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**Murder/Rapture**

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

WITH CREATIVE WRITING EMPHASIS

By

Jeffery Spruill

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

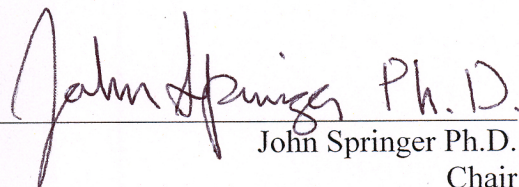
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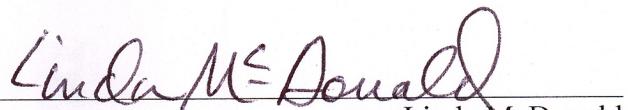
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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

24 April 2008

  
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## Introduction to “Murder/Rapture”

Jeffery Spruill

I wrote my first non-realistic play as a theoretical exercise during my senior year at Harding University. “The Origin of Language” (originally titled “Theory of the Origin of Language”) followed two cavemen inventing language. As they did so, a power struggle ensued as one became the rule-maker, spending all his time in the lofty pursuit of inventing language while the other was left to do all the hunting. Charlie, the rule maker, promises Harold that, once their language is complete, they will never again have to hunt. They will be able to use their language to trade for food. In the end, it is all for naught. Harold and Charlie are starving because Charlie has turned their hunting spear into a stylus. They think they are saved when a woman approaches carrying an animal carcass. Charlie insists that this is their chance to use their language, but they find that they cannot communicate with her; she speaks German. In the end, they kill the girl, Harold kills Charlie (my version of a proletariat revolt), Harold is left muttering gibberish, waiting to starve.

The play had everything that makes an absurdist play great: blatant Marxism, Brechtian alienation, Artuad style violence, and the deconstruction of language. So I was surprised to discover that the play was a kind of art school closet drama. Though I got to explore all the artistic issues that interested me, I had written a play that could not communicate with an audience. After distancing myself from the play (for about three years) I tried to analyze why the play didn’t work.

What I discovered was that the play was just too French. I wrote it entirely by the rules and strategies I learned from Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Samuel Beckett, the playwrights I most enjoy. My characters spoke in non-sequiturs, they constantly broke the fourth wall, and they made contemporary jokes though the play was set in prehistoric time. My characters destroyed themselves because of a failure to communicate, and their failure to communicate came directly from a failure of language. I stole all of these moves from the French Absurdist writers I so loved. However, the work of these mid-century French writers has only a niche appeal in early twenty-first century America, where theatre-goers are still accustomed to realistic characters, settings, and plot lines, and actors are still taught according to “the system.” And, being employed by a young, unknown American playwright, the absurdist style can seem artsy and juvenile. Thus, the goal in all my writing since, culminating in this thesis, has been to find a way to Americanize the absurdist theatre so that I can say what I want to say, and employ the dramatic theories and non-traditional tactics that I want in a way that can communicate to my own audience.

To do this, I began looking at non-realistic theatre written in English. I tried to determine what writers like Harold Pinter, Arthur Kopit, and Edward Albee were doing differently than the French writers that I revered. I was not interested in copying these writers, but I wanted to search their writing in order to find out what they knew that I didn't.

I found in the English language writers less of a self-conscious focus on language. Where the French writers commented on the failure of human communication - perhaps the most discussed subject in the Absurdist theatre - by writing dialogue full of clichés

and non-sequiturs (something I did in “The Origin”), American and British writers generally kept their dialogue realistic. They chose, instead, to handle their characters failure to communicate through the more plausible tactic of inserting characters who were, in some way or other, unwilling to communicate. In “Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mom’s Hung You in the Closet and I’m Feeling so Sad,” Kopit introduces a mother who controls her adult son so completely that she simply refuses to consider, often seeming not even to hear, what he says. Albee fills his plays with characters who have values so different from each other that they cannot hope to empathize, and thereby communicate effectively, with each other. While French Absurdism addresses inability to communicate on the sentence level, by composing lines that are often non-sensical, English language non-traditional writers address this issue on the level of character. Characters fail to communicate, not because they fail to understand, but because they fail to listen.

English writers are able to do this because they, unlike the French, have not abolished the concept of motivation. The French accepted Brecht’s notion that an audience can never be fully convinced of the realness of a play. The audience will always know that what they are watching is false. For this reason, the French writers made no attempt to create three dimensional characters with back stories and character drives. Samuel Beckett was once asked by an American actor about the background of a character that the actor was to play. Beckett famously replied that he did not know - that, if the character had had a background, it would have been included in the play. American writers, on the other hand, have held fast to the notion that characters must be motivated to act.

This is perhaps because, to us, conflict is not accidental, but instead comes from the evil that lives in the heart of man. Man commits crimes against other men because the perversion, greed, and violence that exists in the psyche of every human. American non-realistic theatre seeks to expose these compulsions by exaggerating them. Thus, American non-realistic plays present a reality in which the human psyche is allowed to run amuck, as if characters possessed an id, but no super-ego.

Thus, in “Murder/Rapture,” Ida and Lenny kill, not one man, but hundreds. They kill, not for extraordinary sums of money, but for a glass eye, and eventually simply because they are able. The idea is to create a worst-case scenario of human cruelty, one in which otherwise likable characters are able to do so much evil that they are able to completely stop a town (and, if Lenny is able to go as far as he would like, the world) from functioning.

A goal of absurdist theatre, both English and French, is to construct a hypothetical world in which good never wins out against evil, and men are destined to make the same mistakes again and again. For all their comedy, absurd plays are intended to serve as modern morality tales, warning their audiences of mankind’s potential. And, even while they flaunt their rebellion against realism, they present a real picture of what man could be if he operated only on his own primal impulses. These writers try to bring man into a violent confrontation with himself. Jerzy Grotowski says that, “The core of theatre is an encounter. The man who makes an act of revelation is, so to speak, on who establishes contact with himself. That is to say, an extreme confrontation” (Grotowski 57). Theatre, according to Antonin Artaud, is an act of cruelty that seeks to furnish “the spectator with the truthful precipitates of his dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions,

his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism pour out” (Artaud 92). In other words, theatre exists to foreground the darkness lurking within man’s subconscious.

This is the project of my play as well. I intend for my characters to look, in some ways, like any real member of the audience. Both characters are capable of love. They love each other, and Ida loves Ms. Mild. They are occasionally capable of being very good. Ida seems genuine when he talks about how much he likes to help people, and he insists on giving his victims a proper burial. But whatever goodness they may possess is undermined by overriding, all consuming compulsion toward violence. This style of theatre attacks the assumption that men are endowed with reason, and substitutes it with the hypothetical notion that man is, in fact, endowed with the opposite of reason, whatever that may be. For the French, this involved an attack on language, the old fashioned proof that man was innately reasonable. For American writers, this meant attacking the assumption that man was ultimately “good.” The construction of more realistic characters with realistic internal drives is what separates American non-realistic theatre from the French Absurdist theatre.

For me, the issue of character motivation is problematic. Typical American acting emphasizes an approach that requires a character to have a specific motivation for each action. David Mamet claims that “what makes a good play is a protagonist who wants something vehemently and is going to set out to get it” (Mamet ) This statement carries with it the assumption that one can search for, and find the *one* thing that drives a character, or that the character *wants*. However, human activity, it seems to me, is rarely so simple. The human psyche is enmeshed with countless desires, drives, and

motivations which often conflict with one another, and a person is often unaware of or unable to understand his own motivations. In other words, a person is rarely, if ever, acting in order to achieve one purpose, but, rather, he is acting despite his inability to reconcile the cross-purposes in his own psyche. Perhaps, then, instead of constructing a psychologically consistent character, playwrights ought to emphasize man's incongruity. Thus, Ira can sew funeral shrouds and insist on Christian burials for people who he himself has killed. Lenny can be the most intelligent character, but finally be the most insane as well. Ms. Mild can be both a picture of modest virtue, and a codependent manipulator. So, while the character's incongruities are exaggerated, and thus absurd, they are also realistic. In this way, I am trying to revise our American notion of dramatic conflict in which two characters want opposite things. Instead, a character who himself wants opposite things must interact with another character who wants opposite things. Thus, no character, like no person, is fully integrated.

Also, I have not totally abandoned the tropes of the French theatre that I so love and by which I have been so influenced. I still try to create an alienation effect by writing a self-conscious text. I have tried to write a play that knows it's a play. I do this mostly through Lenny, who seems constantly aware of the literary devices he uses as he speaks. Noticing the assonance between "delay" and "decay," he rehearses the two words, then remarks. "Beautiful. Simply, poetic"(20). When Ms. Mild is knocking at the door, he remarks before opening, "Time to see who's waiting in the wings"(29), and he comments on his own assessment of Ms. Mild's fake uniform when he says, "An army faux. Ah, beautiful double entendre"(32). Finally, he ostensibly breaks the realist sacred



cow that is the fourth wall every time he talks to himself in the mirror on the false wall. Each time he does this, he is looking into the audience.

I have also maintained the more European Marxist concern with power and class. Ida and Lenny correctly worry that the police department will try harder to solve the case of a murdered prominent man than they otherwise might have. As I do in many of my plays, I have created an unequal power structure between the two main characters in which Ida, for most of the play, takes a subservient role to Lenny. The plot finally unravels only when this power structure inevitably unravels.

What I have tried to do in “Murder/Rapture” is to take the parts of each non-realistic tradition, French and English, that I most value and combine them in such a way that I can address the issues that interest me, such as the problematic nature of language, and mankind’s tendency towards the seizing of power, in a way that will also communicate with an American audience. I have tried to find a way to experiment with theoretical issues as well as social issues in a way that will still allow an audience to connect with my characters (a major tenant of American theatre). I hope that I have written a play that has allowed me to explore my own aesthetic without writing a juvenile closet drama.

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"Murder/Rapture"

by

Jeffery Spruill

Murder/Rapture

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING:

The living area of a dilapidated house. Dusty, cluttered, and dimly lit. There is a large hutch with closed cabinet doors on the UC wall and a sofa in the middle of the room. A mirror hangs on the fourth wall, DC, invisible to the audience. An old record player stands against one wall. A door leads to a kitchen at SR and a door from the outside at SL.

A staircase leads upstairs to a balcony where there are doors to two upstairs rooms: IRA's at SL and LENNY's at SR. A trapdoor covers a staircase leading to a DSR basement.

AT RISE:

The outside door flies open. Two men, IRA and LENNY enter. They carry a human body wrapped in a sheet. There is twine around the legs and the neck. IRA carries the head and LENNY the feet.

IRA

Oh my god! This is heavy!

LENNY

Careful. No dropsies.

IRA

I won't drop it.

IRA drops the head which hits the floor with a thud.

LENNY

Dammit, Ira. I said no dropsies.

IRA

(picking it up)

What difference does it make? He can't feel it.

LENNY

Do you want to open up a wound? Do you want his blood on the carpets?

IRA

We have no carpets.

LENNY

The grain of the wood then? That's even worse. Have you ever tried to clean blood out of wood grain before?

IRA

Of course not. Why would I have?

LENNY

It isn't easy.

IRA

Okay, okay, okay... Lenny!

LENNY

What is it?

IRA

I've got to put him down.

LENNY

Why?

IRA

He's heavy.

LENNY

We only have to go to there.  
(indicating the trap door with his head)

IRA

Well I can only carry him to here.

LENNY

Okay. But gently.

IRA drops the head which hits the floor with a thud.

LENNY

Gently, Ira!

IRA

The wood grain, right. Sorry.

LENNY

Don't just stand there, check for blood.

IRA doesn't move.

I don't see any.

IRA

Well check. Check!

LENNY

IRA bends over the body.

Still nothing.

IRA

Did you look under the head?

LENNY

IRA picks up the head. He is not gentle.

Nothing.

IRA

IRA drops the head which lands with a thud. IRA then crosses to the sofa and sits.

Ah, what is it all for?

IRA

You said it.

LENNY

No, I mean, what is it all for? Why did we have to carry this thing all the way home?

IRA

We had to put him somewhere.

LENNY

Why us?

IRA

(impatiently)  
Because you killed him.

LENNY

Killed? It was an accident.

IRA

So you've said. Always you and your dropsies.

LENNY

Couldn't we have just called an ambulance?

IRA

LENNY

What would he do with an ambulance? He was dead.

IRA

Couldn't we have just called the police?

LENNY

Did you want to go to prison?

IRA

But, an accident?

LENNY

What were we to tell the police? That you had the dropsies?

IRA

But I haven't wronged anyone.

LENNY

Really? Is that true? Let's ask Mister Sheet here.

(to the body)

Mister Sheet, do you feel that my good friend Ira has wronged you? No opinion in the matter? Nothing to say?

(to IRA)

You're in luck. He refuses to testify against you. Of course, they may charge you anyway, even though he refuses to press charges. There's the justice system for you.

IRA

We could have left an anonymous tip.

LENNY

An anonymous tip? Don't be ridiculous.

IRA

Still, I don't know why we had to bring him here.

LENNY

Because they can't find him here. They would have to have a warrant to look here. To get a warrant, they would have to find out that we knew him. And since we didn't know him, they wouldn't think to look here.

IRA

Why not?

LENNY

Well they don't go door to door.

IRA

Oh.

LENNY

So you see, this is really the safest place. It will be like he disappeared.

