and OLIVER enter and stand upstage. JESSE downstage, bathed in headlights.

MARLOWE

A lasso snaps out of the darkness, tightens around Jesse's throat, pulling him to his knees.

JESSE falls to his knees, hands around his throat, choking.

MARLOWE

A man behind Jesse plants a foot on his back and jams
Jesse forward.

RED NECK plants a foot in JESSE's back, and JESSE falls forward. At the same moment, the SHERIFF takes JESSE's hands off the rope around his neck and pulls them behind JESSE's back.

RED NECK hands MARLOWE a short length of "rope" for hog-typing, pulls him to JESSE.

RED NECK
(to MARLOWE)

Loop the hogtie around his wrist -- be good for that book
of yours.

MARLOWE loops it around one wrist, his face a mask of fear. He fumbles so badly that RED NECK takes it out of his hands.

RED NECK
(to others)

S'got the twitches.

RED NECK wraps JESSE's hands in a quick tight figure-eight.

RED NECK
(to MARLOWE)

Proper way to tie a hog. You write that down.

RED NECK and SHERIFF stand JESSE up next to the bench. MARLOWE retreats, pulls out his camera. The MAYOR stands on the bench with the noose in his hand, which he loops around JESSE's throat.

MARLOWE

Jesse was dead by the time they hung him because they
had dragged him a mile along the dirt road from the rope
they lasso'd around his neck.

RED NECK, the SHERIFF, and the MAYOR smile for MARLOWE. He snaps their picture, and the stage dissolves into several blinding flashes of light.

In the flashes, JESSE falls into the arms of MARLEY, OLIVER, and LUZ -- a pieta.

SOUND: An enormous storm that washes the earth clean.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 32

An office -- table, two chairs. UTILITY 2 as the EDITOR leafs through MARLOWE's manuscript, with pictures. MARLOWE, seated by the desk, fidgets as he waits. His knapsack rests against the chair.

SOUND: Street noise through an open window. A clanging fan.

EDITOR

And you took these yourself?

MARLOWE

And developed them myself. It's been rejected by some of the best. Polite, you know, but --

EDITOR

Because you're pissing uphill on this one. Gavagan's anti-lynching bill's going nowhere -- Roosevelt needs the Southern Senators for his Court scheme, so --

MARLOWE

So?

EDITOR

So -- I guess I don't mind a piss or two uphill. It's what we do around here -- our --

(wryly)

raison d'être -- the reasoning behind our piss-soaked shoes. It's well written, and God knows it happens. I can't pay you -- much at least.

MARLOWE

Doesn't matter.

EDITOR

Words my bookkeeper loves. And we ain't among "some of the best."

MARLOWE

Doesn't matter.

EDITOR

Then we have a deal.

MARLOWE

Great.

(to audience)

I start to get out of the chair.

EDITOR

You mind if I ask you something?

MARLOWE

Ask me anything you want.

EDITOR

The man in the photos --

MARLOWE

Yeah?

EDITOR

Did you know him well?

MARLOWE

Did I know him well?

EDITOR

Look, I'm sorry -- you don't [have to] --

MARLOWE

I can say this: Jesse Colton and I had -- no, made -- a -- pact -- a covenant -- better word -- a better word -- a covenant about that -- about what happened --

EDITOR

God, that must've not been easy --

MARLOWE

It was the easiest and the hardest thing I've ever done --
can you understand that? I can't understand that -- yet --
but it's true --

EDITOR

And you agreed -- God, to watch and not --

MARLOWE

The kind of thing you do for a friend --

EDITOR

You have your work cut out for you.

MARLOWE

I can say this: we both held up our ends of the bargain. It's
made a difference.

EDITOR

We'll see what we can do.

MARLOWE moves to the bench with his knapsack. EDITOR leaves.

MARLOWE opens his knapsack and takes out JESSE's black bandana and
unties it. He empties the dirt in it, spreads it around with his foot, then dusts
it off and gets ready to put it away.

UTILITY 4 as a BUM comes up behind him. wearing a worn-out suit and
vest.

BUM

Gonna use that?

MARLOWE turns and catches the eyes of the BUM.

BUM

You gonna use that?

He slips his fingers in and out of the breast pocket.

BUM

Could use a handkerchief to complete my ensemble. What
say?

MARLOWE

You take this, you're going to have to fight for justice, you know.

BUM

Mister, just as soon as I get a meal I'll fight for justice.

MARLOWE hands him the bandana. While the BUM folds it neatly and puts it in his breast pocket, MARLOWE digs out two dollar bills. He holds up one.

MARLOWE

Your meal.

The BUM goes to take it, but MARLOWE pulls it away. He holds up the other dollar bill.

MARLOWE

Find someone as bad off or worse than you.

BUM

And give it away?

MARLOWE

Give it away. Free and clear. Both or none.

The BUM holds out his two hands. MARLOWE hands the bills over.

MARLOWE

Don't mess with your promise.

BUM

I wasn't always like this, mister. I was not always like this.

The BUM leaves.

MARLOWE stares into the middle distance. Perhaps he cries. Perhaps not.

Blackout

Bright Gold Promise

DESCRIPTION

Bright Gold Promise is a story of tragedy through real estate.

CHARACTERS

- JIM STERLING, African-American
- NAHEEM STERLING, Jim's son - African-American
- KEN LOUDER, graphic artist
- JERRY ARGENT
- MICHAEL FISH, lawyer
- PHILIP TREMBLE, real estate developer

Note on accents: Ken, Jerry, and Michael are from the northeast. Phil's should be Southern from Virginia, middle- to upper-class. Jim and Naheem are originally from Piedmont North Carolina. However, the director and actors are free to find accents that work for them as long as they bring a musicality to the saying of the language.

SETTING/TIME

Jim's Gym, owned by Jim and Naheem; they also own the building in which the gym exists. The gym is old, full of old sweat and pain. The time is the present, in spring.

MISCELLANEOUS

- KEN has a sketchbook that he draws on during the scenes.
- JIM wears a shape of Africa in tri-color black, red, and green.
- JERRY has two keys on a visually distinctive key ring that he occasionally takes out of his pocket and plays with: the keys to get into the building and then into the diner. He also has a spare set of keys.
- MICHAEL has a key in his wallet -- a key to his parents' house.
- PHIL constantly eats breath mints or pastilles from a small tin.

* * * * *

Scene 1

Lights go to black. A strong percussion begins, a la Gene Krupa. The music continues in the darkness, then lights up as it continues. Jerry comes bounding in to the gym space. He is dressed in a dark suit, having just come from a funeral. Jerry begins to shadowbox, and they are the movements of a young and happy man. His movements carry him around the gym.

Suddenly the music stops with a change in lights: Jerry becomes what he is -- in his late forties, out of breath, and looking sad. He looks around and then walks to the closed office door. He is just about to knock on it when Ken enters carrying a bag or satchel; he, too, is dressed as if coming from a funeral. Jerry moves quickly away from the door, but Ken sees him. With an affectionate gesture, Ken embraces Jerry, who reciprocates the affection with a kiss. Michael enters at a brisk pace, notices the embrace, and continues into the room. Jerry breaks away from Ken to follow Michael.

MICHAEL

The brass --

JERRY

Michael --

MICHAEL

-- of your balls, to bring your face around here.

JERRY

Then you shouldn't have told me.

KEN

You told him because you wanted him to come here.

MICHAEL

No --

KEN

Such a lazy liar, Michael.

JERRY

Michael --

MICHAEL

I do not care about his lost soul -- that's been your unlucky burden.

KEN

Then why --

JERRY

Michael --

KEN

-- did you tell him?

MICHAEL

Because I wanted him to squirm, pine, lament, suffer -- suf-
fer. But appear?

JERRY

I need to know more.

MICHAEL

What do you need to know that you don't already know?

(to KEN)

You should take him home.

JERRY

I won't go -- not if they're really going to sell --

MICHAEL

You've stayed gone for twenty years, Jerry. What's one day more? Jim is not going to want to see you standing there when he comes out.

JERRY

I'm not going away.

MICHAEL

Naheem will bust you up --

JERRY

I'm not --

MICHAEL

-- with pleasure.

JERRY

-- going away.

MICHAEL

Like a bad penny. So stay -- who cares?

KEN
(to JERRY)

What did you expect, my love?

Michael takes off his jacket, hangs it on the chair, then takes off his black armband. So does Ken. Throughout Ken will sketch in his sketchbook.

MICHAEL
I am hating these funerals.

Michael throws the armband on the table; so does Ken.

JERRY
You heard --

MICHAEL
More of them from our age.

JERRY
-- them talking --

MICHAEL
We're all dying off.

KEN
(to JERRY)
You know you have to wait --

MICHAEL
(to KEN)
More and more people we know -- gone. And today, Riordan -- who ever thought Riordan Esposito -- rotund Riordan -- belly-up and off he goes before any of us.

JERRY
Tell me what you saw --

MICHAEL
I never liked him much.

JERRY
What --

MICHAEL

I pretended, but I never did. Did you?

JERRY

-- did you see?

KEN

I didn't like him either.

MICHAEL

He appealed to me about like chloroform does to a moth.

KEN

I always felt sorry for him.

MICHAEL

But one of ours, hey?

KEN

Hey!

MICHAEL

And always mourn one of your own -- even a rat like Riordan.

KEN

Riordan the rat.

MICHAEL

And so -- ergo, Esposito finito. Who's next? You? Ken-man here would mourn -- so at least one person coffin-side.

JERRY

Not you?

MICHAEL

I have done your wills, so I guess I'd have to be there. In matters legal, at least.

JERRY

Matters legal --

MICHAEL

(to KEN)

How have you done it? How have you lasted twenty years with this man -- one whole score with him?

KEN

Tell him what he wants to know, Michael.

MICHAEL

Twenty years, Jerry -- oh, look at him! -- for twenty years you have parked yourself downstairs, in that crud diner --

KEN

Old news, Michael --

MICHAEL

-- that we have to pass by every time we -- we --

KEN

Very old news --

MICHAEL

-- come to see Jim and Naheem to see if they're all right -- note that the we does not include you --

KEN

Let it go --

MICHAEL

-- serving all those belchers and gulpers and fartars down there -- just down the stairs and around the corner --

KEN

Let it go!

MICHAEL

-- just a little ways away in the crud diner --

JERRY

(to KEN)

It's all right.

MICHAEL

-- and have done nothing. You have tried to explain this to me --

KEN

I have.

MICHAEL

(to JERRY)

-- some kind of vigil you're keeping --

KEN

Can't help it if you're [dense] --

MICHAEL

-- is that right?

Jerry does not respond.

MICHAEL

Jerry and his vigil -- sinful Jerry -- what sin, Jerry? -- this lawyer's steel-trap mind can't quite --

KEN

The lawyer might shut up then --

JERRY

(to KEN)

It's all right --

MICHAEL

Vigil?

KEN

It's not --

MICHAEL

Sacred?

KEN

-- all right.

MICHAEL

You?

KEN

I think shutting up --

MICHAEL

What I see, have always seen --

KEN

-- would be a good idea --

MICHAEL

-- standing in that crud diner? Spineless. Weasel. Who has not come through.

KEN

Enough, Michael -- really enough.

MICHAEL

But on this day --

KEN

Michael --

MICHAEL

-- suddenly you are all at the ready for mercy --

KEN

Michael! Time's up! You've already taken your pound. You are talking to, and about, the man I love.

MICHAEL

Will wonders never cease.

KEN

Let's hope so.

MICHAEL

(to KEN)

I apologize -- to you. Not to make you pay.

(to JERRY)

But you --

KEN

Over a pound, Michael.

MICHAEL

(indicating KEN)

For love of him, then. Christ. Christ!

(picks up the black armband)

"Dearly beloved" --

(throws it to JERRY)

You know why?

JERRY

Does it matter?

MICHAEL

I look at you -- Jerry Argent -- and much as I dislike and can't forget, I also can't forget all of what used to be --

KEN

One of our own --

MICHAEL

And it makes me -- angry --

KEN

Yes --

MICHAEL

No, not just that -- It makes me so angry -- that this place smells so much, feels so much, like a tomb! Jim's Gym! Christ! I look at you, and I see everyone else who should come here, crawl here, in homage and unending thanks to Jim, to Naheem -- but they don't. No one comes anymore. Too busy. Too involved. On vigils. Too late. Now -- a chance for them to make better -- you should have the grace to just shut up and stay away. I'm a little on edge.

