

THE BITTERNESS OF ASH

by David Boles

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ACT ONEScene One

WE ARE INSIDE A ROW HOUSE IN WASHINGTON, D.C. DURING THE FALL OF 1987. FROM STAGE RIGHT, A MID-AFTERNOON SUN SEEPS IN THROUGH BEAUTIFUL FLOWERED DRAPERIES ON THE LARGE LEAD GLASS BAY WINDOW IN THE MAIN ROOM. IN FRONT OF THE WINDOW, DOWNSTAGE RIGHT, ARE A WORN OUT SOFA AND AN EASY CHAIR STUCK IN THE RECLINING POSITION. UPSTAGE OF THE SOFA IS A SMALL DINING TABLE WITH ONE CHAIR. THE STOVE, A WORKING SINK AND TWO REFRIGERATORS DEFINE THE UPSTAGE WALL OF THE KITCHEN AREA. CENTER STAGE IS A ROTTED STAIRCASE SITUATED HALF THE WIDTH OF THE STAGE. THE STEPS ARE WORN OUT AND A MAKE-SHIFT RAMP MADE OUT OF AN OLD SLED, BITS OF CUT UP PANELING, GOLF CLUBS, AN OLD TELEPHONE POLE AND SEVERAL SPENT BEER KEGS PAVE THE WAY TO THE SECOND FLOOR. UPSTAIRS THERE IS A NARROW HALLWAY THAT RUNS THE PARALLEL TO THE LENGTH OF THE STAIRCASE. FROM THE NARROW STRIP OF THE HALLWAY ARE ACCESS DOORS TO THREE ROOMS. THE STAGE RIGHT DOOR LEADS TO BELGDOFF'S ROOM, THE STAGE LEFT DOOR LEADS TO EFFIE'S ROOM AND THE CENTER DOOR LEADS TO THE BATHROOM. THE BATHROOM DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN. ON THE MAIN FLOOR, STAGE LEFT, STANDS HECTOR'S PAINT EASEL WITH AN UNPAINTED CANVAS AND SEVERAL DIRTY BRUSHES AND SQUASHED TUBES OF ACRYLIC PAINT ON THE FLOOR. DIRECTLY OVER HECTOR'S PAINTING AREA IS THE ONLY VISIBLE LIGHT SOURCE FOR THE ROOM: A GORGEOUS CRYSTAL CHANDELIER. IT IS THE FANCY KIND, WITH DANGLING BITS OF GLASS FROM EVERY ANGLE. IT'S SHINE IS CONTINUOUS. IT IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING IN THE ROOM. UPSTAGE OF THE EASEL, IS A DOOR THAT LEADS TO HECTOR'S BEDROOM IN THE BASEMENT. THE DOOR IS BUILT UNDER THE STAIRCASE. THE MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE HOUSE STAGE RIGHT IS MISSING A DOOR. SEVERAL LAYERS OF BLACK TRASH BAGS ARE TAPED ACROSS THE FRAME FOR PROTECTION FROM THE ELEMENTS. THE PREFERRED ENTRANCE FROM THE OUTSIDE IS NOW THROUGH THE BACK DOOR, STAGE LEFT. IN THE UNLIGHTED HOUSE, BELGDOFF ENTERS STAGE LEFT. HE IS DRESSED IN A NAVY PEA COAT AND BLACK PANTS. HE IS SKINNY, PALE, AND WALKS WITH THE GRACE OF A BALLET DANCER. AT 33, HIS LIFE EXPERIENCE IS VAST, BUT HIS PHYSICAL LOOKS GIVE HIM AN INNOCENT AIR: HE APPEARS TO BE ONLY 17. HIS SOFT BLONDE HAIR IS LONG AND TOUCHES MID-BACK. HE HAS AN ENGLISH/PORTUGUESE ACCENT. BELGDOFF IS BLIND DRUNK. HE STAGGERS IN, TRIES TO SHUT THE DOOR, BUT MISSES. THE FORCE OF HIS MISS TURNS HIM AROUND 180 DEGREES.