IRA

Still though. I thought that surely we were going to be found out on the train.

LENNY

Yes, we pulled that off nicely, I have to say.

IRA

The way that old lady looked at us, I thought we were caught for sure.

LENNY

But we weren't.

IRA

But we could have been.

LENNY

But we weren't.

IRA

But. . .

LENNY

Ira!

IRA

Sorry. I'm scared, that's all.

LENNY

You should have thought of that before you murdered the man.

IRA

Murdered? Why murdered?

LENNY

Murder. Homicide. Killing. It's all the same.

IRA

But murdered? It was an accident.

LENNY

An accident. A case of the dropsies.

IRA

Yes. Exactly.

LENNY

Or was it rather. . .a Freudian slip.



IRA  
A what-ian what?

LENNY  
A mistake or a . . .  
(with meaning)  
mistake.

IRA  
You're not making any sense.

LENNY  
Aren't I?

IRA  
What?

LENNY  
Imbecile.

IRA  
Where?

LENNY  
The basement.

IRA  
What about it?

LENNY  
Let's put him in the basement. We'll place him there gently,  
amongst the pickled vegetables and broken bicycles.

IRA  
Won't he start to stink?

LENNY  
Yes. Eventually. But not right away. We'll cover him with  
lye tomorrow. Do we have any lye?

IRA  
I don't think so.

LENNY  
Baking soda?

IRA  
No.

LENNY  
Baking powder?

IRA  
Maybe.

LENNY

Then baking powder it is. We'll cover him in baking powder.

IRA

Aren't you afraid it will make him rise?

LENNY

Don't be superstitious. Here, help me carry him.

IRA

I've already helped carry him.

LENNY

Help me again. We can't just leave him in the living room floor.

IRA

Why not? You said they can't come inside without a warrant.

LENNY

Yes but. . .

IRA

They don't go door to door.

LENNY

But do you want a dead man in your living room, stinking the place up?

IRA

Well, if we're going to cover him in baking powder. . .

LENNY

Still, we can't have him under foot constantly. We'll always be tripping over him or slipping on the powder. And what if someone comes over?

IRA

No one ever comes over.

LENNY

What if they do? Are we to tell them to give a moment while we take care of the dead hookers?

IRA

He's a hooker?

LENNY

It's an expression.

IRA

Oh. But I still think it's unlikely that anyone will come over. . .No one ever comes over.

LENNY  
You never know.

IRA  
That's true.

LENNY  
The post office could come with a package.

IRA  
I suppose.

LENNY  
Or the meter man.

IRA  
Yes.

LENNY  
Or a long lost friend of the family.

IRA  
Does our family have any friends?

LENNY  
It's an expression. And you know, the police could conceivably come.

IRA  
But they don't go door to door. You said so yourself. Do they go door to door, Lenny?

LENNY  
Still, you never know. Say they come for some other reason and they find the body.

IRA  
But they have to have a warrant.

LENNY  
What if they see the body over your shoulder while you talk to them. Then what? Then it's pretty easy for them to get a warrant.

IRA  
That's true.

LENNY  
So come on. Help me.

IRA  
I don't see why you can't just drag him.

LENNY  
You killed him. You drag him.

IRA  
Okay, I'll help.

IRA crosses back to the head of the body. They lift the body.

LENNY  
Okay. Easy does it and steady as she goes.

IRA  
Easy going and doing it steady.

THEY carry the body to the trap door where they stand for a moment unsure of what to do.

IRA  
How do we open it?

LENNY  
You'll have to set the head down. Gently.

IRA drops the head with a thud.

IRA  
Dropsies. Sorry.

IRA opens the trap door then they begin to carry the body down the stairs. They disappear from sight, grunting as they go.

LENNY (OS)  
Steady. Steady.

A thud is heard as the head has again been dropped.

LENNY (OS)  
Dammit Ira!

IRA (OS)  
I'm sorry Lenny.

LENNY (OS)  
That's okay. Just...pick it up again. Carefully. Carefully, don't tug.

Thud after thud after thud is heard as the body falls down the stairs.

Ira, are you alright? LENNY (OS)

Ah! Ah! (screaming in fear) IRA (OS)

Are you hurt? LENNY (OS)

No! Ah! I'm fine! Ah! IRA (OS)

What's wrong? LENNY (OS)

He's staring at me! IRA (OS)

Oh my God, Ira. See what I mean. The wrapping tore. LENNY (OS)

Get him off! Please, GET HIM OFF! IRA (OS)

It's okay, just push against him. Roll him off. There you go. (surprised) LENNY (OS)

Holy...

Ahhhhh! IRA (OS)

IRA Rushes up the stairs and onto the stage, screaming the whole way.

Hahahaha. LENNY

His eyeball. Oh my God. His eyeball fell out! IRA

Relax. (coming up stairs) LENNY

Relax? It was staring at me! IRA

Look. LENNY

LENNY shows him a glass eye.

IRA

Oh God! Give it back to him!

LENNY

It's okay, Ira. It's just glass. See.

LENNY rolls the glass eye across the floor to IRA, which makes a wonderfully rich sound as it goes.

IRA

Why would anyone put something so disgusting in their head?

LENNY

For aesthetics.

IRA

Aesthetics?

LENNY

Sure. Which would have been worse? The glass eye staring at you or the empty socket?

IRA

(after some thought)

Good point.

LENNY

Go back down there and wrap the head back up.

IRA

But it's torn.

LENNY

Well, just do the best you can.

IRA

Lenny?

LENNY

Yes.

IRA

I don't want to look at him again. Will you do it? Please.

LENNY

No way!

IRA

Please, Lenny.

LENNY

Do I have to clean up all your messes? You can murder a man but you can't clean up after him?

IRA

Murder? Why do you keep saying murder?

LENNY

Kill. Commit homicide. Slaughter.

IRA

Slaughter?

LENNY

Do it, Ira. Or I'll throw you down there and lock you in there with him.

IRA

Okay. I'll do it.

IRA goes into the basement. Before HE disappears below, HE stops for a moment, takes a deep breath then continues.

IRA (OS)

Oh god, Lenny. His socket! It's staring at me.

LENNY

It can't stare at you. It has no eye.

IRA (OS)

That's what makes it so bad.

LENNY

(to himself, playfully)

I have his eye. Stare. Stare at me.

LENNY holds the eye facing him as if to make it stare.

LENNY

Stare all you want. You don't scare me. Do you bounce?

LENNY drops it to the ground. It does not bounce.

LENNY

(picking it up)

No? Hm. Is there any longer a use for you? For your master's body there isn't. It's usefulness has passed. But what of you? You are made of sturdier stuff, built to last long after the worms have moved on to greener flesh. So what good are you now?

IRA (OS)

I'm gonna be sick.

LENNY

Get sick in a paint can. Do you know how hard it is to get vomit out of the grain?

(back to the eye)

It's almost vulgar to allow you to go on without a partner. I could get your master's other eye but eyes are the first thing to go. I could enclose it in lucite. Ah, that's no good. But you should be coupled, no doubt. I'll keep an eye out.

LENNY puts the eye in his pocket as  
IRA comes back up the stairs.

LENNY

You get him wrapped back up?

IRA

Well, the cloth was torn badly, but I came up with a solution.

LENNY

Which was?

IRA

The paint can. The paint can over his head. It looks very unflattering but he doesn't seem to mind. At least, he didn't protest. I won't leave him that way, of course. I'll start sewing him a shroud tomorrow and we'll give him a proper Christian burial.

LENNY

A Christian burial? Why?

IRA

So his soul can be at rest, Lenny. It's the least we can do.

LENNY

If you insist, but that's your project.

Pause.

IRA

Lenny?

LENNY

Yes, Ira.

IRA

Why don't I feel guilty?

LENNY

You don't feel guilty?



IRA

A little. But not like I should. At least not like I think I should. I don't know, I don't have much experience. But it seems like I should be racked with guilt. Why aren't I?

LENNY

Well, Ira, I don't know. Maybe you are a natural.

IRA

A natural?

LENNY

A natural killer. Remorseless. They're always saying at those trials that the killers have no remorse, that they show no emotion. Maybe you're a killer after all.

IRA

Oh, Lenny, don't say that.

LENNY

That's just what they say.

IRA

Yes, I've heard them say it too.

LENNY

What if it's true? Have you considered it?

IRA

Considered?

LENNY

Sure. Tell me something. How did you feel when you did it?

IRA

Oh my God, it was horrible. I felt. . .I felt. . .horrible.

LENNY

Did you?

IRA

Yes. Oh, yes.

LENNY

You didn't get just the slightest thrill out of it? No enjoyment at all?

IRA

Enjoyment?

LENNY

Yes, you know, did your heart race? In a good way, like being in love? Was there some. . .satisfaction? Come here.

IRA

What?

LENNY leads IRA to the mirror on the fourth wall.

LENNY

Look at yourself in the mirror.

IRA

(sheepishly)

Okay.

LENNY

Now, look yourself in the eye, and ask yourself, "how did it feel? Was it. . .satisfying?"

IRA

Satisfying. You know, at first, when I made the dropsy, I was devastated. Or was it terrified? I can't be sure.

LENNY

That's it. Let it out. Tell yourself the truth.

IRA

But then I saw that he wasn't dead. He wasn't dead! I have to admit that at first, I was relieved. To my shame, I was relieved. Then I knew what I had to do. So, reluctantly, I gave him the first blow. The first purposeful blow, that is. Oh, it's true, there were butterflies in my tummy. But then I gave him the second blow. The second purposeful blow, that is. Then the third and the fourth. And so on. And the butterflies began to subside. And I realized that. . .it was. . .thrilling. Or maybe electrifying, I can't be sure. Electrifying, yes. That's what it was. I must have given him seventy or eighty or a hundred blows before I was satisfied. Before I knew he must be dead. When I confirmed it, the feeling was. . .rapture. Or maybe. . .no, rapture is the only word. Kidnapped by the feeling.

LENNY

I also was satisfied in watching the act.

IRA

You were?

LENNY

Absolutely. Well, not absolutely. I could have been more satisfied. I find that. . .I find that I wish I had. . .done it myself.

IRA

You do?

LENNY

Oh yes. In fact I was somewhat. . .jealous.

IRA

Of me?

LENNY

I know. Imagine it. But it's true. You've done something. You have felt something, intense. The passion! The anger! The fear, all wrapped up together. I wish I had felt it.

IRA

Did you feel anything?

LENNY

Yes. Oh, I felt a type of thrilled amusement to be sure. But it was the type that spectators in the Colosseum must have felt.

IRA

That's pretty good, right? It was very popular, after all.

LENNY

But who wants to be a spectator when you can be a gladiator? Who wants to watch with their eyes when they can feel with their hands. The resistance of the skeletal system as you deal the blows, the spray of your opponent's blood on your face. The. . .rapture. That must be the right word.

IRA

I can't think of a better one. Rapture.

Lights Down.

SCENE 2: THE NEXT MORNING

Lights up. Same scene as before. The stage is empty for a moment. The upstairs stage right door opens and LENNY appears. He is dressed in a bathrobe and has obviously just gotten up. HE yawns and stretches. HE crosses to the upstairs SL door and opens it, looking in.

LENNY

Ira? Ira, you up?

LENNY shuts the door.

LENNY

(loudly)  
Ira? Where are you?

IRA enters from the kitchen door.

He wears an apron.

IRA

Good morning, Lenny.

LENNY

Ira, what are you doing?

IRA

Making breakfast. Coffee?

LENNY

Sure.

IRA goes back into the kitchen.  
LENNY comes down the stairs. HE  
goes to the front door and opens it  
only slightly. HE gets the  
newspaper from the porch. IRA  
reenters with a cup of coffee and  
LENNY crosses to the sofa and sits.

IRA

Here you go. Just the way you like it.

LENNY

Drip or French press?

IRA

French press, of course.

LENNY

What's the occasion?

IRA

No occasion. I just feel good this morning. Good and charitable.

LENNY

Holy. . .can it be? Already?

IRA

What is it?

LENNY

The paper. Look.

LENNY hands the paper to IRA.

IRA

(reading)

Prominent Citizen Missing. Feared Dead.

LENNY

How can it be? It's only been twelve hours. I thought it was forty eight hours before you report someone missing.

IRA

I guess when you're prominent the rules change.

LENNY

Let me see it.

LENNY takes the paper back and reads.

LENNY

The blood.

IRA

The what?

LENNY

The blood at the scene. There was blood everywhere. Hence the prompt response. They assume he's dead even without a body.

IRA

Oh, this could be bad.

LENNY

(reading)

"His family, having been prominent for generations, have vowed to spare no expense to find the prominent man's killer or killers and bring him, her, or them to justice."

IRA

This changes everything. Absolutely everything.

LENNY

This paper is really politically correct. Him, her, or them. They sure don't want to discriminate.

IRA

Surely they'll go door to door now. We're done for. Done for!

LENNY

Ira, calm down. Nothing has changed.

IRA

Nothing has changed? Everything has changed! Didn't you hear what they said. Prominent! Prominent!

LENNY

Sure. A prominent man that we have no connection to. Nothing has changed.

IRA

No connection?

LENNY

If anything, this only helps us.

IRA

It does?

LENNY

Yes. Now they'll assume that it's political infighting or someone who stands to make money off of him. They'll spin their wheels so long looking at his benefactors that they'll totally lose the scent. Prominent men have lots of enemies. Lots of people with motives. We have no motive.