KEN

Noted.

JERRY

Michael --

MICHAEL

What, Jerry?

JERRY

What did you see?

KEN

Two dogs, one bone.

MICHAEL

What did I see --

JERRY

I figured that since the beheading was over you might now talk to me like a human being.

MICHAEL

To you.

JERRY

Even rat Riordan got a pass from you.

MICHAEL

Him dying made that possible.

JERRY

That what you want?

Michael fidgets with the question.

JERRY

You got your humiliation --

KEN
(to MICHAEL)

Making us pay --

JERRY

Everyone had to pay whenever Mikey-O-Mike got on a rant -- annoying little prick idealist, wasn't he?

KEN

Oh, yes.

JERRY

Weren't you?

KEN

Oh, yes.

JERRY

Endless supply of evils in the world for Mikey-O-Mike's --

MICHAEL

Stop calling --

JERRY

-- crusades and causes --

MICHAEL

-- me that --

KEN

It all came from his reading of the newspaper.

JERRY

Too old before his time.

KEN

Evil thing, that newspaper.

MICHAEL

At least I read.

JERRY

Too old before his time even still. Old man, you said you heard "buyer," you heard "seller."

MICHAEL

The voice of the tomb.

JERRY

Whose?

MICHAEL

Clean your goddamn ego out of your ears because I'm only going to say it once.

JERRY

Then say it once and quit the dog-and-pony.

MICHAEL

On my way to the funeral, I poked my head through that very door.

JERRY

Tell me what you saw.

MICHAEL

It's like you're reading the guts of a bird.

JERRY

What's it to you?

MICHAEL

It's nothing to me.

JERRY

Then it costs you nothing to tell me.

MICHAEL

You think.

JERRY

You saw --

MICHAEL

Jim sitting there -- Naheem there --

JERRY

You said one more.

MICHAEL

The flat back of his head -- he never turned around.

JERRY

But you could tell something --

MICHAEL

Yes. I could tell by the crease in his pants -- a knife crease -- I have seen that crease before --

JERRY

Where?

MICHAEL

A crease that the lean and hungry and powerful wear. Cold.

JERRY

He made you feel cold.

MICHAEL

He felt no need to face me. He could bide his time.

JERRY

You should be in there. You should be --

MICHAEL

Jim did not ask.

JERRY

You know about the law.

MICHAEL

Can't give if not asked.

JERRY

You could have insisted.

MICHAEL

And told Jim what?

JERRY

What you felt.

MICHAEL

That the knife crease leaves me cold.

JERRY

The snakes are in there -- aren't they?

MICHAEL

What's in there --

JERRY

Aren't they?

MICHAEL

What's in there is the bright gold promise of an upward price for the tomb.

JERRY

With the knife crease.

MICHAEL

"Property appreciation" --

JERRY

Listen.

MICHAEL

-- about the only appreciation --

JERRY

Listen.

MICHAEL

-- he and Naheem have left. And that's more than --

JERRY

Listen --

MICHAEL

-- any one of us can give them.

JERRY

Listen! There's more, Michael. Mikey-O-Mike. More.
Listen: "A buck, a buck, a buck for luck."

MICHAEL

What?

KEN

Mikey-O-Mike -- "A buck, a buck, a buck for luck."

There is a softening in Michael.

MICHAEL
(softly)

A buck, a buck, a buck for luck.

JERRY

A buck, a buck --

MICHAEL

Buck a week --

JERRY

That's all Jim charged us.

MICHAEL

Ten dimes --

KEN

Twenty nickels --

MICHAEL

-- for a safe place --

JERRY

Michael -- Michael -- c'mon -- not just safe safe.

MICHAEL

No.

JERRY

Paradise safe -- yes?

MICHAEL

Yes.

KEN

Yes.

JERRY

What it felt like to walk up those stairs --

KEN

God, yes!

JERRY

-- and get away from the streets?

KEN

Oh, yes! Yes. Down there, out there -- Out there, in the wilderness, I was the runt --

MICHAEL

It was a --

KEN

-- the fag --

MICHAEL

-- full-time job --

KEN

-- the faggot --

MICHAEL

-- protecting you --

KEN

I was the dog the dog kicked when the dog got kicked!

JERRY

But in here --

KEN

But in here --

JERRY

Safe.

KEN

Safe.

MICHAEL

Where we could all be the sons of Jim.

Michael goes over to Ken and grabs him by the elbow.

MICHAEL

We had to drag the fag, though --

Jerry takes the other elbow, and they lift him off the ground. Ken bicycles his feet.

MICHAEL

Swept off your feet.

KEN

I thought death -- Put me down. I thought you were bringing me to one of my many early deaths. Boxing -- boxing, and me, the mariposa! Whole new meaning to --

Ken begins to shadowbox but in a "limp-wristed" way.

KEN

-- "float like a butterfly" --

Ken falls to the floor, as if he'd been knocked down.

KEN

"8 - 9 - 10 - yer out!" I had a perfect record --

JERRY

Because you never won a fight.

KEN

I never won a fight. But that was my method, smart one that I was. Crapped myself out on the canvas, then someone would always kneel down -- bringing all that sports-approved flesh down to me --

MICHAEL

"You okay, man?"

KEN

Yeah, you're fine -- nope, I mean I'm fine!

JERRY

"Let me give you hand up."

KEN

A hand what? Could you give me two while you're at it?

Jerry gives Ken a hand up.

JERRY

And I always liked giving you a hand what.

KEN

My memoirs of this place will be titled The Call of The Mild.

JERRY

(to MICHAEL)

You think I don't care -- don't remember.

MICHAEL

You --

JERRY

Fags and --

(pointing at MICHAEL)

-- a poet!

KEN

Put that pentameter down!

MICHAEL

(mock shock)

My God!

KEN

He's a poet!

JERRY

His parents --

KEN

What sin have we committed that we should be punished so?

MICHAEL

You'd think I'd masturbated into the chalice.

JERRY

Wearing goat horns.

Michael walks around, touching the equipment, punching the bag, etc., animated.

MICHAEL

Ten years old. First time up those stairs -- ten years old.

KEN

(overlapping)

-- ten years old. Jim -- huge to me. He loomed!

MICHAEL

Like two ice ages ago.

KEN

Huge, and very black.

MICHAEL

(to KEN)

There was Africa!

JERRY

By way of North Carolina.

KEN

Did he look that way to you?

MICHAEL

Africa in our neighborhood --

KEN

This pale fag --

MICHAEL

We weren't all infected yet, were we?

KEN

And this huge black man.

MICHAEL

We could still see.

KEN

The only "Africa" we had ever seen was black people in arrest photos. Not Jim.

JERRY

Michael --

KEN

Naheem.

JERRY

What?

KEN

Naheem. Seeing Naheem. Skinny like I was --

MICHAEL

Like all of us --

KEN

-- dark like I was talcum powder, both of us weirded out and walking on eggs -- suddenly Jim didn't loom. No fee, no fie, no foe, no fum -- he had a son --

JERRY

Sons --

KEN

Even rotten Riordan Esposito.

MICHAEL

Jim's straight-forward parable to the rising generation --

KEN

"We all bleed the same."

JERRY

"All equal under the sweat."

MICHAEL

Not infected yet, were we? Just kids being kids. It is so easy to forget --

JERRY

What a paradise --

MICHAEL
(overlapping)

-- what a paradise it was.

JERRY

Yes.

MICHAEL

Not that you forget, but you don't always keep in mind the way you're supposed to, the way you should.

JERRY

Unless you keep a vigil. Hey?

A reaction from Michael. A reaction by Jerry to Michael.

JERRY

In there the snakes have come to feed, and it is getting colder -- you said so yourself. In there is --

(snaps his fingers)

-- another funeral brewing -- and you hate funerals. In there is the Jim who came here when black skin mapped out some real pain, and he bought this brick-pile and rooted a family and saved the three of us, and a million others, from the rat's ass. That deserves attention. As you said. You can. Do something.

Jerry is standing close to Michael and punches, softly but not too softly, his arm.

JERRY

Do something.

Jerry begins to dance around Michael, who refuses to respond -- jabbing, bobbing, and weaving.

JERRY

Bring back the lessons of boyhood, Mikey-O-Mike --

KEN

Jerry --

JERRY

"It is so easy to forget" --

MICHAEL

Stop it.

JERRY

Use what Jim taught you to take the snakes away.

MICHAEL

Enough.

JERRY

Find the seam, and then -- click, click, slam.

KEN

Don't push --

JERRY

You can do it.

MICHAEL

Do it for you?

Jerry stops.

JERRY

You've missed the point. You've let yourself miss the point.
All right. All right. You want to let yourself go all dumb on
me, that's fine.

Without warning, Jerry really punches Michael hard in the arm.

JERRY

For Jim.

(hits him again, hard)

For Naheem. Something now, shyster.

Jerry goes to hit Michael again, and Michael raises his hands as if he's wearing the boxing mitts. Jerry punches one of Michael's palms, and Michael starts backing up.

MICHAEL

From the man with no reflexes.

Jerry goes to punch, but Michael slips through his guard and slaps him, not hard, on the cheek.

MICHAEL

How Jim could slip right through your guard.

Through the next lines, Michael easily slips past to touch Jerry's face -- never very hard.

MICHAEL

Like this -- and this -- this -- Ken, that color commentary thing you always liked to do.

The three are back in Jim's Gym at the age of ten learning the "sweet science." As they move, the door opens and the audience sees Jim. He is wearing his pendant. Naheem appears behind him. Phil is barely visible.

KEN

And Mike the Spike dances. Gerald on the hunt. The Spike counters with cotton hands, which make the Jer-Bear tip into voom-voom drive.

Jerry chases Michael, who refuses to be caught, until the whole thing gets a little stupid and the anger drains away. Jerry ends with a really hard jab against Michael's hand and stops.

JIM

(to JERRY)

You never could juke out any voltage.

KEN

Jim! Jim!

Ken goes to Jim and embraces him.

JIM

How's my artist?

KEN

Your artist is "in line."

JIM

Dumb jokes as usual -- glad to see nothing's changed.
Michael.

Michael embraces him.

JIM

So soon.

MICHAEL

Couldn't keep myself away.

JIM

Say something to me.

MICHAEL

"In the clearing stands a boxer -- "

JIM

Still the poet.

MICHAEL

Only on weekends.

JIM

The poet at the bar.

MICHAEL

That's why they call me the "bard."

JIM

Watch that, or you might get "dis-bard."

KEN

And I thought my jokes were bad.

There is a moment's hesitation, and then Jerry also embraces Jim.

JIM
(to JERRY)

I tried and tried to teach you how to torque it up, but some got the business end of things, some ain't.

NAHEEM
Especially some "ain't" got it from the neck up.

JERRY
Naheem.

JIM
What are you all doing here?
(to JERRY)
I am mighty surprised by you up here.

JERRY
We came to pay our respects.

NAHEEM
No one's dead yet.

MICHAEL
(to NAHEEM)
When I said I'd stopped by on the way to Riordan's funeral
--

JERRY
Put us, so to speak, in the mode.

NAHEEM
Oh, it did? The mode, then --
(indicating MICHAEL)
-- he came by -- and then went bye.

JIM
It's all right, Naheem.

NAHEEM
We have business to do, Papa.

JERRY
We just thought we'd stop by.

NAHEEM

So, you've been by. So, bye.

KEN

The homophones are just flying around here, aren't they?

JERRY

So. You've all been talking.

MICHAEL
(to JERRY)

We should go.

JIM

Last I heard, Jerry, it was still constitutionally protected.

KEN

Jim, what did you think of the two of them, you know, spiraling around?

NAHEEM

The death spiral.

KEN

Smelled like old times, huh?

JIM

(to KEN, JERRY, and MICHAEL)

You three never did make the sweet science smell any sweeter. It didn't look good -- but it was nice to see it done again.

(to PHIL)

I used to train these yahoos when they were much smaller and most of them were a lot -- a lot -- more honest.

NAHEEM

Papa --

PHIL

How well could they fight?

MICHAEL

Where do I know you from?

PHIL

(to JIM, but pitched to MICHAEL)

How was their attack, Esquire?

JIM

None of 'em ever made money off it.

MICHAEL

(to PHIL)

Have we had --

PHIL

Oh, yes.