HE STAGGERS ACROSS THE STAGE TO THE BAY WINDOW, HE TAKES OFF HIS SHOES, SOCKS AND PANTS IN THREE FLUID, SWIFT MOVES. HE HAS EXPERIENCE. NOW IN HIS JOCKEY SHORT UNDERWEAR AND COAT, HE REACHES FOR THE BLANKET THAT SERVES AS A DECORATIVE COVER FOR THE SOFA . AS HE PULLS AT THE UPSTAGE RIGHT CORNER OF THE BLANKET, HE UNKNOWINGLY GRABS A FISTFULL OF THE DRAPERIES TOO. AS HE TURNS TO LEAVE, HE TUGS ON THE BLANKET/ DRAPERIES: THEY DON'T MOVE. HE SHAKES HIS HEAD, TURNS AROUND AND USES BOTH HANDS TO PULL. HE UNKNOWINGLY RIPS DOWN THE DRAPERIES FROM THEIR HOOKS. HIS REACTIONS SLOWED BY ALCOHOL, HE STUMBLES BACK AS THE DRAPERIES AND BLANKET COVER HIM. HE STAGGERS OUT FROM UNDER THEM. TRIUMPHANT, BERGDORFF WRAPS THE DRAPERIES AROUND HIS SHOULDERS AND STARTS UP STAIRS. AS HE PICKS HIS WAY UP THE STAIRS, HE SLIPS AND FALLS ON A KEG OF BEER. HE FALLS HARD AND DOES NOT MOVE. HE PASSES OUT AND SLEEPS. COUNT FIVE BEATS. HIS ELECTRONIC WRISTWATCH ALARM GOES OFF. HIS PALE ARM REACHES OUT FROM BENEATH THE BLANKET. THE IRRITATING HIGH- PITCHED BEEPING CONTINUES. BELGDORFF, COMPLETELY HIDDEN FROM VIEW, WEARILY TRIES TO TURN OFF THE ALARM BY KNOCKING HIS WATCH AGAINST THE BANNISTER RAILS. HE HAS NO LUCK AS HE MISSES THE RAILS THREE TIMES. HE GIVES UP. HIS ARM GOES LIMP, AND HE ALLOWS IT TO DROP. HIS ARM LANDS HARD ON THE WRIST AND THE WATCH HITS THE FLOOR AND SHATTERS. THE ALARM IS OFF. BELGDORFF'S ARM NOW HANGS BETWEEN THE BANNISTER RAIL. HECTOR ENTERS STAGE LEFT. HE IS A HUGE MAN BUT THE ONLY CLUE TO FAT IS A FLABBY ABDOMEN. HIS BASSY VOICE CAN BE FELT IN YOUR CHEST EVEN WHEN HE WHISPERS. HECTOR DOES NOT SIMPLY ENTER A ROOM, HE BURSTS INTO IT AND CONTROLS IT UNTIL HE LEAVES. HE WEARS L.L. BEAN BLUE JEANS, COWBOY BOOTS, A FISHERMAN'S SWEATER AND RED SUSPENDERS. AN AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK HAT COVERS HIS BROWN CURLY HAIR. HE IS HAIRY AS A GORILLA, AND HIS FACE IS THICK WITH PERPETUAL FIVE O'CLOCK SHADOW. THREE QUAIL FEATHERS ARE STUCK IN THE HAT'S BRIM STRAP. ALTHOUGH HE IS 44 YEARS OLD, HIS EMOTIONAL MATURITY PEAKED AT 15. HECTOR SLAMS THE DOOR. BELGDORFF BOLTS UPRIGHT TO THE SOUND OF THE DOOR, THEN JUST AS QUICKLY FALLS BACK TO THE PRONE POSITION, INSTANTLY ALSEEP AGAIN. HECTOR TURNS ON THE OVERHEAD CHANDELIER. HE HEARS THE WATCH ALARM AND SEES BELGDORFF ON THE STAIRS. HE RUNS TO HIM. HECTOR PICKS HIS WAY UP THE STAIRS. HE GRABS BELGDORFF'S LEGS AND PULLS HIM DOWN THE STAIRS.

HECTOR: Belgdorff! I got you that job and you spit snot in my face!

BELGDORFF: I'm worn out.

HECTOR: You're going to work!

BELGDORFF: I don't shuck cucumbers.

HECTOR: You don't shuck cucumbers, you shuck corn. You're making me look bad, Belgdoff. Love doesn't pay the rent, darling.

BELGDOFF: Screw you.

HECTOR: Well, kiss my ass.

BELGDOFF: Lick it, butt head.

HECTOR: I'm not your type. But thanks for the offer.

HECTOR ROARS WITH LAUGHTER. HE SEES THE DRAPERIES, SCREAMS AND LETS BELGDOFF SLIDE DOWN THE REST OF THE STAIRS. HECTOR PICKS UP THE DRAPERIES AND CRADLES THEM.

HECTOR: Belgdoff, my grandmother gave these to me! God, I hate it when you're drunk.

BELGDOFF'S HEAD POPS UP.

BELGDOFF: Nevuh.

BELGDOFF EXAMINES HIS WATCH.

HECTOR: You're a drunk!

BELGDOFF: It can't be morning.

HECTOR: It's three in the afternoon.

HECTOR STOMPS DOWN THE STAIRS AND GOES TO THE WINDOW AND TRIES TO HANG UP THE DRAPERIES AGAIN.