IRA

True. That's right. You're always right.

LENNY

That reminds me, did you do the baking powder?

IRA

No. We're all out. I was waiting for you to get up to ask what to do.

LENNY

What else do we have?

IRA

Only flour. I was just going to use flour.

LENNY

You're going to cover him in flour?

IRA

Yes. It's better than nothing.

LENNY

He'll be breaded.

IRA

(giggles)  
Breaded. That's funny.

LENNY

We could fry him up.

IRA

(still giggling)  
Yeah. Wouldn't that be something?

LENNY

(after some thought)  
They could fry us up.

IRA  
(stops giggling)  
Fry...us up?

LENNY  
Only kidding.

IRA  
Oh.

LENNY  
Relax, Ira.

IRA  
Yes. Relax. Relaxing. Right away.

LENNY  
But it's true, you know. They could fry us. If they ever found out. That's why it's very important that you get him breaded without delay.

IRA  
Yes, of course. I'll get the flour and I'll get your breakfast. Did I mention that I was feeling good today?

IRA exits to the kitchen.

LENNY  
(amusing self)  
Without delay. . .Without. . .decay. Beautiful. Simply, poetic.

LENNY takes the glass eye out of the pocket of his robe. HE crosses to the fourth-wall mirror. He holds the eye up so that he and the eye are both looking into the mirror.

LENNY  
Ah, yes. I loved you the moment I looked into your eye. But it's unfair that you should be alone. Eyes were meant to come in pairs. And a pair you shall be.

LENNY puts the eye back in his pocket and crosses to a table where he takes a pair of scissors from a drawer. HE then crosses back to the sofa. As he does this, IRA enters carrying a service tray with a nice looking breakfast. He sets it next to LENNY.

LENNY  
Ah. Thank you. Very nice. You always were the domestic one.

IRA

And I enjoy it.

LENNY

And I've always been the hunter.

IRA

Always.

LENNY

Strange how now you've taken on that role as well. Hm.

LENNY begins to clip the article from the newspaper. IRA goes back to the kitchen and comes back out with a comically large bag of flour.

IRA

(as he goes and comes)

I'm not sure that the act counts as hunting. I'm sure of it, actually. After all, I was not hunting anything. I was rather minding my own business. Until the dropsy happened. I've always been the clumsy one. So really, my valor has been completely serendipitous.

LENNY

But still.

(waving the scissors)

The killer instinct is what is important. That's what I thought belonged to me. I feel like. . .like Esau usurped. Bested by a house mouse.

IRA

Esau?

LENNY

The Bible.

IRA

Oh.

LENNY

I tell you, when America abandoned God, God abandoned America.

IRA

I do wish you'd eat your breakfast.

LENNY takes an aggressive bite of something.

IRA

See, isn't that better? I'll do the flour now.



LENNY

Good. Make sure you get him completely covered.

IRA has been crossing to the trap door and he goes downstairs.

IRA

I will.

LENNY

We don't want him spoiling before the fish fry.

IRA

(from below)

I'm covering him completely.

LENNY

You may put some in that socket too. Just to be sure.

IRA

I think it will be fine.

LENNY

Well, at least take the can off and get some on the head.

IRA

I'm doing it now.

LENNY

How does he look?

IRA

Like a giant pork chop.

IRA comes back up the stairs carrying the now empty flour bag.

IRA

Okay. Good for now.

LENNY

Good.

IRA

I may have to do some more when I get his shroud but we'll decide that later.

LENNY

You still plan on doing the Christian burial thing?

IRA

Of course. Faith doesn't diminish overnight.

LENNY

That's right. It takes years. Where will you bury him?

IRA

Uh. . .probably under the pecan tree.

LENNY

Next to Rufas? You'd bury him next to our dog? Some man you've never met. . .some prominent man, next to our own dog? Our family?

IRA

It's the least we could do. Okay, the flour is done, so I am going to go out and get some thread for the shroud. Do you want to come?

LENNY

No. I've got some. . .something to do.

IRA

Okay. Suit yourself.

LENNY

Hey, Ira?

IRA

Yes, Lenny?

LENNY

Since you'll be out, you might pick up some more flour.

Lights down.

SCENE 3: LATER THAT DAY

Lights up on IRA sitting on the sofa. He is knitting. The newspaper clipping that LENNY cut out in the last scene now hangs on the wall.

IRA

(to the basement)

I don't want you to worry down there. I'm working hard. Working on your shroud. I'll have it done faster than. . .I'll have it done pretty fast. A prominent shroud for a prominent man.

Loud knocking at the front door.

LENNY

(from outside)

Ira. Ira. Open the door. Let me in.

IRA

(crossing)  
Lenny, you scared me. I thought maybe they were going door to door.

LENNY

Let me in.

IRA

You don't have your key?

LENNY

I can't get to it. My hands are full. Please.

IRA opens the door and LENNY enters carrying another body.

IRA

Lenny! What have you done?

LENNY

I. . .well use your imagination! What does it look like?

IRA

How could you do it?

LENNY

I used a club.

IRA

No, I mean. . .

LENNY

I know what you mean. But I don't see why you think you are in any place to judge. After all, you swung the first club. But now you want to throw the first stone?

IRA

We already have the one in the basement to worry about.

LENNY

Well now we have another.

IRA

But Lenny, isn't one enough for you?

LENNY

(snapping)  
One! Sure, one is enough for me. But the one in the basement isn't mine, is it? One for you, one for me! It's only fair, Ira. Or do you think that you should be the only one allowed to do anything?

IRA

No. I don't think that.

LENNY

I'm only interested in fairness. A little equal treatment is all I ask. Isn't that reasonable?

IRA

It is. . .reasonable.

LENNY

Good. Help me carry him.

IRA

No. No way. Not this time.

LENNY

Didn't I help you with yours?

IRA

That's a totally different situation.

LENNY

Different? How different?

IRA

Mine was an accident.

LENNY

Was it? Was the blow after the dropsy an accident? How about the one after that? An accident. Pah. Then mine is an accident too. Help me like I helped you.

IRA

I won't. I have a funeral shroud to sew and now, thanks to you, I have another shroud to sew.

LENNY

You and your Christian burials.

IRA

Well, I'm sorry if it hurts you that I believe in something.

LENNY

It's doesn't bother me. You're the one wasting your time.

IRA

(furiously)

It's the least we can do.

LENNY

Fine. I'll carry him myself.

IRA  
Good.

LENNY  
Good.

LENNY carries him in front of the sofa. He drops him.

LENNY  
Ira, I can't do it alone.

IRA  
How'd you get him here?

LENNY  
I took the train.

IRA  
How'd you lift him onto the train?

LENNY  
An old man helped me carry.

IRA  
Then go find your old man.

LENNY  
Ira, don't be this way.

IRA  
Why don't you just drag him?

LENNY  
Drag him? IRA, we've been over this before.

IRA  
I don't care about blood in the grain! You deal with it.  
Your murder, your problem!

LENNY  
Murder? Murder? Why murder?

IRA  
Homicide! Killing!  
(screaming)  
MURDER!

A knock at the front door.

IRA  
What was that?

A knock.

LENNY

At the door?

IRA

No, from the basement. Yes at the door!

LENNY

Oh my god, they're going door to door.

IRA

I guess so.

LENNY

You said they wouldn't go door to door.

IRA

That was before we knew he was prominent.

LENNY

Knocking.

IRA

Lenny, what do we do?

LENNY

We'll have to answer it.

IRA

But. . .

LENNY

Find out who it is.

IRA

Who is it? (yelling at the door from where he is)

Knocking.

IRA

Lenny. Lenny, what do we do?

LENNY

Help me get him downstairs.

IRA

But. . .

LENNY

No. No, this is no time for your excuses.

IRA

The shroud. What will they think about the shroud?

LENNY

Fine! I'll handle the body, you handle the shroud.

Knocking.

IRA

No one's home.

LENNY

You think that will work? Hurry.

LENNY begins to drag the body toward the trap door. IRA grabs the shawl and runs upstairs.

LENNY

While you're up there, look out the window and see if you can see who it is.

LENNY has made it to the trap door. HE opens it then looks down for a moment.

LENNY

Here goes. Please don't bleed.

LENNY gets at the feet of the body and drags him down the stairs. The head bounces with a thud against each step as he goes down.

LENNY (OS)

He does look like a pork chop.

Knocking.

LENNY

(coming up)

They sure are persistent. One moment, please.

IRA is coming back down.

LENNY

Could you see?

IRA

No. They are hidden from view. That is, he, she, or they are hidden from view.

Knocking.

LENNY  
Did you get flour like I asked?

IRA  
I got it.

LENNY  
Hurry then. Bread the new one.

IRA runs into the kitchen.

LENNY  
You may need to get some more next time you're out.

IRA runs back out with a large bag  
of flour and runs down the stairs.

LENNY  
Make sure to cover the whole thing.

Knocking.

LENNY  
Good Lord! Go away.

A sound. A large cloud of flour  
billows from the basement.

IRA  
Oops.

LENNY  
What happened?

IRA  
A dropsy.

LENNY  
Well hurry up.

IRA  
Done.

LENNY  
Done?

IRA  
Done.

LENNY  
Then come on.

IRA comes up the stairs. He is  
covered in flour.



Geez, Ira.

LENNY

I said oops.

IRA

LENNY

Never mind. Let's just answer the door.

Knocking.

LENNY

Time to see who's waiting in the wings.

LENNY and IRA shuffle to the door side by side and very close together, probably touching. IRA is closest to the door. As soon as they reach the door, knocking again, which frightens IRA.

LENNY

Open it.

IRA

You open it.

LENNY

You're closer.

IRA opens the door slowly and fearfully, saying nothing. MS. MILD stands at the door wearing a form fitting Salvation Army type uniform. She is a beautiful and well groomed young woman.

MS. MILD

I'm sorry. Have I come at a bad time?

IRA opens his mouth to speak but nothing comes out.

LENNY

No. Not at all.

MS. MILD

Are you sure? I could come back another time.

IRA again opens his mouth to speak. Again nothing comes out.

LENNY

No. Now is fine. As you can see, we are not busy.

MS. MILD  
May I come in?

IRA  
No!

LENNY  
Yes, of course you may. Please, come in. I'm Lenny and this is Ira.

MS. MILD  
Lenny and Ira, okay.

MS. MILD enters confidently. She looks around a moment.

MS. MILD  
(cont.)  
So, are you bakers?

IRA  
No. No. What gave you that idea?

MS. MILD  
Well it's just that you look so . . . breaded.

IRA  
Oh.  
(shyly)  
Well, I . . . do like to bake.

MS. MILD  
But you're not a baker?

IRA  
No. No, unfortunately.

MS. MILD  
Well you should become one. There is nothing better than doing what you love.

IRA  
You know, I've always agreed.

MS. MILD  
You have?

IRA  
Yes. Do you do what you love? Love what you do?

MS. MILD  
I do. In fact, I am doing what I love right now.

IRA

You are?

MS. MILD

I'm going door to door. . .

IRA

Oh no, they do go door to door!

LENNY

Ira! Sorry, go ahead.

MS. MILD

I'm going door to door trying to raise money to open a new food bank. The one we have is so out of date and rats constantly get into the flour. I'm sorry, I didn't properly introduce myself. I'm Ms. Mild.

IRA

You're not. . .the police?

MS. MILD

Of course not.

IRA

But the uniform. . .

MS. MILD

Salvation Army.

IRA

It's actually an army?

MS. MILD

Well, no but it pretends to be. Hence the uniform.

LENNY

An army faux. Ah, beautiful double entendre.

MS. MILD

This is a very large house.

IRA

Thank you. Our parents gave it to us.

MS. MILD

Gave it to you?

LENNY

Left it to us, actually. In their will.

MS. MILD

Oh. I'm so sorry.

LENNY

And by parents, he means, like our parents.

IRA

We don't have actual parents.

MS. MILD

You're orphans?

LENNY

Probably. But who's to say?

MS. MILD

True. So are the two of you actually brothers or from separate parents?

IRA

Who's to say?

LENNY

The truth is, it doesn't matter anyway. Whether we were from the same mother or from different, or from the same mother but separate fathers, which seems likely to me. Fate is the important part. We are together through Fate.

MS. MILD

I guess that's true for all of us.

LENNY

But for some of us, it will change everything. It will change the world.

IRA

Why don't you come in and sit down.

MS. MILD

Oh, may I?

IRA

Yes please. We haven't had visitors in so long.

MS. MILD

Really?

IRA

Well, two. But they weren't very lively.

MS. MILD

Oh. I see.

IRA leads MS. MILD to the sofa.

IRA

So you make your living helping people then?

MS. MILD

Yes, I do.

IRA

I should think I'd enjoy that. I've always been the type of person who enjoys helping people.

MS. MILD

You should consider joining us.

IRA

You'd have me?

MS. MILD

Of course.

IRA

I should very much like to.

LENNY

That's ridiculous.

IRA

Why?

LENNY

You know why. You know why it's a totally absurd notion.

MS. MILD

(calmly)

What we find ridiculous is the fact that thousands, even millions, go daily without food, without shelter. . .

LENNY

That is true. The fact is the world is severely overpopulated.

MS. MILD

That might be true.