(to JIM)

Their continued friendship is encouraging.

NAHEEM

"Friends" is never an easy word.

PHIL

Still, it's nice to have friends of any kind.

NAHEEM

I disagree.

PHIL

I won't push the point, then.

JERRY

Michael?

Michael says nothing.

JERRY

Michael?

MICHAEL

No.

JERRY

All right.

(to PHIL)

How much are you offering them?

JIM

Michael --

MICHAEL

I said "buyer," I said "seller."

JERRY

How much?

PHIL

You are bold, aren't you?

KEN

Jerry -- Michael, can you [help] --

JERRY

What's the problem? We all know the topic, we all know each other -- so what's the problem?

JIM

One problem could be respect.

JERRY

I have immense respect for you.

NAHEEM

Then you'll shut up and butt out.

JERRY

I have enough respect to want to say something --

NAHEEM

The mouth of the tomb opens. Talk, then. Go on. Hold forth. Grace us all with your secret knowledge.

JERRY

Jim, could I talk with you?

NAHEEM

I knew you wouldn't.

JIM

You have something to add --

NAHEEM

He has nothing to add.

JIM

(to NAHEEM)

St. Peter got his three chances.

NAHEEM

He's been sitting on his ass for twenty years at the bottom of those stairs and never, never, made it up here to talk. I think he's used up his chances.

JIM

So I'll give him another one.

NAHEEM

Papa, we've got business --

PHIL

Take your time. This is all very interesting.

JIM

Before the cock crows, Jerry.

JERRY

Jim, can we talk alone --

JIM

Right here, Jerry.

Jerry goes to speak, but the immensity of what he would have to say overwhelms him, especially in public, and he says nothing.

NAHEEM

(speaking it)

Cock-a-doodle-doo.

JERRY

The building's gone, isn't it?

JIM

The building's still mine.

NAHEEM

Why are you still trying to tend to his business but not your own?

(to everyone)

This sweat equity ain't about any of you -- it's his, and I'm making sure it pays him back with interest.

JERRY

We all want --

NAHEEM

It doesn't matter what you want.

JERRY

Why do you hate me? Why have you always --

NAHEEM

It's only been since then that I've hated you. Before that I liked you. Before that you were a brother. And you misquote me -- I wouldn't use "hate." I couldn't rise to hate you, Jerry, because -- well, because you can't hate a skunk for being what it is. I don't hate you. I just don't care.

(to KEN)

I never have understood why an angel like you let yourself be taken in.

JERRY

Don't talk to --

NAHEEM

(to JERRY)

But, in the spirit of my father, I'll give you one more chance. Do you have something to say to me? To us? That's a ten-count. Out.

PHIL

Maybe I should part company --

NAHEEM

No, wait.

(to JIM)

We we're going to show him the rest.

JIM

I had lots of boys here --

NAHEEM

Papa --

JIM

Boys and years like a flood.

NAHEEM

Later.

PHIL

You'd mentioned --

JIM

I tried to be a father to all my boys, but some -- like them --

(indicating KEN and JERRY)

-- needed more because they had lost their fathers.

PHIL

I am sorry to hear that.

NAHEEM

Papa --

JIM

Back-to-back cancers.

KEN

Tag-team wakes -- went from one right down the street to the other --

JERRY

I invited them in, like I invited everyone.

KEN

That he did.

JIM

You see, we had a world here. Made so that maybe they could get in here a little of what they maybe couldn't find out there.

NAHEEM

Papa!

JIM

It's a dark world without a father. I knew their pains. I knew their hungers.

(points to JERRY)

Especially his.

JERRY

It was paradise, Jim, the closest thing.

PHIL

Quite a world. It seems you all got the father you needed.

NAHEEM

Not by a long shot.

(to JIM)

And you embrace him? While I'm doing this for you?

(to JERRY)

Have you ever said it out loud?

PHIL

Said what?

NAHEEM

Have you ever confessed?

JIM

You've done enough, Naheem.

NAHEEM

Ever tell them?

JIM

It doesn't matter any more.

JERRY

Jim --

NAHEEM

Have you ever testified?

JERRY

Jim -- can I talk with you?

JIM
(to JERRY)

It doesn't matter anymore.

NAHEEM

It's public or nothing.

JERRY

It has to matter, Jim.

PHIL

Perhaps I should go.

JIM

No, Jerry, it doesn't.

JERRY

It has to.

NAHEEM
(to PHIL)

No, it'll be over in a second.

JERRY

It has to!

JIM

It has never mattered.

Michael interrupts.

MICHAEL

I knew I knew you.

Will you shut up! NAHEEM

What? MICHAEL

Shut up! NAHEEM

Ah, finally. PHIL

Naheem? MICHAEL

You were saying? PHIL

You always have to steal the light -- NAHEEM

I don't know what -- MICHAEL
(to NAHEEM)

Esquire? PHIL

Uh, yes -- I was saying, I knew I knew you. Philip Tremble -- MICHAEL

Yes, Michael Fish -- PHIL

But how -- MICHAEL

You two know each other? KEN

His reputation. MICHAEL

(banging his knuckles together)

We've never --

PHIL

That would be wrong --

MICHAEL

News to me, then --

PHIL

You fronted for a tenants group about a millennium ago --
condos on the south side?

MICHAEL

The conversion perversion --

PHIL

You stole a lot of money from me.

MICHAEL

Your name never floated up --

PHIL

Layer the limited partnerships, like a river you can bury
anything -- especially to a lawyer who didn't have any
money.

MICHAEL

You had a stake.

PHIL

I had the stake.

MICHAEL

Sorry they got to keep their apartments.

(to everyone)

Philip Tremble, everyone -- he never does what his last
name says -- at least that's the legend. The iceman cometh
-- the junior iceman, actually -- his father was iceman senior,
the Arctic in deep winter. Jerry --

JERRY

Yeah?

MICHAEL

Snakes, if the legend is right, are lambs by comparison.
And you're dealing with him?

NAHEEM

He came to us.

PHIL

Making my grand rounds --

MICHAEL

He came to you?

NAHEEM

We got a call, a card under our door, another card, a letter,
a registered letter, return receipt --

MICHAEL

You must know something -- large.

PHIL

I live large because I do my homework, Counselor.

MICHAEL

(to NAHEEM)

And this is who you want to deal with? Jim, let me put down
a bet with Mr. Tremble.

JIM

Supposed to be a quiet afternoon.

NAHEEM

A bet.

MICHAEL

I would bet -- I would bet that if I spent five minutes in the
registry of deeds on a three-block area with Jim as ground
zero, I would find you layered all through the indexes --
I have more money now. And I further bet -- sure odds
on this one, Mr. Jim -- that you are the last dotted line for
signing to complete the kingdom. How much is he going to
give you? Whatever it be, triple it, and I'll bet --

PHIL

You bet a lot.

MICHAEL

-- I'll bet you will not hear the whimper of a complaint or a refusal, because even then it's a fire-sale price.

JIM

You say you know this man.

MICHAEL

(raises his hand, as if an oath)

I do. I do, I do, more than I want to.

JIM

(to PHIL)

This true?

PHIL

About?

JIM

Your plantation?

PHIL

My plantation --

JIM

Is what he saying true?

PHIL

Are you taking on the Esquire's services?

NAHEEM

Dad --

JIM

Yes, Naheem.

NAHEEM

(pained in having to admit)

Maybe -- Maybe we should -- I didn't know --

JIM

But you pushed hard like you knew.

NAHEEM

I pushed hard because I have plans for the money.

JIM

Which seems you aren't fully sharing with me.

NAHEEM

To get us out!

JIM

Which seems made you less than reliable.

NAHEEM

Out of here! And don't talk about me not being reliable --

JIM

Not now, Naheem.

NAHEEM

Home, Papa, home again --

JIM

But we set our own price, Naheem. It won't be much longer.
I promise you.

(to MICHAEL)

You offering your card?

Michael looks at Phil; Jerry looks at Michael.

MICHAEL

(to JIM)

Preliminary consultation's always free, even on funeral
days. I think you and I and Naheem can talk --

(to NAHEEM)

You open?

JERRY

(with hand gestures)

Click, click, slam.

KEN
(quietly)

This is not good.

PHIL
Then I should let you all get on with your -- reunion. Something I've found in life, Mr. Sterling: value changes on a daily basis. Stocks rise, stocks fall. The human body -- worth a quarter one day, a quarter billion patented the next -- all depends on the hungers rising to the occasion. We'll be in touch, soon, I hope.

Phil exits.

JIM
Did you just lose me the deal?

MICHAEL
What was the deal I might have lost you?

JIM
(laughing slightly)
He had papers in his pocket. Right here.

MICHAEL
Did he say that, or did he show you his?

NAHEEM
Said. No show. Slapped the place but never took 'em out.

MICHAEL
So all you got was air.

JERRY
An odor.

MICHAEL
Surprised? Even a cheap buzz is a buzz. And a good snake -- and, oh, Mr. Tremble is of the first water -- a good snake can massage a cheap buzz any day. You think you lost this deal? Think he won't ooze back around? The blood is in the water.

NAHEEM

You fought him one time?

MICHAEL

I guess I did.

NAHEEM

Condos.

MICHAEL

Good thing I didn't know -- I would've browned-out my shorts.

NAHEEM

Seems he'd have killed you over condos.

MICHAEL

He's got long teeth, yes.

KEN

Fangs a lot.

MICHAEL

A young lawyer -- boy, young! I was just out of night-school-- but I was all they could afford, the grace of ignorance -- if I had known, drowned in flop sweat.

KEN

He didn't forget.

MICHAEL

No.

JERRY

Long teeth, long memory.

JIM

Now you got Teflon underwear?

MICHAEL

Still cotton.

JIM

So, why?

MICHAEL

Why? The click.

JIM

What?

KEN

Click, click, slam.

MICHAEL

C'mon, Jim. You circle -- circle, circle -- bob, weave --

JERRY

Feet in motion --

MICHAEL

Range, ride -- then -- click.

Michael begins to spar with Naheem. Ken says his lines like the color commentator, and Jerry stands next to Jim.

MICHAEL

C'mon, Naheem. Unbutton those rusty hinges.

Naheem is reluctant.

MICHAEL

Come on.

Naheem makes some tentative moves, and the tension is broken.

MICHAEL

It comes on.

NAHEEM

It comes on.

MICHAEL

A switch.

KEN
In the muscles.

NAHEEM
Nerves.

KEN
Eyes.

MICHAEL
You see the chance --

NAHEEM
The slit --

KEN
The lapse --

JIM
And you thread it.

MICHAEL
Leading from the click.

JIM
The click.

MICHAEL
The thing that --

JERRY
-- turns the thought into a risk. That's what you said, over
and over, a time long ago.

KEN
More than once.

JERRY
Thought into risk.

JIM
Click.

MICHAEL

Mr. Tremble/I Don't Tremble standing right there, smirk, slapping his lying pockets, and -- click.

They stop sparring; speaking in rapid succession.

NAHEEM

Click.

KEN

Click.

JERRY

Click.

JIM

Click.

MICHAEL

I watched him, watched him watching you -- and I just couldn't let him slither past. And this --

Michael pulls out his wallet and extracts a key from it.

MICHAEL

My growing-up home, before I came here. Full of sweetness, it was, it was. Until a certain developer -- Tremble père -- got permission, through urban removal, to wipe it all away and put up his high-rise profits. This was all we kept.

(puts the key away)

The click -- it comes from a deep debt.

JIM

But --

MICHAEL

But --

JIM

But always I taught you about seeing for the weakness --

MICHAEL

Yeah?

NAHEEM

So?

MICHAEL

You're asking me if.

NAHEEM

You think he has one?

MICHAEL
(to NAHEEM)

"Do you want to sell?" If you hold, if you make him guess, then yes -- because, you see, his weakness -- the leverage -- is hunger. Hunger. He told you himself. So, the question stands, friend: How does your hunger match up to his?

JIM
(pointing to the office)

The whiskey is warm, glasses ready.

MICHAEL

Your style, Jim -- that slow weave, then make 'em grieve -- always sooo smooth.

JIM

Still is. You in a hurry?

MICHAEL

Not now.

Jim moves toward the office; Michael and Naheem follow. Jerry and Ken stay still.

JERRY

Well?

MICHAEL

I'll catch you up at the reception. It'll go on and on for a while.