BELGDOFF: It was a long walk home.

HECTOR: You should've called.

BELGDOFF: Get off.

HECTOR: You should've.

BELGDOFF: Yes, mother.

HECTOR: I was worried.

BELGDOFF: Sorry.

HECTOR: I'm willing to take care of you. But I want some respect.

BELGDOFF: Yes, dear.

HECTOR: Next time you'll call?

BELGDOFF: From now on.

HECTOR: I need your rent money. I'll take it over in person since we're a week late.

BELGDOFF: You know I don't have it.

HECTOR: You drank it up?

BELGDOFF: Let 'em sue.

HECTOR: We're getting another roommate.

BELGDOFF: Let the Ditz pay a little extra.

HECTOR: We owe her too much already.

BELGDOFF: We'll have a rent party. I will dance for our friends.

HECTOR: We don't have any friends.

BELGDOFF: They don't dare kick us out. We're artists.

HECTOR: We're getting another roommate. I put a sign in the yard.

HECTOR PICKS UP BELGDOFF, FLOPS HIM OVER HIS SHOULDER AND CARRIES HIM UPSTAIRS.

BELGDOFF: They wouldn't dare kick us out. I danced with Isadora Duncan.

HECTOR: Isadora Duncan is farting peanut dust.

BELGDOFF: There is no tolerance for artist's hunger.

HECTOR: I know, sweetie.

BELGDOFF: I don't want to die, Hector.

HECTOR: You'll be fine.

BELGDOFF: I don't want to be fine. I want to be well.

HECTOR: I know, sweetie.

BELGDOFF: Will you leave me?

HECTOR: Don't be stupid.

BELGDOFF: Will you?

HECTOR: No.

BELGDOFF: And hold my hand when it's time?

HECTOR: I keep my promises.

BELGDOFF: You're good to me, Hector.

HECTOR: Yes I am.

BELGDOFF: Bastard.

HECTOR ENTERS BELGDOFF'S BEDROOM. WE HEAR THE SOUND OF CHOKING. HECTOR QUICKLY EXITS BELGDOFF'S ROOM WITH BELGDOFF STILL SLUNG OVER HIS SHOULDER. BELGDOFF CONTINUES TO COUGH AS HECTOR RUNS INTO THE BATHROOM. EFFIE ENTERS STAGE RIGHT AND BURSTS THROUGH THE TRASH BAGS TAPED TO THE FRAME. SHE DROPS A PILE OF BOOKS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOOR, SLINGS HER HUGE PURSE ON THE DINING TABLE AND HUMS AN OLD ENGLISH DRINKING SONG. SHE IS A LARGE IRISH WOMAN WITH A LISP THAT SLURS HER "S's" TO "TH." SHE IS, 41, SINGLE, AND BIG-BONED WOMAN WHO WALKS ON HER HEELS, THUMPING THE FLOOR AS SHE MOVES IN HER BIG, ANKLE-HIGH LEATHER BOOTS. SHE WEARS A PEASANT DRESS. EFFIE GRABS THE TEA KETTLE, FILLS IT WITH WATER AND PUTS IT ON THE ELECTRIC STOVE TO BOIL. SHE STOMPS ACROSS THE FLOOR AND EXITS THROUGH THE DOOR STAGE LEFT AND SLAMS THE DOOR AS HARD AS POSSIBLE BEHIND HER. A MOMENT PASSES AS THE ECHO OF THE DOOR SLAM FADES. THEN, THE TEA KETTLE WHISTLES. FROM THE BATHROOM, HECTOR YELLS...

HECTOR: Effie? Darling? I think your water is ready! Effie?

NO RESPONSE TO HECTOR. THE KETTLE CALLS. HE STORMS OUT OF THE BATHROOM WIPING HIS HANDS ON HIS JEANS, AND RACES DOWN THE STAIRS AND INTO THE KITCHEN AREA.

HECTOR: Bitch! Bitch! Bitch! Muddufuddin- sockshuckin' Bitch!
HECTOR TAKES THE KETTLE OFF OF THE BURNER. HE CALLS OUT TO BELGDOFF.

HECTOR: She did it again! She's trying to kill us!

NO RESPONSE FROM BELGDOFF. HECTOR SEES THE MESS EFFIE MADE. HE PICKS UP THE PURSE AND FLINGS IT OUT THE FRONT DOOR.

HECTOR: Burn the house down!

ONE BY ONE HECTOR THROWS HER BOOKS OUT THE DOOR, PUNCTUATING EACH THROW WITH...

HECTOR: Ditz-Brain.