LENNY

Something must be done.

MS. MILD

We agree then. Helping is simply the right thing to do.

LENNY

Helping.

IRA

And that's what I want to do. I want to help.

LENNY

That's fine. That's all fine and everything, but we must help according to our own talents.

MS. MILD

I agree. Talents are given to us by the creator, to use for his glory.

IRA

I thought they were given to us to help people.

MS. MILD

It's the same thing.

IRA

Oh.

LENNY

Ira will understand when I say that his talent does not lie in the realm of feeding, clothing, or salvation-ing.

IRA

What can I do then, if I want to help?

LENNY

Perhaps it is your duty to control overcrowding.

MS. MILD

Well that's silly. How does one do that?

LENNY

Perhaps it's not so silly. Perhaps Ira knows exactly how.

IRA

Lenny.

LENNY

Perhaps he is very talented.

IRA

Lenny, stop.

LENNY

Very talented indeed.

MS. MILD

No, no. We unfortunately cannot control the number of people born into the world.

LENNY

What if we could?

MS. MILD

How?

LENNY

What if we had a system. A system of selection, and certain people were allowed to be born. . .or stay born. . .and others were not.

MS. MILD

My God, Lenny, that would be absolutely inhumane.

LENNY

Perhaps. But it might also be the only realistic way to help.

MS. MILD

Realistic? What you're talking about is mass extermination. Like the Nazis.

LENNY

No, no. Not at all. Mass exterminations of the past have always focused on arbitrary qualities, such as race, ethnicity, et cetera. Mass extermination should focus on something else, something meaningful.

MS. MILD

And what would that be?

LENNY

A society should seek to exterminate those that take what they should give.

MS. MILD

What do you mean?

LENNY

Those that hoard. Those that take from the mouths of the poor to feed their own fat stomachs, those who store up for themselves while others go hungry. Society should exterminate the prominent.

MS. MILD

I'm sorry, but what you're suggesting is simply evil.

LENNY

Is it? Is it evil to destroy the prominent? Perhaps Ira would like to answer.

IRA

I say whatever Ms. Mild says.

LENNY

I see.

MS. MILD

It's just that I believe that every life is precious. All were created in the image of God. Even if they are sinful and greedy.

LENNY

But if everybody is created in the image of God, why should some be allowed to take, take, take, while they force others to starve? Why should the many be sacrificed to hunger and cold so that the few can get fat in their warm houses?

MS. MILD

I see what you're saying, but that does not, cannot, excuse their murder.

IRA

Murder?

(to LENNY)

Why does she say murder?

LENNY

Why should it be murder, if one is killed to save the lives of the many? Isn't this what police and soldiers do all the time?

MS. MILD

Perhaps. You make good point, Lenny.

LENNY

Even if you're not quite convinced.

MS. MILD

That's right.

LENNY

Well then, I must be off. I have important work to do in the basement.

MS. MILD

You have a basement? How lovely. You just don't see basements in houses anymore. I just love everything about these old houses.

IRA

It really is nice. Would you like to. . .never mind.

MS. MILD

What? Would I like to see it? Of course.

IRA

(panicked)

You can't!

MS. MILD

Oh, I'm sorry. Have I offended?



LENNY

No, no. No offense. But. . .it's half full of water at the moment. We have terrible foundation problems. That's actually what I have to go down there to do.

MS. MILD

By yourself? Why don't you hire someone to do it for you? Aren't there specialists in things like that?

LENNY

We're do-it-yourselfers.

MS. MILD

I see.

LENNY

It's much less expensive that way.

MS. MILD

But it seems like a foundation would be a difficult thing to fix without the proper tools.

LENNY

No doubt. But little by little we prevail. Am I right?

MS. MILD

Absolutely.

LENNY

And so, by the grace of God, go I.

MS. MILD

Nicely put.

LENNY goes to the basement, careful not to allow MS. MILD to see.

MS. MILD

It really is great to come across such thoughtful and faithful people.

IRA

Yes, I agree.

MS. MILD

People who think about the same things as me, even if their solutions are different.

IRA

It's a rare thing for sure. Especially in such troublesome times.

MS. MILD

The times are troublesome. But that is why we must do what we can while we are alive. We must do what little good we can and remember that to live is Christ and to die is gain.

IRA

To die in vain?

MS. MILD

To die is gain. That means that while I am here on Earth, I live trying to help others as much as I can, and if I die, I go to a place better than this one.

IRA

(longingly)

A place better than this one.

MS. MILD

It's a lofty thought, isn't it?

IRA

It sure is.

MS. MILD

I remember that whenever I think that this world is too much to bear.

IRA

Which it often seems.

MS. MILD

Doesn't it?

IRA

I have often thought that it would be better to die. Wished I were dead. Wanted to die.

MS. MILD

(awkwardly)

Well, I hate to rush, but I have to get to the whole neighborhood today, so we should get to the business at hand.

IRA

Yes, of course. What is the business at hand?

MS. MILD

Well, as I explained, it is my job to raise money for the food bank.

IRA

Yes. Yes, that's what you said.

A pause.

MS. MILD

So, what I wondered is if you might be able to make a contribution. . .of money.

IRA

Oh, oh. Of money. Of course. No.

MS. MILD

No?

IRA

I can't.

MS. MILD

I see.

IRA

I mean, I should very much like to but, you see, we don't have much money.

MS. MILD

I understand. These are difficult times.

IRA

Very. I'm sorry to say. Otherwise, I am a great humanitarian. I love helping others.

MS. MILD

I have no doubt.

IRA

For instance, I sew funeral shrouds.

MS. MILD

You do?

IRA

Yes. For people who need them. It's the least I can do.

MS. MILD

I didn't know funeral shrouds were still in use.

IRA

Yes, very much so in some circles. Would you like to see the one I'm working on now?

MS. MILD

Maybe next time. I really must go.

IRA

Well, will you come back? I can try to earn some money. I would love to see you again, so I can help.

MS. MILD

Well, sure, I'll come again. If you'd like me to.

IRA

Oh yes, please.

MS. MILD

Okay. I will then.

MS. MILD moved toward the door.

IRA

Ms. Mild?

MS. MILD

Yes, Ira?

IRA

I think you're lovely.

Short pause.

MS. MILD

You know, I'm afraid that Mr. Lenny and I may have gotten off on the wrong foot.

IRA

No. He's fine. He just likes to argue.

MS. MILD

And his ideas aren't bad. Perhaps they're even brilliant. I feel like I should tell him that. So he knows, even if I disagree with him.

IRA

I'll tell him you said so.

MS. MILD

I feel like I should tell him myself.

She begins to cross toward the basement.

IRA

No, no. He doesn't like to be bothered.

MS. MILD

But I really feel bad about the whole thing.

IRA

But you can't go in there.

MS. MILD

Why do you let him push you around so much?

IRA

He doesn't push. Ever. He never hits or pushes or anything.

MS. MILD

I meant that figuratively. Why do you let him tell you what to do all the time?

IRA

Because. . .He's the smart one.

MS. MILD

You're smart too.

IRA

No.

MS. MILD

You just have to learn your own value. I bet I could teach you.

IRA

Maybe. But you still shouldn't go down there.

MS. MILD

Well, I'm not afraid. And I really feel like I should speak with him.

IRA

No. You don't want to talk to him.

MS. MILD

Yes, I do.

She continues to cross.

IRA

You don't understand.

Just as MS. MILD makes it to the trap door, LENNY emerges from the basement.

LENNY

Oh, you're still here.

MS. MILD

(shyly)  
Well, I was just leaving.

LENNY

I see.

MS. MILD

I just wanted to make sure that you weren't offended by our disagreement.

LENNY

Of course not.  
(he obviously is)  
Why should I be?

MS. MILD

You just seem. . .I want you to know that I very much liked talking to you and I look forward to talking to you again.

LENNY

Well, okay.

MS. MILD

Okay.

LENNY

But in the meantime, I have much to do, and so does Ira.

MS. MILD looks at IRA for a brief pause. IRA will not look up.

MS. MILD

I see.

LENNY

So long then.

MS. MILD crosses to the door, somewhat defeated.

MS. MILD

Goodbye, Ira.

IRA

Goodbye, Ms. Mild. Please come back.

MS. MILD

Of course. And remember what I said, about value. Goodbye, Lenny.

LENNY

Yep.

LENNY goes back into the basement.

MS. MILD

So long, Ira.

IRA

Good bye, Ms. Mild.

After a moment, MS. MILD exits. IRA staggers back as if swooning.

Rapture!

IRA

IRA crosses to trap door and opens it.

IRA

Lenny. Lenny. Lenny, what are you doing? Ah!

A popping sound. IRA ducks and barely dodges a glass eye which flies out of the basement and rolls across the floor.

IRA

What was that?

LENNY

What did it look like?

LENNY come out of the basement.

LENNY

Where did it go?

IRA

Over there. What are you doing?

LENNY

Removing his glass eye.

IRA

You almost hit me!

LENNY

Yeah, sorry about that. It had a little pressure behind it.

IRA

Why did you pry his eye out?

LENNY

It wasn't his actual eye. It was glass.

IRA

Nevertheless.

LENNY takes the other glass eye out of his pocket.

LENNY

You see this?

IRA

Yes.

LENNY  
What's wrong with it?

IRA  
No nerve attached?

LENNY  
What? No.

IRA takes it and examines it closely.

IRA  
I don't know. Looks okay to me.

LENNY  
Use your head, stupid.

Pause.

LENNY  
No?

IRA  
Sorry.

LENNY  
How many eyes do you have?

IRA  
(thoughtfully)  
Two.

LENNY  
Yes, two. If your eyes aren't alone, how can this one be alone? Eyes require a partner. It's why patches aren't worn anymore. We're not cavemen, Ira. We're civilized. All civilized men know that eyes must be coupled.

IRA  
Oh.

LENNY  
Would it be fair for your eyes to have a mate but not this one?

IRA  
Well, no, I guess not.

LENNY  
Fairness is all I ask. That's reasonable, isn't it?

IRA  
Yes. It's reasonable.



LENNY

Your man had a glass eye, so mine had to as well. Eyes must be in pairs, wouldn't you agree?

IRA

It's reasonable.

LENNY crosses to mirror. He takes out the first eye so that now he has both.

LENNY

There, there. You're now a pair. Internal rhyme.

(after a moment, to IRA)

What did the girl want?

IRA

Money.

LENNY

Not surprising.

IRA

What is that supposed to mean?

LENNY

That I'm not surprised that a girl would want money.

IRA

Why are you not surprised?

LENNY

Oh come on. One: she's a girl. Two: she's a Jesus girl. That's the double whammy. The two types of people who always want money, in one finely dressed pretty person.

IRA

She's not like that.

LENNY

She isn't? Did I miss something? Didn't she tell you that that's what she was here for?

IRA

Yeah, but she's not like that. I mean, that's not all she's after. She's in it for the right reasons.

LENNY

Oh, and what, pray tell, are the right reasons?

IRA

She only wants to help people. For the glory of God.

LENNY

Yeah. That's funny.

IRA

You don't even know her. I'm telling you, she's different.

LENNY

She's just like all the others.

IRA

You shut up!

LENNY

I see. . .

LENNY begins to roll the glass eyes  
in his hands like a stress ball.

IRA

What?

LENNY

I see what's going on here.

IRA

What?

LENNY

Ira's in love.

IRA

No. . .

LENNY

Yes. Ira's in love. Ira has a girlfriend.

IRA

That's not true.

LENNY

It is too. Ira wants the little Salvation Army girl in her  
smart little uniform. Well, let me tell you something. You  
don't have a chance.

IRA

You don't know anything.

LENNY

Oh, don't I? You think that a beautiful girl like her, a  
Christian girl at that, wants to have anything to do with a  
murderer like you?

IRA

For your information, she said that she would be coming back, that she very much liked our conversation, and that we are of like mind.

LENNY

A sales pitch.

IRA

(aghast)

A sales pitch? It's not a sales pitch. You know what else she said?

LENNY

What?

IRA

That I shouldn't let you tell me everything. That I'm smart too. I'm valuable too. Just as much as you.

LENNY

Yes. Oh, she knows how to play the game, alright.

IRA

What game?

LENNY

She knows, in order to sell her little cause, to get you to buy it, she has to sell herself.

IRA

Herself?

LENNY

Yes. Like a hooker. The same way a hooker does. That's what she is. A little Jesus hooker.

IRA backhands LENNY in the face.

LENNY

Did you just hit me?

IRA

I'll do it again, too, if you ever call her a hooker.

LENNY runs to the mirror and looks himself over.

LENNY

You've never hit me before. I'm kinda proud. Of course, you know what has to happen now. I have to retaliate. I have to hit you back.

IRA

Do it!

LENNY

Oh, I have to. I can't let you think that just because you got away with it once, you'll get away with it every time. Then you'll hit me with total indiscretion, and that's simply unacceptable.

IRA

Do it then. You think I'm afraid?

LENNY steps forward. IRA steps back.  
LENNY begins to walk forward and  
IRA walks back, retreating.

LENNY

Oh, it's gonna happen. Get ready for it.

IRA

What are you waiting for?

LENNY

I'm gonna pop you right upside your head.

IRA

Talk, talk, talk. You sure talk a lot.

LENNY kicks IRA.

IRA

Ow! You kicked me.

LENNY hits IRA in the head.