Michael hesitates, then turns back to Jerry.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry.

JERRY

Maybe you're right.

Michael looks at Jerry quizzically.

MICHAEL

Right?

JIM

Michael.

JERRY

"A buck, a buck -- " Don't forget.

MICHAEL

Right.

JERRY

Later.

Jim, Naheem, and Michael exit into the office.

KEN

Well. They do have a lot to talk about.

JERRY

I'm sure --

KEN

They have a lot to talk about --

JERRY

Everybody is talking.

KEN

Do you want to go to the reception? Do you want to go home? I can make us some of that --

Jerry grabs his coat.

JERRY

You go home. I'll be home later.

Jerry starts to exit.

KEN

Jerry --

Jerry stops, sees the anxiety in Ken's face. Jerry hesitates, then goes to Ken and hugs him.

JERRY

I know where our home is. Don't worry. I'll be there soon.
I just need to --

KEN

Yeah.

Jerry exits. Ken watches until the lights fade out. Strong percussion for scene change.

* * * * *

Scene 2

Scene shifts to downstage right or left. A table is set up, with two chairs -- Jerry is there, facing the audience, a beer and a shot in front of him. Also, a pile of napkins, a dish of munchies, etc. Phil enters, with a styrofoam cup of coffee in his hand. He is free to move around; Jerry is not until he begins his "confession."

JERRY

Look what slithered in. Aren't you supposed to ask me what I'm slamming down and then buy me a refill?

PHIL

Is that what I should do?

JERRY

You're supposed to offer --

PHIL

Because?

JERRY

So I can insult you properly.

PHIL

A protocol.

JERRY

If you're working the street.

PHIL

Insult number one, then.

JERRY

I wouldn't take it, anyway.

PHIL

A true savage noble, you are.

JERRY

Just careful about the diseases I can catch.

PHIL

Good I didn't offer, then -- to preserve your health.

Jerry raises his glass in a mock salute.

JERRY

What do you want?

PHIL

Where are the others?

JERRY

They have lives.

PHIL

Where's Ken?

JERRY

You can leave him alone.

PHIL

So you're here alone.

Jerry indicates with a gestures that yes, indeed, he is alone.

PHIL

Today must be hard for you, being alone. May I sit down?

JERRY

No more than any other.

PHIL

May I?

JERRY

Why would you want to?

PHIL

Company.

JERRY

I don't think you should.

PHIL

Why?

JERRY

Because we get known by the company we keep.

PHIL

That could be a trade up for you.

JERRY

You are smooth.

PHIL

No -- just interested. And I promise not to pollute your health with the offer of a drink.

JERRY

(indicating the chair)

Doesn't have a lock on it.

Phil sits.

JERRY

What do you want?

PHIL

Not easy to lose a friend.

JERRY

He wasn't a "friend." What do you want?

PHIL

Not a friend.

JERRY

We just grew up together -- grew around each other.

PHIL

The company you kept, so to speak.

JERRY

What do you want?

PHIL

Still hard, though, even to lose someone just "around" when they've been around for so long.

JERRY

What do you --

PHIL

It's still a loss, no? Yes?

JERRY

Riordan -- Riordan Esposito was a loss, yes.
(less sarcastic)

It was sad, though -- to see him -- disappear.

PHIL

I'm terrible at funerals. I always get that little whisper. Do you ever get it?

(pointing to his ear)

Right here: "When will my ticket come up?"

JERRY

I'll bet a lot of people ask that same question about you: "When will Philip Tremble's ticket get punched?" Do you have a date for us, Mr. Tremble?

PHIL

I'd say about the same time as you. Did anyone happen to ask?

JERRY

Ask me what?

PHIL

Ask you about how you felt about the death of this friend and not-friend.

JERRY

What?

PHIL

What was his name again?

JERRY

Riordan.

PHIL

Riordan.

JERRY

Esposito.

PHIL

Ah.

JERRY

What are you saying?

PHIL

I just asked a question.

JERRY

No.

PHIL

No one?

JERRY

No one asked.

PHIL

Everyone being "hard" about it, I guess.

JERRY

We're all true men around here.

PHIL

Funny coming from you.

JERRY

Ha, ha.

PHIL

But it did touch you, didn't it? Didn't it?

Jerry gets up to go.

JERRY

I'm going to go.

PHIL

You work at the diner downstairs.

JERRY

I'm going.

PHIL

I've seen you in there -- even eaten there and watched you work.

JERRY

You watched me.

PHIL

Sit down. You're the juggler in the crowd -- why not watch?
Sit down. Eggs with the right, home fries with the left,

cheese at the last moment for the right melt, those plates skidding on the counter --

(makes as if ringing a bell)

-- "ding," order's up, grab the next -- I can tell you've been there for a while -- you are practiced. Why so hard to take a compliment?

JERRY

Not a regular feature of my day.

PHIL

Ding -- compliment's up. Sit down and enjoy.

Jerry sits.

PHIL

I like any kind of skill, and I don't mind telling people when I do. They should know. I'll bet -- I'm beginning to sound like Michael, huh? -- I'll bet no one's ever complimented you on your over-easies. On how up your sunny-sides are.

Jerry laughs at the sound of it but not dismissively.

JERRY

You would win that bet, for what it's worth.

PHIL

So, a compliment, all right?

JERRY

You've paid it.

PHIL

But one thing -- one thing is clear to me, Jerry -- you don't look like you eat your own food.

JERRY

I like my heart.

PHIL

Live longer and prosper-- I knew it. I noticed something about you right off that seemed to make you different -- you had a look, something like a lean and hungry look --

JERRY

I don't know you --

PHIL

I just wonder if anyone --

JERRY

Enough, all right?

PHIL

-- even Jim -- Mr. Sterling -- I just wonder even if he notices that about you. Even notices you. Were you like "lean," like "hungry," when Mr. Sterling was your boxing father?

JERRY

No.

PHIL

Why not?

JERRY

That wasn't what it was for.

PHIL

Then what for, if not bloodsport? Why the black man and the Scotch-Irish man? You obviously respect him --

JERRY

I would do anything for Jim --

PHIL

I have no doubt. But --

JERRY

What?

PHIL

Well -- maybe I'm out of line here.

JERRY

That's a given.

PHIL

Back there -- I had a feeling -- I could be wrong -- but that Jim doesn't feel the same way about you. I hit a nerve. I'm sorry.

JERRY

You're sorry, all right.

PHIL

My unfortunate habit of honesty.

JERRY

You want honest? You weren't expecting Michael, were you? Breeze in, breeze out.

Phil looks closely at Jerry, amused.

JERRY

What?

PHIL

Nothing. Michael? I do admit -- he was a surprise.

JERRY

You didn't predict him putting us in your way.

PHIL

Us?

JERRY

We talked after you left.

PHIL

You did.

JERRY

Talked and talked and talked and talked.

PHIL

A lot of talk.

JERRY

We strategized.

PHIL

And they included you.

JERRY

Why not?

PHIL

Really?

JERRY

I even came up with the idea, the anti-snake strategy. We have made plans.

PHIL

I'll bite.

JERRY

We are going to buy the building.

PHIL

Don't say.

JERRY

Say.

PHIL

We --

JERRY

A --

(dragging out the word)

-- con-sore-shee-um. How's that for snake repellent? Michael has figured out how we can do things coöperatively.

PHIL

Fast work on such a sad Saturday.

JERRY

The press of circumstance.

PHIL

You actually talked this out?

JERRY

Yep.

PHIL

A coöperative?

JERRY

Have you thinking, huh?

PHIL

Have me sore amazed, Jerry, yes, because this still brings me back around --

JERRY

To what?

PHIL

Why would Jim sell to you?

JERRY

His best interest.

PHIL

No, no, not to the con-sore-shee-um. Not to the coöperative plural. To the singular you.

JERRY

Why not?

PHIL

Do you really want me to say it again?

JERRY

Go ahead.

PHIL

Because he doesn't like you. Because he can't stand your entire mortal presence. I'm only stating the obvious. It was so easy to smell, Jerry. Didn't it strike you as odd that Naheem had such a free cut into you? Didn't it hurt when Naheem said, "You can't hate a skunk," and Jim never defended you? Jim never once said, "Stop." Is that what a father would do to a son? I just raise the question.

Silence.

PHIL

There is a secret floating in the air, Jerry, and if that secret could have a sound, it would go like this: "Have you ever confessed?" Now, that word interests me. There's a whole journey in that word.

Silence.

PHIL

I hate to say it, but I think something's wrong with the idea of the consortium. The coöperative.

Silence.

PHIL

Another drink?

Silence.

PHIL

It's not easy to lose a father, Jerry. I've lost one. You lost one -- it saddens me to think you may have lost a second one.

JERRY

I haven't lost Jim.

PHIL

I'm just giving you an impression.

JERRY

That's enough.

PHIL

All right.

JERRY

How could you know anything?

PHIL

I know anything like you know anything: I have lived it.

JERRY

Yeah, well, you didn't live here.

PHIL

I'm not talking about here. I'm talking about another space, another time. I'm talking about "death bed," I'm talking about being at my father's. Were you at yours?

JERRY

My dad died in the hospital -- I was ten. They didn't let me.

PHIL

Understandable -- it's an experience that can humble you to dust. See, I had disappointed him in some way -- there was always this bomb sitting on the breakfast table, in the office, over a late-night bourbon, something I had done that I should not have been done. And I could never figure it out. You want to hear more? I loved my daddy, but a father can be very -- steep, and I hated how high he made me climb. I hated the altitude because on top of any regret he felt, he liked the power of holding over me what I couldn't defend against. He was a nasty man that way. But the deathbed -- that was the equalizer. On that death bed he had no more power, and he knew it: ticket punched. He who had eaten iron for breakfast couldn't even keep down water. You want to hear more?

JERRY

Did he tell you?

PHIL

He did tell me.

JERRY

And what was it?

PHIL

Something so small but had grown cancerous through silence -- being "manly."

JERRY

What was it?

PHIL

Does it matter?

JERRY

Did to you.

PHIL

Not any more. Not after --

JERRY

Not after --

PHIL

Go ahead, say it.

JERRY

Not after he forgave you.

PHIL

That's what you really wanted to know. Yes, he forgave me, and I helped him complete his dying because I forgave him. And off he went. Now, Jerry, back to our four basics. "Have. You. Ever. Confessed?" It hangs, Jerry, it just hangs.

JERRY

Go hang yourself

PHIL

The walls that people erect -- like antibodies! -- they mark the edge of a disease. Why do they feel sinned against? Why won't Jim forgive you a mistake you have made?

JERRY

Why should I tell you anything?

PHIL

I'm going to let that hang for a moment, too. I can help you. I can help you. I can help you get Jim's forgiveness.

JERRY

And why -- would you want -- to [do that] --

PHIL

You tell me.

JERRY

You just want the building.

PHIL

A building's a building.

JERRY

You're such a snake.

PHIL

No, I'm not, Jerry -- let's drop that noun. I am a human being remarkably like you. We are a fraternity of two, Jerry, men who have lost their fathers. I would hate to see that happen a second time to anyone. You tell or don't tell -- it's up to you. You tell me to go, I'll go right now. But I don't think that's what you want. I made you an offer. A release. From over hard, kill the yolks. But there's only ever one way to start the cleansing: you have to offer that story. You have to give it away.

JERRY

Yeah?

PHIL

It's your choice, Jerry. Keep it, or give it away.

JERRY

Back then -- what was going on in this city -- in this neighborhood --

PHIL

Remind me.

JERRY

School desegregation --

PHIL

Right.

JERRY

-- the busing --

PHIL

The changing of the plantation --

JERRY

It was nasty around here.

PHIL

So I heard.

JERRY

The buses -- pelted with everything -- people shit in coffee cans -- And I can still see -- the faces in the windows -- You'd look above ground floor and see people's faces glued to the windows --

PHIL

It must have been hard --

JERRY

-- old folks, pale -- mothers, red-angry -- guys out of work and nothing to do -- just all there, in the windows, like a photo album. And then the buses -- the faces in those windows -- faces against the bus windows watching all of us --

PHIL

-- all of you --

JERRY

-- just throw the hate against them.

PHIL

Yes.

JERRY

I'd see Jim and Naheem on the bus when I saw the buses roll in -- not really, but all the faces in all their shades were them.

PHIL

In sympathy.

JERRY

Seeing with double eyes -- my friends, people I'd come up with, the "code" --

PHIL

-- code words --

JERRY

-- all that on the street -- And then afternoons, in Jim's gym, all colors bleeding the same under the sweat, Jim equaling us all, Naheem right there with us all -- all that in me, too.

PHIL

Yes, yes, but -- so what, in a way -- routine mayhem during social change. The important thing, to me, Jerry, to you: where is Jerry? Where. Is. Jerry? We've come this far. Something you did -- A choice you made --

JERRY

They attacked Jim's place one day.

PHIL

The tribe.

JERRY

Not attacked, really -- but surged. The buses would come down his street, and they'd slow down to take the curve to up the hill and the high school. And Jim and Naheem were standing on the front steps, watching -- every day, maybe they did it, a vigil -- but the first time I saw them. And one of the buses stalled, or something broke -- dead in the street. Cops in front, cops in back, but nothing in the middle. Like blood in the water. Oozed everywhere.

PHIL

Oozed.

JERRY

People who I knew hadn't tasted daylight for fifteen years --

PHIL

Incited.

JERRY

It built and built -- driver trying to turn the damn thing over, faces behind glass, rocks and garbage and everything. And then it split --

PHIL

Over-ripe.

JERRY

They saw black men on the steps and went berserk, even though they knew these people, had lived with them for --

PHIL

(interrupting)

And where are you during all of this? Where. Is. Jerry? Ah! You are not an innocent bystander.

JERRY

Riordan Esposito -- today's corpse -- He runs up to me, into me, brick in his left hand, brick in his right, hands me the one in the right, gleam in his eye like a gunshot.

PHIL

Yes?

JERRY

"C'mon, man," he starts jittering me, pushing, poking me, "c'mon, man." "I can't," I say. "Cunt," he says. "Niggah lover," he says.

PHIL

Someone from your own neighborhood --

JERRY

No cops anywhere -- can't get a cruiser or a cycle down. Bus dead. Radius expanding. And Reero Esposito knocking me with the brick piece, hashing out names, gunshot in his eye.

PHIL

You took the brick.

JERRY

I took the brick.

PHIL

Taking a brick's not a crime.

JERRY

Yeah.

PHIL

So Reero throws -- And Jerry --

JERRY

The look in Reero's eye --

PHIL

You couldn't back down --

JERRY

As soon as it left my hand --

PHIL

You couldn't call it back --

JERRY

Jim's eye pinned me -- He saw me throw it -- Naheem --

PHIL

Michael? Ken?

JERRY

They were there. I didn't know they were there.

PHIL

Watching.

JERRY

Behind me.

PHIL

Behind you. Watching.

JERRY

Watching. Until the throw spun me --

PHIL

They know.

PHIL

So long ago --

JERRY

Jim saw me --

PHIL

-- and yet it still bleeds --

JERRY

Naheem saw me --

PHIL

-- blood and thunder --

JERRY

They all saw me throw the brick. It did not even come close. Reero zoomed off to do something else -- His eyes, their eyes, right to me -- bam! Like the brick right back in my face. Bam! I died. Right on that spot -- I died. The shame -- it is in my mouth always. Always. It has -- unnerved me.

PHIL

And for your penance -- ah, the irony of the soul! -- you spent twenty years close by -- a vigil -- but taking no action. That was your choice. To bring this back around -- do you want Jim to forgive you? Do you want release? Would you like a drink?

Lights down on bar.

* * * * *

Scene 3

The gym. Phil stays at the table. The scenes will shift between the gym and the bar, with Jerry carrying messages.

Jim, Naheem, Ken, and Michael enter. Jerry joins them, as if he entered with them. Michael's briefcase has lots of papers in it, and he begins laying them out on the table. The others gather around.

MICHAEL

I'm not quite sure what took me over, Jim. Maybe I was just torqued when I saw Mr. No-Tremble, but whatever, once I dug into the registry and then on-line, chatted up real estate attorneys I knew -- this guy's hunger, man, prints our ticket.

JIM

What's in the oven?

NAHEEM

This is that important to him?

MICHAEL

Want to know his game plan?

(to every one)

Heh? C'mon, ask me.

(to JIM)

You called it "plantation." Recall?

JIM

It fit.

MICHAEL

Fit it did. The man's a classic carpetbagger. I checked ownership of the buildings around here -- long story short, but he's buying up or agreeing to buy up the properties in a very specific pattern. C'mon, ask me: Which one?

JERRY

Which one, Esquire?

MICHAEL

You've all heard about the new convention center going, going, gone in our fair backyard.

JIM

That?

NAHEEM

Plans floated for years. Nothing's ever been definitized --

KEN

"Not in my back yard"! Those lusty meetings --

MICHAEL

But, ah! let me repeat: Have you heard about the new convention center?

NAHEEM

A new new convention center? No.

KEN

Well, the Mayor pinged me on his cell-phone just the other day --

JIM

Ken --

(to MICHAEL)

You are driving at what?

MICHAEL

My point made -- no one around here has heard -- but -- the ego has landed in the mayor's office. The mayor is angling for world class.

KEN

World class asinine --

MICHAEL

And our Mr. Tremble-who-never-trembles -- C'mon, you know where I'm leading here --

JIM

He's on the inside track.

MICHAEL

And moving up fast.

JIM

The power of the inside word.

MICHAEL

Made fresh. And guess where the convention center
Godzilla footprint is expected to land?

Michael slowly lowers his hand to the table but then slams it down.

MICHAEL

"8-9-10 - yer out!"

Freeze. Jerry goes to Phil at the table.

JERRY

It is true?

(looking around)

Where are we?

PHIL

One of my many buildings. It has -- elements.

JERRY

You are going to steal it.

PHIL

I am going to offer Jim a fair price.

JERRY

Fair to whom?

PHIL

Fair all around.

JERRY

Fair to Jim.

PHIL

Fair to both. Mr. Sterling should get what he deserves for his opportunity. Greed is not a good strategy for either of us.

JERRY

But Michael said --

PHIL

You want to make things up with Jim? Help him by helping me: get him to take the best offer possible: my offer. Which will give comfort to his life and safe passage for his family.

JERRY

Safe passage?

PHIL

Go forth.

Jerry moves back into the gym scene.

MICHAEL

Whatever he's offering you -- pocket change with some lint.

JERRY

It's not a bad price, though, huh?

MICHAEL

Jim should get less than it's worth? Than he's worth? The Snake should win?

JERRY

His official name now?

JIM

It looks like Michael has plowed this field deep --

JERRY

He's done his work --

JIM

-- to show me a good otherwise to accepting Mr. Tremble's first offers.

NAHEEM

So what are you saying?

JERRY

We've got a good price.

NAHEEM

Hear that "we"?

MICHAEL

Always a bad price if more can be gotten -- safely, that is. Those are the rules. Tremble knows it. And Jim deserves it.

KEN

He deserves it.

NAHEEM

Safely, Michael.

JERRY

This is not safe.

MICHAEL

I'm not going to do anything that puts anything in danger. But the Snake is not going to win.

NAHEEM

Second time you've said "not going to win." I'm not sure I like the repetition.

MICHAEL

Manner of speaking.

NAHEEM

Are you getting primed, Michael? Are you getting primed for ignition?

MICHAEL

I'm not sure I like that repetition.

NAHEEM

What was my tone?

MICHAEL

It sounded like Thomas and Jesus.

NAHEEM

You have a ruby gleam in your eye, Michael.

MICHAEL

I do?

KEN

Flame-red.

MICHAEL

I do?

NAHEEM

You sure you're not developing a taste for Mr. Tremble's vital parts? Head on a platter, heart on a knife kind of thing?

MICHAEL

I can't deny --

NAHEEM

Deny what?

MICHAEL

That the more I puzzle things together, the more my guts jump.

NAHEEM

The lick of the chase, man --

(indicating JIM)

We have had enough of that in our lives. This is about settling so that we can settle into the future.

MICHAEL

Don't you think that's what I want?

NAHEEM

Is it?

Momentary freeze as they look at each other. Jerry turns to Phil.

JERRY

It's not going your way.

PHIL

Every way is my way, Jerry.

Jerry turns back. Unfreeze.

NAHEEM

Is it? I hear "thrill" in your voice.

KEN

(bays like a bloodhound)

Like a bloodhound.

MICHAEL

That's not true!

Ken bays the word "True!"

MICHAEL

(to KEN)

You have cracked --

KEN

You doth protest too much.

Ken draws a STOP sign and holds it up.

NAHEEM

The lick of the chase, man.

KEN

Remember who you are working for.

NAHEEM

I want it more direct, Ken: can we trust you? You've done all this work -- but for who and for what?

Beat -- momentary freeze. Jerry turns to Phil.

JERRY

It's a moment of doubt.

PHIL

I doubt it.

JERRY

What place is this?

PHIL

Go.

Jerry turns back. Unfreeze.

KEN

The sin of pride, Michael my boy.

JERRY

Ken's right -- you can't beat him.

NAHEEM

You were thinking it --

Ken scrawls a lightning bolt on his pad, making "thunder" noises.

MICHAEL

Did sneak up to the top of my list.

JERRY

You can't --

MICHAEL

You know, just to stick him with a little of his own --

JIM

Michael, I can understand the pull. But Phil the Snake, official name, is going to get this building -- the only real question is terms. You need your mind clear before you slip into the ring.

Jerry edges toward Phil so that he splits the two groups.

JERRY

(to PHIL)

I think you'll get what you want.

JIM

It's too late to talk to the other owners around here. Mr. Phil is the rocket's red glare, and we are -- I am -- out here alone.

PHIL
(to JERRY)

You don't know everything I want.

JIM

This is about extracting the most flesh we can from Mr. Phil before the flood tide of change swamps the chance. I can't beat him. You can't beat him.

JERRY

Right.

JIM

And to give you the full weight, I don't -- we don't -- want to beat anyone anymore. He's the only plantation we got right now, and he won't stay still for long.

JERRY
(to PHIL)

You may have to pay more -- Michael's fired up.

JIM

So we pick the field bare and move on.

(to NAHEEM)

Of course I trust him -- we just needed to re-arrange him a little.

PHIL
(to JERRY)

The night-school boy -- not an ounce of victory for him.

JERRY
(to PHIL)

What?

MICHAEL

So we go for more -- safely.

JERRY
(to JIM)

If you want to sell higher.

JIM

It's all about money and motion right now. I might as well ride.

JERRY

You don't have to ride. You can take what's on the table -- what's safe on the table.

NAHEEM

Why are you even here?

JERRY

It's your choice.

NAHEEM

That's exactly what we're saying. But what are you saying?

They all look at Jerry, then freeze. Jerry moves to the table.

JERRY

Michael will take you for more.

PHIL

Encore performance, huh?

JERRY

This place is creepy.

PHIL

Focus.

JERRY

He hates you.

PHIL

He doesn't hate me -- he's high on the chase.

JERRY

But he's got Jim to run with him.

PHIL

And you haven't been able to budge Jim?

JERRY

No one listens --

PHIL

You haven't been able to do what I asked you to do --

JERRY

I've tried!

PHIL

To help your friend get a fair price -- a price fair to him and to me -- so that he can continue his life in a comfortable retirement.

JERRY

No one listens to me.

PHIL

Remember your stake in this, Jerry -- which means you also can lose.

Jerry moves back into the gym.

JERRY

I don't know, Jim. Just that this is tricky.

JIM

Michael here will handle the details.

MICHAEL
(to NAHEEM)

And you?

JIM

Naheem?

NAHEEM

I'm going to trust him. If he can get you more money, why not -- and if Mr. Tremble doesn't want to put up the cash, someone else will. Who cares if he can't get his plantation?

I just want us to get what we can get and then get away from here.

JIM

Then that's what we'll go out with.

MICHAEL

Done!

KEN

Done!

JERRY

So, who's gonna tell him?

KEN

Jerry --

JIM

You working for him?

JERRY

No.

NAHEEM

Sounds like you're carrying his water.

JERRY

No! I just want to make sure, like everyone else, you get what's coming to you.

NAHEEM

Our best interests at heart.

MICHAEL

I'll get on to the papers.

Lights dim in the "gym" as they exit. As Jerry moves to the table, Jim re-enters in the darkness and watches the scene.

JERRY

I could hardly find this place!

PHIL
It's remote.

JERRY
You've lost.

PHIL
I have?