IRA

Ow. You. . .

IRA tackles LENNY. They fight. The glass eyes come loose and roll in different directions.

LENNY

My eyes! My precious eyes!

LENNY pokes IRA in his actual eyes.

IRA

My eyes! My precious eyes!

The fight continues. IRA ends up on top, pinning LENNY to the floor.

IRA

Ha! Not so tough now, Esau. Bested by the lesser brother again.

Knocking at the door.

IRA

It's her.

IRA jumps up and runs to the door, opening it quickly. INSPECTOR WILDE stands at the door, wearing a suit and a badge. IRA slams the door.

IRA

It's the police!

LENNY

What?

Knocking.

IRA

They're going door to door.

LENNY

Impossible!

IRA

Well, it's true.

Knocking.

LENNY

The eyes. Hurry.

IRA

The door. Hurry.

LENNY runs to collect the eyes while IRA runs to shut the basement door. They rejoin near the door as the knocking continues. Side by side, they shuffle to the door. IRA opens the door.

IRA

Yes. Hello.

INSPECTOR WILDE

You slammed the door on me.

IRA

Sorry. I didn't see you.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
You didn't see me? I was standing right here.

IRA  
I thought you were kids. I thought you were playing a prank.

INSPECTOR WILDE walks past THEM  
into the house.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
May I come in?

IRA  
Uh...

LENNY  
Don't you need a warrant?

INSPECTOR WILDE  
You mean a search warrant?

LENNY  
Yes. Don't you need one?

INSPECTOR WILDE  
Only if I'm going to search. Is there something for me to  
search for?

IRA  
No, of course not.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
I'm sorry. I didn't properly introduce myself. I'm Inspector  
Wilde.

IRA  
Inspector Wilde?

INSPECTOR WILDE  
Yes. With the homicide unit.

LENNY  
Homicide?

INSPECTOR WILDE  
Yes, you know, murder.

IRA  
Murder? Why murder? Why must you call it murder?

INSPECTOR WILDE  
Do you prefer "killing?"

IRA  
(whining a little)

No.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
Are you sure that you boys don't have anything to hide in here?

LENNY  
Of course we're sure. We ought to know what's in our own house, oughtn't we?

INSPECTOR WILDE  
I suppose so. But you'd be amazed. Let me ask you a question then.

IRA  
Okay.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
When I came to the door, you slammed the door in my face. Do you suppose that's normal?

IRA  
I wouldn't know. I don't visit many people.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
Let me answer for you then. It's not.

IRA  
It's not?

INSPECTOR WILDE  
No. In fact, it hasn't happened to me all day.

IRA  
It hasn't?

INSPECTOR WILDE  
No. In fact, it very rarely happens to me. And when it has, do you want to know how many times they tried to tell me that they didn't see me?

IRA  
How many?

INSPECTOR WILDE  
All of them. And do you know how many of them had something illegal in their house?

IRA  
How many?

INSPECTOR WILDE

All of them. Can you see then why slamming the door on my face might make me suspicious?

IRA

Yes.

INSPECTOR WILDE

So, come clean with me, fellas. What are you hiding?

IRA

I swear there are no bodies in the house!

LENNY

Marijuana!

INSPECTOR WILDE

I'm sorry?

LENNY

We had marijuana. You know, grass. We were fixing to smoke some. It was right there on the sofa when you knocked on the door. That's why my brother here slammed it. But we flushed it before we let you in. It's all gone. Down the toilet.

INSPECTOR WILDE

And you don't have anymore in the house?

IRA

No, sir. That was all of it.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Why didn't you just say so? Marijuana is a misdemeanor. I am a homicide detective. I have bigger fish to fry.

IRA

Fry?

INSPECTOR WILDE

It's an expression. May I sit down?

LENNY

I don't really think that's. . .

INSPECTOR WILDE sits on sofa.

INSPECTOR WILDE

You have no doubt heard about the eyeball murderer.

LENNY

The eyeball murderer?

INSPECTOR WILDE

Yes.



LENNY

I think I may have seen something about it in the paper.

INSPECTOR WILDE

It seems that he, she, or they murder people with glass eyes. Well, we've had two with that same M.O. anyway.

LENNY

Could be just a coincidence.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Cops don't believe in coincidences.

LENNY

I imagine not.

IRA

It does seem that they could think of a better name than the eyeball murderer.

INSPECTOR WILDE

You know how the local papers are. When, and if, the national media gets a hold of it, they'll think of something better. I doubt the reporting will be any better but the title will be catchier, I'm sure.

LENNY

So how does all this bring you into our home?

INSPECTOR WILDE

Well, we're going door to door...

IRA

See! I knew they went door to door!

INSPECTOR WILDE

Well, I admit that we don't usually go to that much trouble, what with our case load and all. But both of the victims have been prominent citizens.

IRA

Both?

INSPECTOR WILDE

Yes, both. Prominent citizens with glass eyes. It's an M.O. that we've never seen before. We've had serials that went after prominent men and we've had serials that went after glass eyes. But never both. It leaves us in something of dilemma as far as how to approach the case.

LENNY

Yes. I can see where it might be a problem.

INSPECTOR WILDE

For instance, why is he, she, or they going after glass eyes?

LENNY

(thoughtfully)

That is a problem.

Unwittingly, LENNY pulls the two glass eyes out of his pocket and starts rolling them around like stress balls.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Is the killer himself missing one or both of his eyes? That would explain why he goes after prominent citizens. Why should they be able to afford glass eyes while he cannot? That doesn't seem fair. Understand, these are not my thoughts. I'm putting myself in the mindset of the killer here.

LENNY

Of course.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Or maybe, perhaps, he feels that his own eyes have offended him, as it were. He harbors guilt at something he's seen, something he's witnessed. As the Good Book says, "If your eye offends you, pluck it out." But he can't pluck out his own, can he?

LENNY and IRA stand staring. During the following speech, INSPECTOR WILDE will cross to the mirror and watch himself give his speech.

INSPECTOR WILDE

I'll answer for you. He can't. So what does he do? He projects, a psychological term, understand, projects all that guilt, all that shame, all those feelings, onto others, onto his victims. Is it Projection or Transference? Projection. You see, he cannot punish himself. Human nature won't allow it. We must preserve ourselves. So instead he punishes them. He plucks out their eyes. Maybe it is transference.

IRA

How did you know the killer was plucking the eyes out?

INSPECTOR WILDE

I don't. It's just a guess.

LENNY

So you think the eyeball thing is all a deep psychological issue?

INSPECTOR WILDE

That, or it's just a coincidence.

INSPECTOR WILDE notices that LENNY is rolling the glass eyes.

INSPECTOR WILDE

What's that you've got there?

LENNY, who has not realized what he has been doing, quickly puts the eyes away.

LENNY

Stress balls.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Stress balls, huh? I've been thinking about getting a set myself. May I see them?

LENNY

No.

INSPECTOR WILDE

I apologize if I have offended.

LENNY

No. No. No offense taken. It's just that they are very special to me. My father gave them to me before he died.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Oh. I see.

LENNY

And they are very rare. If they were to be accidentally broken, I would not be able to replace them.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Of course.

LENNY

Ira, I need to speak to you in the kitchen please.

IRA

Okay. Right behind you.

IRA and LENNY, who are standing side by side, shuffle off into the kitchen, watching the INSPECTOR as they go. INSPECTOR WILDE begins to snoop around. He comes across the newspaper clipping. He is forced to put on a pair of reading glasses to read it. When he reads it, he makes

no expression, as if it didn't register. He then crosses to the trap door. He walks around it, perhaps knocks on it with his foot to see if it's hollow. He bends down and is about to open it when IRA and LENNY reappear from the kitchen.

LENNY

You don't want to open that. It's almost completely flooded with stagnant water. It smells like death.

INSPECTOR WILDE

I see.

IRA

"Smells like death" is an expression.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Of course.

IRA

I'll be right back.

IRA goes upstairs, slowly at first as if sneaking, then breaking out into a near run. HE goes into a room and slams the door.

IRA (OS)

Oops. Dropsies.

LENNY

So why is it that you think coming here will help you?

INSPECTOR WILDE

Well, we are, as I have mentioned, going door to door.

LENNY

Why this neighborhood?

INSPECTOR WILDE

It's a respectable neighborhood full of once grand houses where once prominent people once lived. The type of people who might hold a grudge against still prominent people.

LENNY

I see.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Also, it's on the same train line as the crime scenes.

LENNY

You think the killers took the bodies on the train?

INSPECTOR WILDE

Is it already out that the bodies were taken from the scene?

LENNY

I think I saw it in the papers. Have you checked all their acquaintances? They say that the murderer always knows his first victim.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Yes, I've heard them say that too. But who are they? Let me tell you something about them. They lie. And people believe them because they put it in the local papers.

IRA appears in the upstairs door. HE has his hands behind his back as if hiding something. HE is in fact hiding a white sheet. HE comes back down the stairs with his back away from the audience. HE takes a place SL of the newspaper clipping which is again lit up.

LENNY

Ira.

IRA

Yes?

LENNY

Entertain the Inspector for a moment. I have to piss. That's okay, isn't it?

INSPECTOR WILDE

Yes, of course. You are not under arrest. . .yet.

LENNY and IRA stand in shock.

INSPECTOR WILDE

I'm kidding. Hahaha! Lighten up. Life is short. Unless you have a life sentence.

LENNY exits into the kitchen.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Oh, you have a bathroom in the kitchen?

IRA

Well, no. Who ever heard of such a thing?

INSPECTOR WILDE

Didn't he have to use the facilities?

IRA

Yes. Well. . .He uses the sink.

INSPECTOR WILDE

I see. . .So, you seem like a good kid. How did you get yourself mixed up in this?

IRA is frozen.

INSPECTOR WILDE

The marijuana, I mean.

IRA

Oh. Well, I don't know. Must have been my childhood.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Ah. Problems with the rents, as it were?

IRA

Well, no. I don't know my parents.

INSPECTOR WILDE

An orphan. That must have been tough.

IRA

It was.

INSPECTOR WILDE

You must have seen a lot of things.

IRA

I guess.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Some of them must have been pretty awful.

IRA

Yes. Yes. Some of them were.

INSPECTOR WILDE

You must harbor a lot of guilt. I mean, having seen so much.

IRA

Well. No. Not really.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Got a girlfriend, do you?

IRA

Yes. There is a girl I'm talking to.

INSPECTOR WILDE

Good. That's very good. Everyone deserves to be. . .paired off, don't you agree.

IRA  
That's what Lenny says.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
Is it?

LENNY reenters from the kitchen. HE hides a rolling pin behind his back. HE stands SR of the clipping.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
Feel better?

LENNY  
Yes.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
I have only one or two more things to ask you. Then I'll be out of your hair.

LENNY  
Sure. Go ahead.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
You say that you read in the papers that the bodies were taken from the scene.

LENNY  
Yes. That's what I read, at least. Of course, we all know that the papers are always getting things wrong.

INSPECTOR WILDE crosses to the newspaper clipping and stands facing LENNY so that his back is to IRA.

INSPECTOR WILDE  
That's strange, because, having perused the article here on your wall, I don't see any mention of that.

LENNY  
NOW!

At that command, LENNY throws the sheet over INSPECTOR WILDE's head. INS WILDE resists and they wrestle him behind the sofa where WILDE and IRA fall, concealing WILDE's upper half. LENNY takes the rolling pin from behind his back and strikes WILDE with it several times. WILDE yells and his feet move at first but after several strikes movement stops and he is dead.

LENNY staggers around the sofa and sits on it. IRA lifts himself up and props his elbows on the back of the sofa.

LENNY

It's gonna be pretty hard to get the blood out of the grain.

Pause.

IRA

Lenny?

LENNY

Yes, Ira.

IRA

We just killed a policeman.

LENNY

Yes, Ira. We did.

IRA

I've always liked policemen.

LENNY

I know.

IRA

Now what?

LENNY

You'll have to get some more flour... I'm afraid it's starting to snowball here. I'm afraid. . .we've finally found what we're good at.

Curtain. End of Act I.



ACT II

SCENE 1: MUCH LATER

AT RISE:

IRA is sitting on the sofa, knitting a shroud with a basket of sewing supplies next to HIM. A large collection of newspaper clippings has replaced the one that hung in Act I. A rolling chalkboard is in the room. On the top stage right side it says, "Shrouds complete" with a fairly large number of hash marks below. On the stage right side: "Shrouds to make" with much larger number of hash marks. A neat cube stack of flour bags sits near the kitchen door. The hutch containing several trinkets in it that were obviously taken from the victims stands open.

The front door opens and a body wrapped in a sheet and tied with twine falls in. LENNY enters.

IRA

No. No, Lenny. Not another one. Look how far behind I am already.

LENNY

I know but when business is good, what can you do? Refuse it? Hardly. Got this one coming from the Tuesday morning prayer breakfast.

IRA

No.

LENNY

I had to. It was easy pickings. You know that they'll be there and you always know what time. So reliable, these prayer breakfasts.

IRA

But the church people?

LENNY

What do you care about the church people?

IRA

What if you're getting someone Ms. Mild knows? What if you're getting her father or her brother?

LENNY

Does it matter?

IRA

It does to Ms. Mild.

LENNY

Well, I'm sorry. I can't very well ask everybody who comes along, "hey do you know Ms. Mild?"