JERRY
Michael's handling everything.

PHIL
Esquire night-school boy --

JERRY
Jim is going for more.

PHIL
How much?

JERRY
I don't know.

PHIL
And Michael handles everything?

JERRY
Yes.

PHIL
The night-school wonderboy.

JERRY
It's nothing big for you.

PHIL
Not again.

JERRY
It's just Michael.

PHIL

My ingenue.

JERRY

What are you talking about?

PHIL

Listen. Closely. I would hate to see Jim lose what was most precious to him.

JIM

What?

PHIL

Suffer some great unnecessary loss.

JERRY

I've had enough of you.

PHIL

I only have his best interests against my heart. It is time for me to go. And I've had enough of you.

Phil moves to leave.

PHIL

Actually, that's not true. One more thing.

During the next lines, Phil puts on a pair of leather gloves and takes out a tin of what looks like black shoe polish -- though, in reality, it is black greasepaint.

JERRY

Wait -- I'm busy pulling up my pants.

PHIL

I need one more thing from you.

JERRY

I do not have any flesh left. What are you doing?

PHIL

I have the pound I need. I want one more thing from you.

JERRY

What? What are you doing?

PHIL

I want you to lose your keys.

JERRY

My keys.

PHIL

To the building.

JERRY

To the building.

PHIL

(points to the table top)

Right there.

JERRY

I won't.

PHIL

Won't?

JERRY

I won't do that.

PHIL

"Won't do."

JERRY

No.

PHIL

Hmm. "Won't do" are words only for those without shame.
Are you, sitting there, telling me that you are without shame,
Jerry? Hmm?

Jerry gets up.

JERRY

I won't do it.

PHIL

And I tell you again: "Won't do" are words only the unshamed can use.

JERRY

I don't feel -- !

PHIL

The coward's answer. The liar's choice. Sit down.

JERRY

Why?

For the first and only time in the play, Phil speaks commandingly, sharply, and Jerry should believe that he is, in fact, in real danger.

PHIL

Sit down! Sit. Down. Now. Judas. You do not know how deep you're in. How lost you are. You have run out.

Jerry sits. Phil takes the cap off the tin of shoe polish and gets some on his fingertips.

PHIL

The American story of the black man -- let's see how much you really admire it.

Phil goes to swipe it across Jerry's forehead. Jerry pulls back.

PHIL

Ah -- no, no, no. This is Ash Wednesday. Stay still.

Jerry stays still.

PHIL

Listen.

Phil draws a black streak across his forehead: the gesture should be between a caress and rough handling.

PHIL

My gospel to Jim and Naheem and company will go something like this: A long time ago, you all know Jerry Argent made a mistake.

Phil continues to paint Jerry's face in the same soft/rough way. Phil can be as "artistic" as he wants in his gestures and thoroughness of application of the minstrel face.

PHIL

An honest mistake, if mistakes can ever really be "honest." He has tried for oh so long to redeem himself for you all through his lonely vigil in that flatulent hell of the diner -- a vigil so noble-sounding and heart-rending: "I just want my father back!" But the truth? Jerry Argent has been a fool. And why? Because he has been a slave to his fears, and that has made him stupid. And how stupid?

Phil stands back and admires his work.

PHIL

He came and worked for me thinking I would do for him what he should have done for himself a long time ago. He came and worked for me!

JERRY

I don't work for --

PHIL

You came and worked for me hoping against hope that I was not what you knew I was. You convinced yourself to betray Jim by telling yourself you were helping him. How useful your shame has made you to me!

Phil starts covering Jerry's hands.

PHIL

Have you ever heard about Scorpion and Frog? Scorpion wanted to cross the river, and Frog offered to take him -- but a little nervous. "How do I know you won't sting me halfway across and we'll both drown?" "Why would I drown myself?", which made sense to Frog. So off they went, and, sure enough, halfway across, Scorpion stings Frog. "Why

did you do that?" cried Frog as he was dying. "You knew what I was when you agreed to carry me," said Scorpion. "Why did you think it would be any different?" You carried me knowing. One minor difference, though: only one of us will drown. They will believe it because they marked you a long time ago. That brick did bounce back and hit you right here --

Makes a small sign of the cross on Jerry's forehead.

PHIL

-- your mark of Cain.

JERRY

I won't do it.

PHIL

Once I tell them -- you will have no more paradise to hope for. No more vigil at the diner, no more Ken, probably, who will have reached even his considerable limit of patience, Michael disowning, Naheem enraged, Jim dismissive -- Jerry will be an exile, even more than now, homeless and fatherless and naked and hated all at once -- how does that appeal to you?

JERRY

But you know why --

PHIL

Do I? Human motives are so changeable. You've told me one thing, but you've told me others, too. What should I believe? After all, if you're working for me --

JERRY

I am not working for you --

PHIL

-- you must be like me --

JERRY

I am not like you --

PHIL

-- and I change motives almost hourly.

Phil steps back to once more admire his work.

PHIL

Now, you are properly dressed to play your part. Here you sit with two choices. Either you give me the keys, and I will keep our little engagement a secret from those you love (who may or may not love you), or I will tell -- I will tell, tell, tell, tell, tell -- and make sure you lose more than your life.

Jerry hesitates. Phil does a little "touch-up" on Jerry's face.

PHIL

You do not have the stomach for this. They will see it as your grandest betrayal yet. That much I surely do know. Tick-tock, Jerry.

Phil points to the table. Jerry hesitates again, and without warning, Phil slaps him across the face, then backhands him just as quickly, as if reprimanding a child. The slap need not be hard, but it should punctuate. Almost as immediately, Phil caresses Jerry's face.

PHIL

A pickaninny should always do what the master tells him to do.

Jerry takes out the keys.

PHIL

On the table.

The sound of the drum solo begins, very softly.

PHIL

All in the fullness of time, Iscariot. All in the fullness of what we call the march of time.

Lights fade to black as the drum solo comes up and ends with a crash.

INTERMISSION

Scene 4

As the houselights dim, strong percussion begins. In synch with the houselights, as the lights go to black, the music stops and the lights bump up to the scene in the gym. It is now a week or so later. The audience hears voices in the hallway arguing. Jerry enters first, as he does in Act I, and there is a brief moment when he is alone in the space while the voices float in from the hallways. Everything looks the same except for the fact that the heavy punching bag is not there, which they do not notice immediately. Thumb-tacked to the door jamb of the office door is an envelope.

Conversation in the hallway while Jerry is alone.

MICHAEL

Naheem -- Naheem -- listen to me, lend me your ears --

NAHEEM

You treat it like a feather --

MICHAEL

Believe me, I do not -- listen --

NAHEEM

-- like it does not really matter.

They enter. Michael is holding a letter. During this conversation, Jerry is clearly not party to the discussion. Ken pulls out his pad to begin drawing. At times Ken also goes to Jerry to see how he is. At points people can even move to where the bag was but not notice it is gone, though they might register some puzzlement. Michael puts his briefcase down. No one notices the envelope.

NAHEEM

What does the letter mean?

MICHAEL

It doesn't mean anything.

NAHEEM

What does the letter mean?

MICHAEL

They just --

NAHEEM

It must mean something if comes certified.

MICHAEL

Look --

NAHEEM

Return receipt requested.

MICHAEL

It "means" what it says --

NAHEEM

Look at what it says!

MICHAEL

-- but it does not mean anything important.

NAHEEM

He wants to sue!

MICHAEL

Yes.

NAHEEM

Not important?

MICHAEL

Blather.

NAHEEM

What?

MICHAEL

Bogus.

NAHEEM

Bogus.

MICHAEL

As in "ain't gonna happen."

NAHEEM

Not inspired when you slip into jive.

MICHAEL

But it ain't!

NAHEEM

Michael!

MICHAEL

He cannot sue what you did not do.

NAHEEM

He can sue, boogaloo, whenever he wants to because we are the ants, he is da shoe, get it?

(indicates letter)

This, this, is a shoe -- we do not take that lightly.

Michael begins to mock spar with Naheem.

MICHAEL

Do the drill with me, Naheem.

NAHEEM

Stop it --

MICHAEL

Step one, step two --

NAHEEM

Stop it --

KEN

Michael --

NAHEEM

What are you on so giddy about?

MICHAEL

He telegraphed --

NAHEEM

Get away from me.

KEN
(to MICHAEL)

Why not come down a peg --

MICHAEL
He indicated, Kensington -- Tremble trembled.

KEN
What?

MICHAEL
One, two buckle my shoe --

KEN
Michael!

MICHAEL
You never signed anything with him, right? Three, four --
You never signed a thing with him, right?

NAHEEM
Not a god[dam] --

MICHAEL
Not cocktail napkin -- five, six --

NAHEEM
Stop it!

KEN
Stop it!

MICHAEL
-- toilet paper --

NAHEEM
Not a goddam thing! Stop it!

MICHAEL
Nothing that gave exclusive anything to anything -- right?

NAHEEM
Right!

MICHAEL

Seven, eight, lay them straight.

Naheem grabs one of Michael's fists in his own and holds it crushingly tight. Michael stops.

NAHEEM

Stop being the fool.

MICHAEL

The hand -- it can be released on its own recognizance.

Naheem lets the hand go.

NAHEEM

Not a goddam thing.

MICHAEL

You're sure?

NAHEEM

I do not want to be smoked -- We may have been niggahs from North Carolina -- but we are not stupid! My father is smarter than this leech!

MICHAEL

Okay. Sustained.

NAHEEM

I am sorry we ever dialed for these dollars --

KEN

Tremble trembled?

MICHAEL

So Tremble cannot argue breach of a contract that never happened -- he's nervous --

NAHEEM

All because you asked for more, isn't it?

MICHAEL

We asked for more --

NAHEEM

You rode my father into it --

MICHAEL

We, Naheem.

NAHEEM

Bigger commission for you.

MICHAEL

We all agreed.

NAHEEM

You forced him --

MICHAEL

You agreed --

NAHEEM

You forced me.

MICHAEL

Did what I was asked to do.

NAHEEM

You drove it.

MICHAEL

I advised.

NAHEEM

You pushed.

MICHAEL

I counseled.

NAHEEM

You jerked us --

MICHAEL

Broke no one's knees, Naheem. Free choices freely made.

NAHEEM

And now letters.

MICHAEL

We are in this --

NAHEEM

Now battle lines --

MICHAEL

-- in this together --

NAHEEM

And now I have to worry if this friend -- this so-called friend
--

MICHAEL

Go on -- complete the indictment.

NAHEEM

How much this friend -- Money, Michael. Money. The
universal solvent. Even you --

KEN

Is that justified?

NAHEEM

Money twists.

KEN

Twists even you, then, if you believe Michael's false.

NAHEEM

I have to worry. That is what this son does for his father.

MICHAEL

And you are not the only son of Jim around here -- man,
oh Manishewitz -- I must be one powerful dude! I must be
Philip Tremble's love child, can bend an iron will in his bare
filthy hands!

KEN

Michael --

MICHAEL

So powerful that I can hoodwink the "niggahs from North Carolina" --

KEN

Michael!

MICHAEL

-- a righteous betrayal.

KEN

Stop it!

MICHAEL

Shut up, Ken. I am so powerful that I took Jim "smarter than this leech" Sterling for a ride -- stay back from me, Naheem, I am dangerous! -- slimy Michael bagging his overweight commission from the dumb-ass black folks -- stay away! -- even though he hasn't been paid dime one yet. Stay away, stay away!

KEN

Michael, stop this now!

Ken physically tries to restrain Michael, not very successfully.

MICHAEL

Or maybe I am getting paid off from Tremble Associates

KEN

Michael --

MICHAEL

Back off, Ken -- double deal dealt right into my bank account.

KEN

Michael --

MICHAEL
(to KEN)

I'm warning you.

(to NAHEEM)

Do you know how often I got my can handed to me because I was friends with you? Did I ever give you up then? Did I ever do the Judas to you or to Jim?

(to KEN)

Hands off.

KEN

Right --

MICHAEL

I have always been on your side, Naheem. You tell me if I haven't. You tell me if you think all of this has made my bank account fat. Is that how you see it?

KEN

Lower the temperature, Michael --

MICHAEL

Is that how you see it?

NAHEEM

I see it like you want to get him -- that is how it appears to these.

MICHAEL

(to KEN)

How blind --

NAHEEM

You shoot. He shoots. A duel.