IRA

You might find a way.

LENNY

Ira, I know you like her, but you cannot allow your personal life to interfere with business. That's a very hard and fast rule. And the rules exist for a reason.

IRA

Business. What business? Have you made a dime?

LENNY

That's not the point.

IRA

Not the point? Isn't revenue what defines a business?

LENNY

Well I don't know.

(crossing to basement)

Every prominent person in town is with us. Let's ask them what they think.

(opens the trap door)

Distinguished gentlemen, your attention please. Must I make money to be considered a business man?

(to IRA)

They have no opinion on the matter.

IRA

They're ignoring you because your question is so stupid. They consider it self-explanatory.

LENNY

There are many businesses that don't come out in the black. Look at us as non-profit, just like the Salvation Army. Do you think Ms. Mild considers herself a bad business woman?

IRA

I don't think she considers herself a businesswoman at all. Ms. Mild is a servant.

LENNY

You think salvation isn't a business like any other? Just because her goals are lofty doesn't mean she doesn't have to eat. I have a right to do business just like she does, lofty or not.

IRA

I still don't know why you have to go after church people.

LENNY

Because they're there.

IRA

Besides, I'm already so far behind.

LENNY

Well how many have you had this week? Huh?

IRA

Three.

LENNY

Three. I've only had one. Just one to your three. Is that fair?

IRA

I guess not.

LENNY

Fairness is all I ask. Equality is all I want. Isn't that reasonable?

IRA

It is reasonable, yes.

LENNY

Good. Than we agree. Help me carry him.

IRA

I'm busy.

LENNY

I always help you carry yours.

IRA

Yet you never help me when it's time to sew.

LENNY

Christian burials are your project, not mine.

IRA

And the fairness thing is yours, not mine. Look at that board. I'm so far behind I may never finish.

LENNY

Fine. It doesn't matter to me. But you're the one who's gonna get stuck scrubbing the blood out of the grain.

LENNY drags the body to the trap door. HE opens the door and hefts the body in.

LENNY

Flour.

IRA

It's right there.

LENNY

No. You're not getting out of this one. The flour is your job. It always has been.

IRA angrily puts down the shroud he's working on. HE crosses to the flour and takes a bag. HE then crosses to the basement, carelessly opens the bag, and dumps it into the basement. HE drops the bag on the floor and slams the trap door shut, then returns to his task.

LENNY

You could be a little more gentle.

IRA

They don't know the difference.

LENNY

You could be a little more careful.

IRA

It won't matter. No one ever comes here.

LENNY

They may start to go door to door again.

IRA

They won't go door to door again.

LENNY crosses to the chalk board and draws a hash mark in the "shrouds to make" column.

IRA

Ms. Mild is coming over today, so you could help me pick up a bit.

LENNY

What? Ms. Mild?

IRA

Yes. She's probably on her way already.

LENNY

No.

IRA

Lenny. . .

LENNY

No. She's not coming here.

IRA

What do you mean she's not coming here?

LENNY

I mean, no way she can come here. Look at this place. It has suspicious written all over it.

IRA

I invited her already. I can't just un-invite her.

LENNY

You have to.

IRA

Lenny, come on. I'm so close on this one. I love her, Lenny, and I think she will love me soon. How can I come this close to love then blow it?

LENNY

I don't understand why she doesn't ever invite you. It's always you inviting her. Go to her house some time.

IRA

We can't.

LENNY

Why not?

IRA

She lives with her old mother.

LENNY

So what?

IRA

So her mother won't let her have people over. Especially not men. She's very strict with her. Even at her age.

LENNY

Well I'm sorry but her mother is not my problem. You'll have to do something else.

IRA

What else can we do?

LENNY

I don't know. Go to a picture show. Kiss on a park bench.

IRA

Lenny, you know I don't do well in public. You know I'm not used to being around strangers.

LENNY

Again, not my problem.

IRA

Well it is this time. I've always let you run things. You've always gotten your way around here but I'm putting my foot down on this one. This is my house too. It's just as much my house as it is yours. That means that I can invite whoever I want to and you can't do a thing about it. And I invited Ms. Mild.

Knocking.

IRA

And there she is, so if you'll excuse me.

LENNY

I'm getting out of here. You enjoy your little date.

IRA

I will.

LENNY

And don't come running to me if she opens up that basement and finds out what you really are. I tried to tell you that it was unsafe.

LENNY crosses towards the door.

IRA

Lenny. Remember while you're out how far behind I am.

LENNY

Remember while you're enjoying your date that you have three this week and I have two.

LENNY opens the door. MS. MILD is there.

LENNY  
Good morning Ms. Mild.

MS. MILD  
(pleasantly)  
Hello, Lenny.

LENNY walks past her coldly and MS. MILD enters. LENNY shuts the door. MS. MILD crosses to IRA and hugs him.

MS. MILD  
I'm so glad to see you.

IRA  
I'm glad to see you too.

MS. MILD  
Did you miss me?

IRA  
No.

MS. MILD  
No?

IRA  
How could I? You never left my mind.

MS. MILD  
I didn't? Ira, you really know what to say to a woman.

IRA  
Nah.

MS. MILD  
Have you played humble to all the girls?

IRA  
I've never played anything with any girls.

MS. MILD  
I don't believe you.

IRA  
It's true. I've never really been around girls before you.

MS. MILD  
That's a line, mister. I know a line when I hear one.

IRA  
A line?

MS. MILD

Yes, a line. You know, a trick.

IRA

Trick? I would never trick you.

MS. MILD

No, I guess you wouldn't. Oh my gosh, Ira. Look at this.  
(indicating the bags of flour)

IRA

What?

MS. MILD

All this flour. Does this mean you took my advice?

IRA

I'm sorry?

MS. MILD

About baking. Have you become a baker?

IRA

Oh. Um. . .yes. Yes, I've become a baker. I bake things.

MS. MILD

You have?

IRA

Yes. I bake all day.

MS. MILD

I'm so proud of you!

IRA

You are?

MS. MILD

Yes. Yes I am. Very proud of you. Look at you, doing what you love, taking a chance. It's all very noble. You're very noble, Ira.

IRA

You think I'm noble, Ms. Mild?

MS. MILD

You are noble, Mister Ira. Only one in a million people has the courage to find what they're good at and go after it. You've done that.

IRA sits on the couch.



IRA

(shyly)

Nooooo.

MS. MILD sits next to him.

MS. MILD

You are very humble, Ira. But I wonder, is it really humility or is it just plain lack of self esteem?

IRA

Self what?

MS. MILD

Esteem. Ira, do you love yourself?

IRA

(misunderstanding)

What? No! Never! Well, maybe sometimes. Lenny caught me once but he says that it's perfectly natural.

MS. MILD

No. I mean, do you care for yourself?

IRA

Well, yes. Very much. I shower daily. I have excellent dental hygiene. . .

MS. MILD

You're misunderstanding me. I mean, do you like yourself?

IRA

Oh.

(pause)

I don't know.

MS. MILD

You don't know?

IRA

I don't know. I mean, I think so. At least, I think I could. If I could only find something to like.

MS. MILD

What do you mean? There's so much about you to like. You're... thoughtful. You're kind. You're brave. You do something that you love. There's so much to like.

IRA

That's true. But who really likes that stuff?

MS. MILD

Everybody likes that stuff, Ira. Do you know who in particular? Do you know who really likes you, Ira?

IRA  
(thoughtfully)  
Jesus?

MS. MILD  
Well, yes, him. But someone else too.

IRA  
Someone else? Who?

MS. MILD  
Me. I like you, Ira.

IRA  
You like...me?

MS. MILD  
Yes, very much.

MS MILD kisses IRA on the cheek.

MS. MILD  
I think you're a very good person, Ira. Very good.

IRA  
Oh, if only that were true.

MS. MILD jumps up, excited nearly  
to the point of dancing.

MS. MILD  
Oh, come on, Ira. Cheer up. You're young. You have have your  
health. You have a beautiful girl alone in your big house.

MS MILD crosses to the old record  
player and plays a record. A  
grandiose piece of classical music  
plays.

MS. MILD  
It should make you dance!

MS. MILD spins, then pulls IRA off  
the sofa.

MS. MILD  
Come on, Ira. Don't be shy. Dance.

Music and dancing for a moment. IRA  
and MS. MILD laugh and spin. MS.  
MILD suddenly comes upon the wall  
with the newspaper clippings. The  
music stops as the record runs out.

Ira?  
MS. MILD  
IRA is still spinning.

Ira?  
MS. MILD  
IRA stops.

Yes, Ms. Mild?  
IRA

What are all these articles?  
MS. MILD  
IRA

These articles?  
MS. MILD  
Yes. What are they?

They're from the newspaper.  
IRA

I see that. Why are they on your wall?  
MS. MILD  
IRA

Lenny. . .put them there.  
MS. MILD  
Why would he do a thing like that? Ira, these articles are ghastly.

Well. . .  
(scrambling)  
Well, you know I'm a baker, right?.

Yes.  
MS. MILD

Well, Lenny has a different job.  
IRA

What job, Ira?  
MS. MILD

See. . .I bake things, right?  
IRA

Right. But what kind of job does Lenny have?  
MS. MILD

IRA  
Lenny is. . .a. . . Lenny is a writer.

MS. MILD  
A writer?

IRA  
Yes. Lenny's a writer.

MS. MILD  
Wow. I had no idea.

IRA  
Oh yes. Lenny's a much better writer than I am a baker.

MS. MILD  
Really? Has he written anything I would have heard of?

IRA  
Well, no. Actually this is his first book. It's a. . .you know. . .a. . .

MS. MILD  
A crime book? True crime novel?

IRA  
Crime novel. That's exactly right.

There is a moment in which it is unclear whether or not MS. Mild believes the story. Then, with the flash of a smile, it is clear that MS. MILD believes IRA.

MS. MILD  
I'm so impressed. The two of you are so talented and artistic.

IRA  
Thank you.

MS. MILD  
I mean it. Are you sure that you don't get a lot of girls?

IRA  
Lenny does.

MS. MILD  
But not you?

IRA  
He has it a lot easier with girls. He's a writer and he's so smooth. He's always writing poems and stuff. Girls like poems.

MS. MILD

It's true. They do.

IRA

But I'm just a baker. What is a baker supposed to do? Bake for a girl?

MS. MILD

Yes, Ira. That's exactly what a baker should do.

IRA

Do you think it would work?

MS. MILD

Absolutely. I would love for a man to bake for me!

IRA

Love?

MS. MILD

(passionately)

Love!

IRA abruptly stands. Passion and endorphins flow almost visibly from the two.

IRA

If I had you, I would bake for you every night!

MS. MILD stands.

MS. MILD

And I would be yours every night!

IRA

Every night until I died.

MS. MILD

Unless I died first.

IRA

We would die the same night. In each other's arms, eating macaroons.

MS. MILD

What a death it would be.

They come together and kiss. IRA picks MS. MILD up and carries her like a honeymooner up the stairs to his room. THEY go in and HE shuts the door. The stage is empty for a second, then a thud is heard.

Ow!  
MS. MILD (OS)

Sorry. Dropsy.  
IRA (OS)

Lights down.

SCENE 2: THE NEXT MORNING

The scene opens with IRA sitting on the sofa looking defeated. He wears a bathrobe and a sour expression. LENNY staggers in through the front door. HE also looks defeated and wears the same clothes as the scene before. He has been out all night.

Lenny, you're home.  
IRA

Yes. Home. How was your date?  
LENNY

It was okay, I guess.  
IRA

Just okay? Where is she?  
LENNY

She went home.  
IRA

You didn't. . .you know?  
LENNY

We tried.  
IRA

What happened?  
LENNY

A dropsy.  
IRA

That will happen more and more.  
LENNY

Where have you been?  
IRA

Looking.  
LENNY

IRA

You've been gone all night.

LENNY takes out the eyes and rolls them in his hands.

LENNY

I've been looking all night.

IRA

And you didn't find anything?

LENNY

Nothing.

IRA

You looked all night?

LENNY

All night. I didn't find a thing. I saw no one. No one all night. No one in the streets. No one in the diners. No one on the train. No one in the whole world.

IRA

I'm sorry.

LENNY

It's to be expected. After all, the market's no longer flooded. What we are seeing is called a market correction. Ah, how I long for the good old days, like during the war, when human lives were a dime a dozen.

IRA

It's for the best.

LENNY

I beg your pardon?

IRA

It's for the best. It was time to slow down anyway.

LENNY

Time to slow down? How can you say such a thing?

IRA

Look how lucky we've been. We've done the best we could and we haven't been caught. No one suspects a thing. Maybe it's time to quit while we're ahead.

LENNY

Quit? Quit? How did we go from slow down to quit in one sentence? How can we quit? There's still work to be done.

IRA

What work? What is left to do? The second one, okay, I understand. You were probably right to get a second eye. It was the least we could do. But then the third and the fourth. For what? We didn't need those things. Did we need locks of hair? Did we need gold fillings? When did we become slaves to these things?

LENNY

It's not the things. It's never been about the things. It's about the work. It's because it's the only thing to do. The only thing worth doing.

IRA

But where does it stop?

LENNY

Never! It never stops! It can't stop. It's the only thing to do.

IRA

Until when? When is the job done?

LENNY

When there's no more job to do. When everyone who belongs in the basement is there. Until everyone who deserves it, every mother's son is sent back to the bitch who bore him. Until there's no one left running about the earth procreating, making all of festering humanity possible.

IRA

I'm not sure I want to go on that long.

LENNY

I know what this is about. I see where this is coming from. You don't want me to catch up.

IRA

What?

LENNY

You don't want me to catch up with you. You don't want me to get my third for the week. You want the game to end with you ahead by one. After all, that's what it's about for you isn't it? You've got to be first. Jacob hasn't stolen Esau's blessing unless he finishes first.

IRA

You know it's not like that.

LENNY

Oh I know what it's like. I know all too well. You've done nothing but try to hold me back!



IRA

How can you even think that? Lenny, you're my only family. You're my brother.

LENNY

You are NOT my brother! You have never been my brother! You're a worthless orphan! I curse the day two whores left us together!

IRA says nothing.

LENNY

(cont.)

Ira. Ira, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. You know I didn't.

IRA

Didn't you?

LENNY

Ira, come on. Don't be like that. I'm sorry. I'm angry with myself and I'm taking it out on you. I was wrong. See, I can say it. I'm big enough. I was wrong. Just mad at myself because I'm a failure.

IRA

Lenny, you're not a failure. Not a failure at all.

LENNY

I'm not?

IRA

No. Anything but a failure. Look at that wall. Look at all those newspapers. I bet no one has a wall like that. Can anyone be as good at what they do? You're the best, Lenny.

LENNY

You really think so?

IRA

I know so. The best.

LENNY

You're right. I am the best. I just got complacent that's all. I didn't find anyone last night because I didn't think positively. I tried to find fault with you instead of finding a solution. I just have to try harder.

IRA

That's right. Stay positive. You'll get number three. Then you can get number four if you want to. I could never outdo you. You're my big brother.

LENNY

I will get number four. And number five. I'll never stop.  
I'll never give up!

IRA

That's the spirit.

LENNY

I'll adapt. I'll overcome. I'll kill so many that I'll fill  
the oceans with blood!

IRA

Now you're thinking positive.

LENNY

But how?

(almost an aside)

Where can I look next?

LENNY thinks for a moment until  
inspiration flashes across his face.

LENNY

Ira, look, I have been really terrible to you. I have to  
make it up to you.

IRA

No, you've been good.

LENNY

No I haven't. There's no denying it. And Ms. Mild too. I  
treated her badly as well because I was jealous of you and  
her and what the two of you have.

IRA

You were?

LENNY

Yes. Because you were happy. Because you're together. And  
that wasn't fair of me. You have to let me make it up. You  
should invite her over.

IRA

You want me to invite her here?

LENNY

Absolutely. It's your house too. You should have the woman  
you love here.

IRA

Really?

LENNY

Why shouldn't you? In fact, I'm going to turn this place into your own private restaurant. It will be like being on a real date but not in public, right here at home where you can be comfortable.

IRA

You would do all that?

LENNY

For my brother. Anything. We'll clean this place up. I'll bring the table in here. We'll have candles and a table cloth. Maybe we'll play some music and I'll cook for you. We'll have meat for dinner.

IRA

Meat? We have meat?

LENNY

I think I can dig some up.

IRA

Oh, we haven't had meat in so long. How are you going to afford it?

LENNY

We are the ultimate criminals. Are we really worried about paying for things like meat?

IRA

Lenny, you really are a great brother.

LENNY

It's the least I can do.

Lights down.

SCENE 3: A WEEK OR SO LATER

The scene opens on a bare stage. The newspaper clippings have been cleared off the wall and the bags of flour are not in the room. The hutch is closed so none of its trappings are visible. A table sits in the living room. There is, for the first time, a great deal of light on the stage. The trap door to the basement is open. LENNY comes up from the basement. HE is wearing an apron and carries something wrapped in butcher paper. HE is whistling a tune. HE goes

into the kitchen and leaves the kitchen door open. After a moment there is a sizzling sound, such as that of cooking bacon.

LENNY (OS)

Whoa! Pan's a little too hot.

IRA enters through the front door. HE goes to the couch and plops down.

IRA

Mmmm. What's that smell?

LENNY enters.

LENNY

Rump roast. Breaded and fried.

IRA

Is it a roast if it's fried?

LENNY

I don't know. Does it make a difference?

IRA

I don't see why it should.

LENNY

Well?

IRA

Nothing.

LENNY

Nothing? Still? I thought they'd be out by now.

IRA

Nope. I've been thinking, maybe we should lay low just a little bit longer. You know, to let things run their course. You can never be too careful.

LENNY

That's true. Though I prefer not to wait too long. I would hate to get rusty. Besides, things are pretty much taken care of now.

IRA

Yeah but, things should maybe. . .run their course. It's just really soon is all I'm saying.

LENNY

It doesn't seem that we have a choice anyway. People are still not coming out, which I don't understand. We have to lay low at least until people will come out again. But as soon as they do, we need to get back to work. Oh, time to flip the butt roast.

LENNY goes back into the kitchen.  
HE reappears with a folded table cloth.

LENNY

Hey, I hate to ask you to do this on your own big day but...will you put on the cloth and candles?

LENNY goes back into kitchen.

IRA

Oh. Sure.

IRA puts the table cloth on the table and gets candle sticks out of the cabinet which are buried amongst the grim souvenirs. He should be speaking the following lines as he does it.

IRA

Lenny.

LENNY (OS)

Yes.

IRA

Thank you for all this. I mean it. This really is good of you.

LENNY (OS)

You're welcome.

IRA

You don't know how much it means. I think. . .I think that maybe Ms. Mild is the one. Do you know what I mean, the one? I mean, she's just so. . .so. . .she really is.

LENNY comes out.

LENNY

She's really sexy too.

IRA

I know.

LENNY

There's just something about that Salvation Army outfit. It brings out her. . .features.

IRA

It's great.

LENNY

Plus, there's just something. . .naughty about religious girls.

IRA

Oh no, I don't think so at all.

LENNY

No?

IRA

Not Ms. Mild. She's not one of those girls. She's pure as pure gold. She's perfect. And she's all mine.

Knocking.

LENNY

And she's here.

IRA

Oh, no. I wasn't ready. Light the candles.  
(to the door)  
Just a minute.

LENNY lights the candles while IRA crosses to the door, furiously trying to fix his hair and straighten his clothes. IRA opens the door and MS. MILD flies into his arms, hugging and kissing him.

MS. MILD

Oh, I missed you! I missed you! It feels like it's been forever since I've seen you.

IRA

I know. I missed you so much.

LENNY

It's only been a week or so.

MS. MILD

To young lovers that feels like forever.

IRA

Lovers?

LENNY

I understand. I'll make myself scarce for a moment then.

LENNY goes into the kitchen.

MS. MILD

I've missed you so much, not being able to come over. I'm so glad we can go outside again. The curfew was just terrible.

IRA

I know. I thought I'd never see you again.

MS. MILD

I would have broken the curfew to see you. But it had become so dangerous.

IRA

We do what we must to be safe.

MS. MILD

That's true. In the end, it was for the best.

IRA

That doesn't make me miss you less.

MS. MILD

Nor I, you.

IRA

I hope there's never a curfew again.

MS. MILD

I hope there's never need for one.

IRA

Maybe we should. . . Maybe we should stay together. You know, so we'll be together if anything does ever happen again.

MS. MILD

You mean, stay together as in stay together? Permanently? In the same place?

IRA

Yes. Yes, exactly.

MS. MILD

Live together?

IRA

Of course. It's a perfect solution. Then we never have to be apart again. We'll be together always.

MS. MILD

IRA, you know I can't do that.

IRA

Why not?

MS. MILD

Because it's not the right thing to do. That's not the kind of person I am, to shack up with my boyfriend.

IRA

What if I wasn't your boyfriend?

MS. MILD

What?

IRA

What if I was more than that? What if we weren't just shacking up?

MS. MILD

What are you asking, IRA?

IRA

I don't want to just be together always. I want us to be together forever.

MS. MILD

Yes?

IRA

Do you know what I'm talking about, Ms. Mild?

MS. MILD

Yes, I'm sure I do. But don't stop!

IRA kneels to one knee. MS. MILD covers her mouth with her hands in anticipation.

MS. MILD

Hang on. Let me just take in the feeling. The . . .rapture.

IRA

Ms. Mild. . .

LENNY bursts through the door carrying a tray containing plates and red wine in glasses.

LENNY

Dinner is served!

IRA jumps up with a start.

LENNY

Oh. I'm sorry. Did I interrupt something?

IRA

Yes.



MS. MILD

But it's okay.

LENNY

Should I make myself scarce again?

MS. MILD

No, no. It's okay. We'll talk after dinner. Come join us.

IRA and MS MILD sit at table. LENNY serves them.

LENNY

(serving MS. MILD)

Madame.

MS. MILD

Thank you.

LENNY

(serving IRA)

Sir. Your dish and my humble apologies for rudely ruining your moment.

IRA

(sighs)

Thank you, and I forgive you.

MS. MILD

And that's why I love you. So forgiving.

IRA

Love?

LENNY

(sitting)

He really is.

MS. MILD

He's very gentle.

LENNY

Gentle indeed.

MS. MILD

And so are you by the way. This is very nice what you're doing for us.

LENNY

It's the least I could do.

MS. MILD

So what is it?

LENNY

Asparagus with butter sauce and rump roast.

MS. MILD

It's breaded and fried.

LENNY

And aged to perfection.

MS. MILD

But is it a roast if it's fried?

LENNY

I don't know.

MS. MILD

I guess it doesn't matter though, does it?

LENNY

I never thought so.

MS. MILD

It's the thought that counts.

LENNY

I think so too.

(raising glass)

And so, a toast. To youth.

IRA

To us.

MS. MILD

To life.

THEY drink. THEY eat in silence for a moment. IRA spits a bone onto the plate which makes a nice sound. MS MILD pulls a bit of gristle from her mouth. THEY all seem displeased with the meat.

LENNY

Not as good as I had hoped for.

MS. MILD

No, no. It's good.

LENNY

Maybe the aging wasn't perfect.

MS. MILD

The aging was fine.

LENNY

I wish it were better. It's just that usually IRA does the cooking.

IRA

I make a great lentil stew.

MS. MILD

(to Lenny)

Say, how is your book coming?

LENNY

My book?

MS. MILD

Yes. How is it coming. I noticed the articles are no longer on the wall.

LENNY looks at IRA for help.

IRA

Lenny has most of it done. What he can do of it anyway. Now he just has to wait for things to . . .take their course.

MS. MILD

I guess you have the ending then, now that the killer has been caught.

LENNY

Ohhhhhh. Yes. I guess so.

MS. MILD

So how does it feel to have it nearly done with?

LENNY

You know it's strange, it's. . .bitter sweet.

MS. MILD

I guess I can understand that.

LENNY

You can?

MS. MILD

Sure. I mean it's great that he's been caught but it must be tough to see all that you've been working for coming to an end.

LENNY

It is. . .tough to see.

MS. MILD

And what a character. Are you going to study the killer much?

IRA

Oh, he already has.

LENNY

I feel like I know him personally.

MS. MILD

He doesn't seem smart enough to me, to get away with killing so many people. That's why a lot of people believe he didn't do it. Though I think that's silly. Why would the police arrest the wrong man?

LENNY

(distant)

I don't know.

MS. MILD

I don't know why they don't see that. The papers say that they have physical evidence that links him to the crime. Physical evidence. They say that certain types of evidence can make police ninety-nine point nine-nine percent certain that a person committed a crime.

LENNY

Yes, that's what they say.

IRA

I've heard them say it too.

MS. MILD

Are you going to go to the parade?

IRA

The what?

MS. MILD

The parade. You don't know about the parade? It was in all the papers.

IRA

No, I didn't know about it.

MS. MILD

Oh yes. The town is throwing a parade to celebrate the end of the curfew. Hundreds of people are going to be there.

LENNY

Hundreds?

MS. MILD

Oh yes. And not just from this town but from all over the area.

LENNY

Really? All over the area?

MS. MILD

Yes. Are you going?

LENNY

Oh yes. We'll be there.

IRA

Lenny, no.

LENNY

Ira, we're going.

MS. MILD

Come on, Ira. Go to the parade. I would love to go with you. You know, as a date.

LENNY

Yeah, Ira, as a date.

IRA

No. Ms. Mild, you don't understand. If we go to that parade everything will be ruined.

MS MILD's face begins to change.  
Little by little she is beginning  
to feel ill.

LENNY

Ira, this is our chance. It's time to get back to work. We are not going to miss that parade.

IRA

Lenny, no. Let things run their course, Lenny. You'll ruin everything.

MS. MILD

I feel sick.

LENNY

Ira, this parade is perfect. This parade is essential. It is the only way to fulfill our mission.

IRA

It's too soon and it's too many.

MS. MILD

Ira, where is the restroom? I'm sorry. I'm feeling very ill.

IRA

Upstairs, through my room. Are you okay?

MS. MILD

I'm just afraid maybe the meat is making me a little sick. It tasted. . .strange.

IRA  
(staring at LENNY)  
The meat?

MS. MILD  
Excuse me.

MS MILD rushes upstairs into IRA's  
room.

IRA  
(as she is going)  
Ms Mild? Are you okay? Ms. Mild.  
(to LENNY, after MS. MILD is gone)  
What's wrong with the meat, Lenny?