MICHAEL

Pow, pow. With your money.

NAHEEM

With our lives.

KEN

Jerry, say something.

Jerry says nothing.

NAHEEM

With my father as bullseye.

MICHAEL

A duel -- man, oh Manchester, England! You think in the serious cold light I want to cross shots with this man?

NAHEEM

You beat him once.

KEN

Like lucky dumb luck, Naheem.

MICHAEL

(to KEN)

Thank you. You don't beat people like Tremble.

(indicates the letter)

Sure, a little glitch -- a little scrap we can use to make a point -- maybe. But you do not beat people like Tremble. You do not beat gods. You get in, get out before you get slapped. You "beat" them by getting out alive.

(with some gentleness)

I want us out alive, Naheem. Intact, alive, with enough money to honor thy father. Any objections to that?

KEN

May I see the letter?

Michael hands it to him. Beat.

MICHAEL

Being scared makes -- us -- talk stupid, Naheem. No more -- deal? We ain't got the time.

NAHEEM

Did you -- did we -- muck up or something?

MICHAEL

A simple letter to him -- you saw it -- stating his first offer was a departure for negotiation, not last call. That is all. Inviting him to continue the discussion. You saw it.

KEN

(indicating the letter)

It sounds serious enough.

MICHAEL

We do need to respond, and I need to talk to Jim.

NAHEEM

Well, talk to him.

MICHAEL

For that, I need to know where he is.

NAHEEM

In the office.

MICHAEL

In the office?

NAHEEM

I thought.

Everyone looks at the office, and for the first time they notice the envelope. Everyone talks as if in normal conversation but clearly aware of the envelope and not sure what it means. All but Jerry move toward the office, slowly, cautiously.

MICHAEL

Then why hasn't he come out?

KEN

On the door?

MICHAEL

We ain't been exactly quiet.

NAHEEM

Well, he is not upstairs, in the house. I just came from there. I don't know.

KEN

So where would he go on a day like today?

NAHEEM

My father doesn't go anywhere. Not like he's a stroller,
except to the store for his tonic --

MICHAEL

So, maybe he went --

NAHEEM

His coat is still upstairs. It is not covering his back.

KEN

(to NAHEEM)

When did you see him last?

NAHEEM

Last night.

KEN

When last night?

NAHEEM

When I left to go home.

MICHAEL

Could he have left?

NAHEEM

For what? It was late -- after news. Look, I know my father's
cranks -- he is not one for a midnight ramble, especially in
this neighborhood.

KEN

And this morning?

NAHEEM

I assumed he went to church. But that would be over by
now.

KEN

But there is the matter of his coat. Still here.

By this time they are standing at the door, looking at the envelope. Jerry
has not moved.

NAHEEM

His coat is still there. The coat he would wear to church --

Michael looks at everyone, then slowly takes down the envelope. He opens it and shakes out Jim's necklace, except that it has been broken in half.

NAHEEM

It's been cracked --

They look at each other, and then around, suddenly frightened.

JERRY

You'll notice --

They all turn to him.

JERRY

You'll notice that the heavy bag is gone.

They notice it. Without a word, Michael opens the office door and the bag, which has been leaning against it, falls into the room. Taped to the bag is another envelope, and it is taped to the end of a piece of duct tape in a way that should suggest that someone pull the tape. Naheem opens it, and it's the other half of the broken necklace. Naheem tears away the duct tape and looks in the bag. He looks at the others. There is a beat as he puts his hand in the bag and takes it out, bloody; then a long agonized howl of pain. The scene shifts to a sudden blackness, then a bright light on Jerry. Drum solo kicks in.

* * * * *

Scene 5

Jerry in his own bright light, terrified: shaking, shaken. Jim appears in another bright light; Jerry sees him. The lights cut out; drum solo continues. They run two different places -- lights up, then down. Two more times. The effect should be as if Jerry is being pursued. At the final black, Jim exits.

Phil enters in darkness. He sits in an executive office chair.

* * * * *

Scene 6

The drum solo cuts out at the same moment the lights bump up. Jerry seated, as if to a secretary but also as if others are watching him in the reception area.

JERRY

Don't give me the "not in" crap. He's in. I know he's in. Look, I watched him slither -- That's right -- no, no, no, he will see me, Jerry Argent, you just press the right button -- he's in, I know he's in -- c'mon, c'mon, c'mon, I'll take that phone if you don't -- right, right, you call him right now, go on -- that's right, Jerry Argent -- tell him -- what? go down there? his secretary -- aren't you his -- right, right, down to the right, around --

Lights change location; the sound of a fight bell; Jerry sits down.

JERRY

Jerry Argent for Philip Tremble -- no, I don't, but he will see me -- just buzz him on the phone -- go on, go on -- I don't need an appointment -- in fact, he has one with me, required -- go on. Good. Down, down to the left? Aren't you his sec -- left, then a left?

Lights change location; the sound of a fight bell; Jerry sits down.

JERRY

I've got myself more lost than ever -- a maze -- tell him -- oh, so you know, from out front, yes -- tell him it's required -- he owes -- oh, yes, I can wait a minute. A minute -- that's all -- I've got infor[mation] -- I've got --

Lights change to Phil's office; fight bell. Jerry more or less falls into the office, as if he's been ejected into it. He sits in his chair.

PHIL

Welcome.

JERRY

A maze --

PHIL

Amazing, yes it is, out there. A. Maze. Ing. So, well, now that you have bulled your way in here -- what? You look like a thread in your head is about ready to snap. Hmmm? Speak quickly, Jerry Argent, because I am hungry.

(sniffs)

I smell agony in the room. I smell a tortured soul.

JERRY

How could you --

PHIL

How could I. All right.

JERRY

Bring yourself --

PHIL

Bring myself. To what?

JERRY

How?

PHIL

To what, my raven?

JERRY

To stuff part of his body --

PHIL

The body of whom?

JERRY

What?

PHIL

The body of whom?

JERRY

Whom? What a piece of -- work you are!

PHIL

We all are of such a piece.

JERRY

You are a piece of --

PHIL

Remember where you are, Mr. Argent --

JERRY

You deny --

PHIL

Deny nothing.

JERRY

You deny that --

PHIL

I deny everything because I have nothing to deny.
Remember where you are, Jerry.

Phil snaps his fingers, gets out of his chair.

PHIL

Ah. You mean -- you must -- that weekend tragedy -- yes, yes, that one -- I read it in today's newspaper. It was below the fold. Metro section. Small box, near the bottom. Small sans serif headline. Continued on the back, after the auto ads. All the notice that a man like that gathers? A shame.

JERRY

You said --

PHIL

Deny.

JERRY

A man of your word.

PHIL

Not that word.

JERRY

Not a man.

PHIL

You came all the way here, through shadow and sadness to say -- I said that?

JERRY

You said --

PHIL

Such anguish.

JERRY

-- directly to me --

PHIL

All because of a false something heard.

JERRY

-- a matter of life and death --

PHIL

Sit down! Now! Sit! It is always -- my buddy -- a matter -- of life and death -- with me. You will really need to become more aware of this -- element -- in my character. Good. Besides, the man --

JERRY

He had a name --

PHIL

-- was practically -- name? yes, Jim, James, Sterling, then -- let us pay a proper honor -- practically my business partner, yes, wouldn't you say?

JERRY

And you had someone --

PHIL

We had dealings, Jerry.

JERRY

You paid someone --

PHIL

We had started dealings. Exchange. Why would I un-deal by, well, whatever you accuse me?

JERRY

You paid someone!

PHIL

I was going to get the building.

JERRY

What?

PHIL

The building -- you remember that?

JERRY

But Michael --

PHIL

Ah, the archangel -- here is the skinny on the archangel. Con. Sore. Shee. Um. Remember that? That flat bit of trickery? That is Michael -- an empty breath. Not worth my breathing. Here is the real word, Jerry Argent: "Ch-ch-ch-changes." Say it with me. "Ch-ch-ch-changes --"

JERRY

I will not.

PHIL

"Ch-ch-ch-changes," Jerry.

(softly)

"Turn and face the stranger -- " "Ch-ch-ch-changes." James Sterling -- rest his black eradicated soul -- is dead. Is he not, Jerry?

JERRY

Yes.

PHIL

He is, isn't he?

JERRY

Yes.

PHIL

Begin for you the laying of him to rest.

JERRY

And you ki[lled] --

PHIL

Ah, ah, ah -- I will damage you.

JERRY

Your hand is all over --

Phil touches Jerry on the face with his hand. Jerry pulls away.

PHIL

My hand is this, Jerry Argent, laid out flush: James Sterling is dead, and for that I grieve.

JERRY

You grieve the way a stone grieves.

PHIL

But why would I desire him dead? True, I am not above --

JERRY

You are so full of snakes --

PHIL

-- a little escalation in fear -- it concentrates the choices. Jim was in a league not his own. Nor the archangel -- the night school lawyer. They needed to know that. Above their weight class. But death -- Do I smell doubt?

JERRY

You could kill.

PHIL

But did I? Did I?

(looking closely, sniffs)

Doubt. And --

(sniffs again)

-- a spoon of guilt, a whiff of "Perhaps I had a part -- " After all -- grief can -- disarm a man. Grief will disarm Naheem -- and as cold as it is to say it, that will be to my advantage. This hand continues -- time presses -- "ch-ch-ch-changes," Jerry. Are you done? I read that the funeral is this week. Go. Convey my regrets. I cannot be there. Go. Say goodbye to your friend. Grieve. Go.

Jerry is at where the "door" would be.

PHIL

By the way. One small matter -- one small key item. Almost embarrassed to bring it up.

JERRY

What?

PHIL

You don't happen -- you don't happen to have your keys, do you?

JERRY

What?

PHIL

Your keys? Dawning realization.

JERRY

No. No. I do not.

PHIL

You do not?

JERRY

No.

PHIL

Well, then. I wonder.

JERRY

What?

PHIL

I wonder where they are.

JERRY

You do not have them.

PHIL

I never had them.

JERRY

You used them.

PHIL

I had asked if you had them, true.

JERRY

I gave them to you.

PHIL

You lost them.

JERRY

To get in the building.

PHIL

I cannot say I did that.

JERRY

You never used them?

PHIL

I only came in the building upon Jim's invitation.

JERRY

Did someone else use them?

PHIL

I do not know.

JERRY

But I left them for you.

PHIL

Things get lost.

JERRY

And now you do not?

PHIL

Why would I? And you do not?

JERRY

No. I have my extra set.

PHIL

I am sure they will rise up.

JERRY

What do you mean, "sure"?

PHIL

"Sure" the way things turn -- about. Fair. Play.

JERRY

You know what this means.

PHIL

Do I?

JERRY

You know this means I am floating out there.

PHIL

Do I? I have no more luck reading --

JERRY

A piece of me -- flotsam --

PHIL

-- the future than you do.

JERRY

If those keys turn up --

PHIL

Yes?

JERRY

What am I supposed to say?

PHIL

You're innocent. Say what you like.

JERRY

I am sure they will turn up.

PHIL

You look ashen.

JERRY

They will turn up.

PHIL

Ghostly.

JERRY

They will turn up in a way that --

PHIL

Are you failing?

JERRY

-- will break everything -- broken --

PHIL

Is it Jim's ghost?

JERRY

Ah --

PHIL

Go.

JERRY

You --

PHIL

Ite missa est.

JERRY

You used --

PHIL

I never used the key.

JERRY

Used me.

PHIL

As a good key should be used. Click. Click. Bam. Go.
Grieve. You already look overtime.

Lights change. Phil exits. Chairs off.

* * * * *

Scene 7

Jerry in harsh light. Jim behind him in harsh light.

JERRY

What has been done? No -- what have I done? I have done
so much everything and so much nothing. In so far -- so far,
so deep, so lost. Everything lost. Everything -- Judas.

Jim walks to Jerry's light and gives Jerry the "lost" keys. Jerry takes them
and deliberately slices the palm of his hand -- there is blood. Lights fade.
Jerry and Jim exit.

* * * * *

Scene 8

The sound of a snare drum played with brushes, insistent but soft. Jim's
funeral. Lights up find Jim sitting on the floor, downstage center. Naheem
sits to one side on a black box. Michael and Ken sit slightly farther back
on black boxes; and further behind them is Jerry, standing, unseen by any
of them. Some kind of container holding incense sticks or some substance
that creates smoke is placed behind Jim, and in a strong shaft of downlight,
the smoke curls upward.

Each actor, except Jim, holds a downy feather: Ken has a blue one, Michael a red one, and Naheem a white one. First, Ken takes his box and, placing next to the light, stands on it and releases the feather so that it drifts down in the light. Then he takes his box and exits. Michael does the same thing. Naheem speaks.

NAHEEM

Who killed my father. How will there be justice. What must the son do. And not do. For the rest of his life's sentence.

Naheem stands on his box and releases his feather. Jerry mimics his gestures, but nothing falls from his hand. Lights out, music goes until lights come up for the next scene.

* * * * *

Scene 9

The gym. Michael and Ken enter. Ken, as usual, has his satchel. They are dressed as at the top of the play, in mourning, but no armbands. There are several moments in silence.

KEN

What -- can -- What -- can -- anybody -- Words just -- fail. Just fail completely.

Michael does not respond immediately.

KEN

I really do not like this.

MICHAEL

It just has to be carried.

KEN

Dragged, more like it.

MICHAEL

Dragged, then. Just be quiet about it.

KEN

Strong and dumb -- being so brave in this brave new world. It will freeze our hearts and kill us all.

Ken takes out his pad and begins to draw.

KEN

What happens now?

MICHAEL

Now.

KEN

To everything?

MICHAEL

To everything.

KEN

Legitimate questions.

MICHAEL

Perfectly. Legitimate. Questions.

KEN

Naheem is going to want to --

MICHAEL

Documents and dockets must be satisfied. Memories, memorials -- get them done with. Dust to ashes, then on to invoices and court filings. The world -- waits. And wastes. And doesn't wait. And wastes some more.

KEN

What happens?

Jerry shows up in the door, his hand bandaged.

MICHAEL

What happens?

(indicating JERRY)

Well. This, for instance.

JERRY

What?

KEN

You weren't there.

MICHAEL

Hello, Jerry.

Jerry enters the space.

KEN

You weren't there. Your hand.

JERRY

Michael --

KEN

Your hand.

JERRY

Michael --

MICHAEL

Your hand, Jerry. The one who --

JERRY

Michael --

MICHAEL

-- in this world loves you, the only one as far as I can tell,
wants to know.

JERRY

Michael -- what happens?

KEN

Where were you?

JERRY

Michael, what happens now?

MICHAEL

You were deep into bird guts once, I heard -- brighten our
day, why don't you?

JERRY

I do not know anything.

MICHAEL

You lie.

KEN

Jerry, answer me: where were you? I waited and waited -- I had to leave. Without you. Where were you? Let me see that.

JERRY

Leave! Leave it alone!

KEN

It's got blood.

MICHAEL

You do not want to touch him.

KEN

It's got blood on it.

JERRY

Leave it alone!

KEN

I just want --

MICHAEL

(to KEN)

You do not want. You really don't.
(snaps his fingers)

Click, click, bam.

JERRY

Will Naheem --

MICHAEL

Keep that off me.

JERRY

Will Naheem have to --

MICHAEL

Stay away from me.

(to all)

You want to read Naheem's guts, go ask his permission!

JERRY

But you have all the paperwork --

MICHAEL

Choking on paperwork! The whole world is making me gag, Gerald, the whole world, and that includes you. Over there. I do not want you near me.

KEN

You were not there, Jerry.

MICHAEL

You have been up to something --

KEN

At the funeral of Jim --

MICHAEL

You have not been one hundred percent --

KEN

You were not there.

MICHAEL

Your eyes steam --

KEN

You can't just excuse that away.

JERRY

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

The evasive look, the eyes from the side, the way the air fears for its life when you walk into the room -- we've all smelt it. It riffs off you in waves. Maybe it was good he wasn't at the funeral, Kensington -- he would have cleared the hall.

KEN

I mean, your hand is bleeding.

JERRY

I cut it downstairs.

MICHAEL

Diner's closed on Sundays.

JERRY

On the door.

MICHAEL

When? Just now? A swath of bandage in your pocket --
how Boy Scout of you!

JERRY

Some time --

MICHAEL

I feel a closing circle closing, don't you, Kensington? The
lariat, the garrote, the noose.

KEN

Jerry, answer straight. C'mon!

MICHAEL

Circle, circle. Ding-ding, Round One.

KEN

Jerry, what is going on?

MICHAEL

Gerald, look at me. Look at me.

(JERRY looks)

I know.

KEN

(to MICHAEL)

You know?

Naheem appears in the door, slowly. He has been listening to the conversation while standing in the hall. They do not notice him at first. He holds an envelope in his hand.

MICHAEL

(still speaking to JERRY)

I stopped in at McMahon's the other day for a drink -- did you think no one would notice? All the meetings?

KEN

Meetings?

MICHAEL

A liaison, Ken. Who, Gerald, was taking up so much of your extra time?

NAHEEM

Tremble.

KEN

Tremble?

MICHAEL

You knew?

NAHEEM

I found out.

KEN

You were meeting with --

MICHAEL

The snake of the first water.

KEN

Why?

MICHAEL

Ding-ding. Last round.

Naheem enters the room.

NAHEEM

Didn't see you at the funeral. Care to explain? Actually -- Actually, do not wash your breath over me. Enough profanity on this day for a lifetime of shame -- no need for addition. My dead father. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Not dead by way of nature -- long life, respect of age, chance to reflect and gather. Nope. He earned murder instead -- for what? For what did he deserve extinction?

(gestures around him)

For this. This -- palace of dreams.

Naheem takes Jerry's keys out of the envelope.

KEN

Those are your keys.

NAHEEM

Look at these. Gaze upon them. What are they, Jerry?

(sing-song)

Jerry -- what are they?

JERRY

My keys.

MICHAEL

That's evidence, Naheem.

NAHEEM

Oh, look deeper. Not just keys. Not just keys. A sign.

MICHAEL

Naheem --

NAHEEM

A sign, Jerry. An omen. Ravens and burning stars.

MICHAEL

Naheem, you have to --

NAHEEM

Do you know the emptiness, Jerry? Of absence, Jerry?
Of the absence of someone deeply loved, Jerry? Deeply
loved and then deleted, Jerry? I cannot hear you, Jerry.

JERRY

My keys, yes.

KEN

Jerry --

NAHEEM

This is a sign. A sign. At the funeral, someone comes
up to me, unknown to me, and gives this envelope to me.
Distracted, I do not even see his face.

MICHAEL

Give them to me --

NAHEEM

The invisible messenger disappears. But the envelope --
ah, the envelope. It stays. I put it away for later. I must lay
my father to his rest. Are you listening, Jerry? Later, I take
it out. I read its guts. I -- invade them. They invade me. I
know this -- thing. I know its hand. Are you listening, Jerry?
Whose keys are these?

JERRY

Mine.

NAHEEM

Why do I have them?

JERRY

I --

NAHEEM

Why don't you have them?

JERRY

I must have lost --

NAHEEM

A sign of trust, isn't it, if you lost them, to tell us? At least tell your boss. We'd have changed the locks -- no problem. Nothing to be ashamed of in the losing.

JERRY

I don't know.

NAHEEM

Convince me, please, that you lost them. Do not let me think --

JERRY

I might have --

NAHEEM

Do not let me think! Do -- not -- let -- me -- think. Jerry?

JERRY

I can't prove what you want.

NAHEEM

Michael, stay back!

KEN

Jerry --

NAHEEM

It always struck me -- I will hurt you! -- God, I do not want to do this, any of it!

MICHAEL

Don't --

NAHEEM

Jerry, convince me, please --

KEN

Jerry, just tell him you lost the keys. Tell him that this is what happened, set his mind to rest --

JERRY

I can't. I can't. The well is dry.

KEN

Jerry!

NAHEEM

(indicating KEN)

Do you see his face?

(pounds his heart)

Aches with disbelief! Right here!

(spreads his hand over his own breast)

Already it turns hard.

(pounds it again)

Already it completes -- into -- stone. I do not want -- I have never wanted -- But already it is gone. Dust.

(to KEN)

No, your face still -- pain -- You matter -- love -- a cheat --

(to JERRY, indicating KEN)

You are so careless.

MICHAEL

Naheem, give me the keys.

NAHEEM

Conclusion. It always puzzled me -- puzzled the police, too -- how the perpetrator -- the perpetrator -- got into the building.

KEN

Michael --

NAHEEM

It is a very tight building on the outside -- Dad and I buttoned it tight over the years --

(to himself)

-- the heart crumbles -- no!

MICHAEL

Ken, get Jerry out of here.

NAHEEM

(to KEN)

You must --

MICHAEL

I'll deal --

NAHEEM

-- witness!

KEN

Jerry could not have done it!

NAHEEM

Witness! No sign of forced entry -- you know forced entry?
(pounds his breast)

Crack, crack, crack! No sign of forced entry. Jerry, help me. My only conclusion? Please, no! Please convince me --

JERRY

Say it.

NAHEEM

Say it?

JERRY

Say it. Say it.

NAHEEM

Say it? Say it? To welcome the snake, then. Say it? Then to be the snake. Say it? But it must be said. In final pieces. It must be done. Were you here when the deed was done, Jerry?

JERRY

No.

NAHEEM

Were you around? Did you hear him?

JERRY

No.

NAHEEM

Did he scream, or did he just grunt when they cut his throat? Face surprised or terrified?

JERRY

I was not here.

NAHEEM

Your key in the lock -- easy slide in, easing in. He probably never heard the click of the lock. I can imagine all the spikes of it, Jerry -- the footfall, the killer's dead heart racing, that moment when my father knew -- God, feeling the life drain, knowing -- All of that up here, like nails and thorns.

JERRY

I was not here. I did not do anything.

NAHEEM

Except --

JERRY

Except -- yes.

NAHEEM

Except pass the keys to Mr. Tremble -- true?

KEN

Jerry, you have to tell --

NAHEEM

You gave him these keys, I do not know for why, for what -- and these got passed, and then passed again.

JERRY

I did not kill your father.

NAHEEM

But you did. You did.

Jerry moves to stand in front of Ken; he touches Ken's face. Then he moves to Naheem and, standing in front of him, makes a gesture of openness, as if to say, "I am what you say I am."

MICHAEL

Naheem, we've got to let --

NAHEEM

(laughs)

Not that easy. How can you even begin to feel your emptiness? You have not lost anything. A price has to be paid, boy, a price must be paid in kind.

MICHAEL

Naheem --

Holding one of the keys, Naheem unexpectedly grabs Ken around the neck, and with Ken's head held by his arm, he punches Jerry's key into each eye. Naheem lets Ken drop to the floor. Ken's eyes are bloody.

NAHEEM

Now you can begin to know.

MICHAEL

Naheem!

Jerry rushes to Ken. Naheem presses the key into Michael's hand. Michael responds as if he had just had an ember or nail driven into his palm. Naheem drifts to another part of the room. Michael stands in the middle. Lights fade to black as the audience hears lamentation.

About Block & Tackle Productions

After more than a decade of projects together, Michael Bettencourt and Elfin Frederick Vogel joined forces to form Block & Tackle Productions. In addition to producing Michael's plays with Elfin directing, B&T Productions also looks to collaborate with other playwrights and directors and explore different media for dramatic narrative, such as live-streaming theatrical productions, recording radio-play podcasts, and creating short films.

Whichever project B&T Productions pursues, it will create theatre narratives focused on our present times and where every part of the production - design (set, lighting, sound, media), performance, script, the brand of beer sold in the lobby, and the pre-show music - relates to and nourishes every other part. As often as possible, B&T Productions will do this in collaboration or conjunction with like-minded theatre-makers.

Elfin Frederick Vogel (Producer/Director) -- Elfin has directed over thirty productions in New York City and regional theatres, from classical plays (among others, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*) to 20th-century plays (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *The Real Thing*, *Exit the King*) and new plays, among them *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*, *Excerpts from the Lost Letters of Hester Prynne*, *No Great Loss*, *Four Plays*, *The Sin Eater* (all by Michael Bettencourt), and *Moral and Political Lessons on "Wyoming"* and *Reckless Abandon* (by Vincent Sessa).

Michael Bettencourt (Producer/Writer) -- Michael is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. As always, special thanks to María Beatriz. All his work can be seen at www.m-bettencourt.com

**Block
&Tackle**
PRODUCTIONS

www.blockandtackleproductions.com