LENNY  
Nothing. Nothing, Ira. She's just sick.

IRA  
Why does the meat taste funny, Lenny?

LENNY  
Funny?

IRA  
Yes, funny. Why?

LENNY  
I don't know. Why are you looking at me that way?

IRA  
Lenny, I'm going to ask you a question and I need you to  
answer me very honestly. Are we eating. . .people?

LENNY  
Ira. . .

IRA  
Lenny, don't. . .

LENNY  
What was I supposed to do? You know we can't buy beef.

IRA  
So it is people? Oh my God, Lenny!

LENNY  
Now you're going to criticize? Now you're going to act  
shocked? You know what I think? I think deep down you knew.  
You had to know. It's the only logical conclusion. Of course  
it's people, what of it? I'm only sorry I didn't think of it  
earlier. We could have been living high off the hog, so to  
(more)

LENNY (CONTINUED)

speak, this whole time. Instead we have starved and our muscles have atrophied while we collected worthless trinkets and ignored a viable protein source.

IRA

It's not right.

LENNY

Right? You and your right. What is right, Lenny? Prominent people stealing from the poor. They eat meat at every meal. Is that right? I think it's about time. It's about time they gave back. It's about time that we took back. If more of us did, maybe they'd give it willingly. Right? There's what's right, Ira, then there's what's deserved. They're not always the same thing.

IRA

But you brought Ms. Mild into it.

LENNY

Oh, you think she is so innocent. Don't you remember how you met her? Or have you forgotten her in her little outfit? The black suit with little red trim. The form fitting black skirt, just begging for it. Coming in the name of Christ, whoring for money.

IRA

Whoring?

LENNY

Whoring. For Christ.

IRA runs toward LENNY and tries to tackle him. LENNY takes a hold of him and controls IRA's arms.

LENNY

Ira. Ira, calm down.

IRA

I won't calm down. Let me go so I can kill you.

LENNY

Now, Ira. . .

IRA

I'll kill you.

LENNY trips IRA, causing him to fall and pins him to the floor.

LENNY

I had hoped I wouldn't have to do this. But your actions give me no choice.

LENNY pulls a measure of twine from his pocket and ties IRA's hands.

LENNY

Okay, Ira, stand up.

LENNY stands IRA up by applying pressure to IRA's wrist.

IRA

Ah my wrist. You're hurting me!

LENNY

Come on, Ira.

IRA

Where are you taking me?

LENNY

Just upstairs where you'll be safe.

As they speak these lines, LENNY leads IRA to LENNY's room and they exit into the room. The stage is empty for a short moment. MS. MILD enters from IRA's room.

MS. MILD

Hello? Ira? Lenny?

MS MILD goes down the stairs into the living room.

MS. MILD

Guys? I hope you didn't leave, I'm still here.

LENNY sneaks out of his room and is on the balcony watching MS MILD as she moves around. MS MILD opens the kitchen door and sticks her head in.

MS. MILD

Lenny?

SHE shuts the door as LENNY begins to creep down the stairs.

MS. MILD

Ira?



MS MILD crosses to the trap door.

MS. MILD  
(as she opens the trap door)  
Lenny? Are you guys down. . .

MS MILD sees what she sees and is  
frozen.

MS. MILD  
Oh my God.

LENNY  
Taking the Lord's name in vain. That's a broken commandment,  
Ms. Mild.

MS. MILD  
What is this, Lenny?

LENNY  
That's. . .my book Ms. Mild. My masterpiece. How do you like  
my writing?

MS. MILD  
Where is Ira?

LENNY  
He's safe. He's my brother. But Ms. Mild, you should  
probably know, what you see down there is not just my book.  
It's also his baking.

MS. MILD  
Oh my God!

LENNY  
Don't act so innocent, Ms. Mild. You're part of this too.

MS. MILD  
Me?

LENNY  
Of course. You may notice. . .  
(fiddling with the left-over scraps on the table)  
they're breaded.

MS. MILD  
Oh my God, No.

LENNY  
I'm afraid so.

MS. MILD  
You're not going to. . .kill me?

LENNY

Well Ms. Mild, I am in quite a precarious situation, as you can no doubt appreciate.

LENNY pulls the table cloth off the table, scattering the dishes.

MS. MILD

Lenny, I'll never tell.

LENNY

Oh, that's not true.

MS. MILD

I won't. I don't care about IRA's past. I love him.

LENNY

Maybe, but you love Jesus more. He'll get to you. He'll be on your conscience and you will eventually have to tell someone. You'll have to tell the world.

MS. MILD

(feebly)

No.

LENNY

I'm sorry, Ms. Mild.

LENNY throws the cloth over MS. MILD's head.

MS. MILD

(as he covers her)

NO!

Lights down quickly.

SCENE 4: SOME DAYS LATER

At lights up, the back wall is now covered in newspaper clippings. Their basement is so full of bodies wrapped in sheets that they are piled past the trap door and are overflowing onto the stage floor. IRA is digging through the bodies, feeling their faces through the cloth in order to identify who is who.

IRA

Where are you? You have to be here.

LENNY enters, looking exhausted and dejected.

LENNY

Nothing. Our biggest upswing followed by our biggest drought.

IRA

Where is she?!

LENNY

What are you doing?. . .Come on, still not speaking to me?  
then you'll be happy to know, nothing all night. . .again.  
That's a week without seeing a soul. Nothing since the parade.

IRA

I don't care about your problems.  
(in tears)  
I've been crying all day.

LENNY

Ira, you've got to stop beating yourself up over this. We  
did what we had to do.

IRA

We? What's we? I would have never. . .  
(tears again)  
I loved her.

LENNY

Love comes and goes.

IRA

Here she is. There you are.

IRA pulls a body from the stack. HE  
kisses the sheet over her face and  
begins to drag the body upstairs.

LENNY

What are you doing?

IRA

Taking her away from the others. They're strangers.

LENNY

Where are you taking her?

IRA

To my room. So she can be with me.

LENNY

You'll do no such thing.

IRA

Yes, I will. You can't stop me.

LENNY

That is not her place. She belongs here with my others.

IRA

She doesn't belong to you. She chose me. She belongs with me.

IRA is dragging her upstairs. Her feet bang against the steps as she goes.

LENNY

Ira, it's not sanitary. You can't keep her in your room.

IRA

She's my girl and I'll keep her where I want to.

LENNY

Ira, this is crazy!

IRA

We were meant to be together, Lenny. Fate brought us together and I won't let you pull us apart. I wish I could be where she is.

LENNY

Lenny. . .

IRA

I do! I wish I was with her. But if I can't be with her, then I'll keep her with me.

IRA goes into his room and slams the door. A knock at the door. IRA instantly opens the door and steps out of his room. He is shocked and a little scared.

LENNY

(staring at door)

Look who it is. Out your window.

IRA goes back into the room, leaving the door open.

IRA

It's. . .a person.

LENNY

Impossible. The police?

IRA steps out onto the balcony.

IRA

No. A young person. A man. He's thin and looks tired. Don't let him in.

LENNY

Are you kidding? We must let him in.

IRA

Lenny, please don't.

LENNY

Ira, a week. Not one soul in a week.

IRA

But. . .

LENNY

This is our only chance.

LENNY crosses to the door and opens it. SURVIVOR stands at the door. He is a young man. He is thin and wears somewhat tattered clothing.

SURVIVOR

Oh thank god. Someone's home.

LENNY

(cheery)  
Someone's home.

SURVIVOR

I'm sorry but may I come in?

LENNY

Yes. Come in out of the cold.

SURVIVOR

I'm so glad someone's here. I've been door to door and I can't find anyone. It's like a ghost town here.

LENNY

A ghost town. That's right.

LENNY shuts the door. He turns the deadbolt key and takes it out of the lock.

SURVIVOR

I mean I've never been somewhere so. . .dead.

SURVIVOR sees the bodies.

SURVIVOR

That's. . .not what I think it is. . .is it?

LENNY

I don't know. What do you think it is?

SURVIVOR bolts for the door. LENNY intercepts him and holds up the key, showing him.

LENNY

It would do you no good to pass me.

(to IRA)

Ira, come downstairs.

(to Survivor, pleasantly)

Oops. I gave away a name. I guess that seals your fate.

SURVIVOR turns to run into kitchen but trips on a body and falls into the pile.

LENNY

What's the rush? We'll put you in the pile when it's time.

SURVIVOR

What do you want? Anything. I'll give you anything.

LENNY

Sit.

SURVIVOR sits in one of the dining room chairs, still left from the last scene. LENNY takes rope from his pocket and begins tying SURVIVOR to the chair.

LENNY

I'd like some information.

SURVIVOR

Anything you want to know.

LENNY

No one else is out. It seems that no one else is left. This is a. . .ghost town.

SURVIVOR looks to IRA who is by now downstairs. LENNY takes out the glass eyes and rolls them in his hands.

IRA

(mouthing to survivor)

Sorry.

LENNY

Where is everyone?

SURVIVOR

I don't know. I've been going door to door.

IRA

(meekly)

Door to door.

SURVIVOR

And I haven't seen anyone.

LENNY

And yet, you're someone and here you are. Where, oh where did you come from?

SURVIVOR

I'm from out of town. I'm passing through.

LENNY

How did you get here?

SURVIVOR

I walked.

LENNY

You didn't take the train?

SURVIVOR

The trains weren't running. There was a sign, "Due to operator shortage, the trains are not in service until further notice."

LENNY

No trains. . . And who have you run into in the streets?

SURVIVOR

No one, I swear.

LENNY

A ghost town. And no one answered their doors?

SURVIVOR

Not until you. Oh, wish to God I hadn't knocked.

LENNY

(to himself)

No one in the streets. No one in the houses. We're almost there. It's almost complete.

(to SURVIVOR)

Well, thank you, sir, for your cooperation. And now I'm afraid I must do what I must do.

SURVIVOR

What? No, please! I have a family!

LENNY

That's okay. We'll get to them soon enough.

(to IRA)

Watch him for a moment please. I have to choose an instrument.

LENNY goes into the kitchen.

SURVIVOR

Help. Please help. I have a family.

IRA

A family?

SURVIVOR

A wife. We're newlyweds.

IRA

A wife? Do you love her?

SURVIVOR

Yes. Yes, I love her very much. I just want to get back to her.

IRA

Love. . .Do you remember my name?

SURVIVOR

Not if you don't want me to.

IRA

I do. I want you to. You must promise me that you'll tell everyone you ever meet. Tell them my name and tell them, he was with a beautiful girl named Ms. Mild.

IRA unties SURVIVOR.

IRA

A beautiful girl named...

SURVIVOR

Mild. Ms. Mild.

IRA

That's right. Ira and Ms. Mild saved you from the serial killer. Do you remember?

SURVIVOR nods. IRA goes to the door and takes out his own keys. He unlocks the door.

IRA

Quickly.



Thank you. SURVIVOR

Remember. IRA

I won't forget. SURVIVOR

SURVIVOR exits. IRA shuts the door and locks it. He crosses to the chair vacated by SURVIVOR and sits with his hands behind his back as if tied up. LENNY enters with a pipe.

Where'd he go? LENNY

I'm here. IRA

Not you. Him. Where'd he go? LENNY

I am he. IRA

Ira... LENNY

Ira left. He told me to tell you that he is leaving. He said that he is going to find Ms. Mild. He said he will find her no matter where she is IRA

Ms. Mild. . .is in heaven. LENNY

Then that's where he'll go. IRA

Ira, don't you know what you're doing? LENNY

Aren't you going to tie me up? IRA

Why are you doing this? LENNY

It's the least I could do. Tie me up. IRA

Pause.

LENNY

It's not necessary. I don't need to tie you up.

LENNY looks as if he may cry. After a moment, he suddenly grabs the chair and knocks it to its side along with IRA. IRA and the chair disappear behind the sofa.

Pause.

LENNY strikes IRA with the pole. Once. Then a very brief pause. He begins striking without ceasing. LENNY is near tears as he deals the blows.

Lights fade to black as the strikes continue.

EPILOGUE

Lights up almost as soon as they have gone out. Lenny stands holding a bloody pipe. He is unraveling.

LENNY

I am bringing Armeggedon. I have just learned this. I. . .am the Angel of Death, it's the only logical conclusion. None come to me, but they shall perish into eternal fire! You think I'm crazy, don't you? Well you're wrong. I do what I have to do. We all have our roles in life. This one is mine and I do it well. I wait for them to come and then I do what I do. Eventually, they all come. And yet, there is no one left. No one left to come. Not one soul in the whole world.

(at the empty room)

Is there anyone left?

HE runs to the door, opens it.

LENNY

Is there anyone out there? If there is anyone left, I command you to come!

HE shuts the door and crosses center.

LENNY

Just as I suspected. They are all in that basement. And if there is anyone left who is not in there, they are in their houses. Never to come out again. The world has ended. So what am I to do now? My job is not complete. Somewhere, there's one more. I feel it, like I've never felt anything before. I feel it like Ira felt Ms. Mild. I feel it like the  
(more)

LENNY (CONTINUED)

Inspector felt justice. . .like our savior felt grace. But  
what am I to do now that there's no one left?

Pause.

LENNY

But there is one left...

LENNY crosses to the mirror on the  
fourth wall and looks into it.

LENNY

One more...

Curtain.