EFFIE ENTERS STAGE LEFT DOOR. SHE IS EATING AN ICE CREAM CONE. WHEN SHE SEES HECTOR THROWING HER BOOKS OUTSIDE, SHE STOPS. AND SLAMS THE DOOR. HECTOR DOES NOT STOP. BELGDOFF STAGGERS OUT OF THE BATHROOM.

BELGDOFF: Stop slamming the door! It's a needle in my spine!

BELGDOFF STAGGERS DOWN THE HALL AND INTO HIS BEDROOM. HECTOR STOPS AND TURNS TO FACE EFFIE.

HECTOR: You!

EFFIE: Helloo!

HECTOR'S RAGE BOILS WITHIN. HE ERUPTS LIKE A VOLCANO.

HECTOR: You did it again! This is the fifteenth time in six months!

EFFIE: What?

HECTOR: Why do you hate us?

EFFIE: Grow up.

HECTOR: Why?

EFFIE: I don't hate you, Hecky.

HECTOR: Why did leave the kettle on?

EFFIE: Why are you keeping count? Do I count every time you belch in the mornings? It's just as bad.

HECTOR: If I burp we don't get carried outta here in body bags.

EFFIE GOES OUTSIDE STAGE RIGHT AND THROWS HER BOOKS BACK IN THE HOUSE.
HECTOR UNTANGLES THE TAPE FROM THE TRASH BAGS.

EFFIE: You're used to living in fear.

HECTOR: This is not a flop house! This is a home.

EFFIE BURSTS OUT IN A GUFFAW.

EFFIE: Are you ever full of it today.

HECTOR: Don't do it again.

EFFIE: Don't threaten me. Pay me the twenty-five hundred and I'll leave.

HECTOR: Oh, shut up.

EFFIE: We'll all shut up and get along around here.

HECTOR: Who beat you with an ugly stick?

EFFIE CHEWS ON THE ICE CREAM CONE NOW AS SHE SPEAKS.

EFFIE: There are certain lifestyles around here that I must put up with even though it makes me vomit violently. But I accept that bit of dried puke in the corner of my mouth in the morning, because this is an oasis with no fresh water.

HECTOR: This is the cheapest rent on the Hill.

EFFIE: Die of thirst or slash a wrist and suck your own blood.
Cheers!

EFFIE MIMES SLASHING HER WRIST. SHE TILTS HER HEAD BACK AND OPENS HER MOUTH. SHE HOLDS HER WRIST OVER HER MOUTH. HECTOR IGNORES HER AND TAPES THE TRASH BAGS BACK INTO PLACE.

HECTOR: Don't use this door any more.

EFFIE: Fix it. I pay the rent.

HECTOR: It gets cold at night, so don't take it down again, all right? Use the back door.

EFFIE: I don't like walking through the alley to get in.

HECTOR: And don't slam the door any more, either. It bothers Belgdoff.

EFFIE: It won't shut otherwise.

HECTOR: And please remember to walk, heel-toe, heel-toe. When I'm asleep downstairs, your heel-heel stomps wake me up. Don't stomp. Walk like a lady.

EFFIE: Heel to toe?

HECTOR: And please. Effie, please. If you put water on for tea, keep an eye on it. Don't put it on and then leave. Okay?

EFFIE: I ran to the corner for an ice cream. I had it timed out.

HECTOR: You could burn the house down.

EFFIE: I'm used to gas, that's all. Electric is trickier.

HECTOR: Belgdoff is sleeping upstairs. So don't stomp.

EFFIE: Asleep again?

HECTOR: It's been a bad week.

EFFIE: Take a number.

HECTOR KEEPS A GOOD BIT OF SPACE BETWEEN HE AND EFFIE, BUT HE DOES KISS HER ON EACH FACIAL CHEEK. SHE RETURNS THE KISSES.

HECTOR: Later, Guy.

EFFIE: 'Bye, Hecky.

HECTOR GRABS HIS COAT FROM A HOOK ON THE BASEMENT DOOR AND EFFIE GATHERS UP HER PURSE. THEY WAVE TO EACH OTHER. AT THE SAME INSTANT THEY EXIT TOGETHER: HECTOR EXITS STAGE LEFT AND SLAMS THE DOOR AND EFFIE EXITS STAGE RIGHT BY WALKING STRAIGHT THROUGH THE TRASH BAGS AGAIN. WE TAKE A MOMENT AS THE HOUSE RESTS FROM THE REVERBERATIONS. BELGDOFF ENTERS FROM HIS BEDROOM. HE IS ONLY WEARING HIS JOCKEY SHORTS. HIS EYES ARE PUFFY. HE MOVES STIFFLY, HIS SHOULDERS DO NOT MOVE AS HE WALKS. HE IS IN A TRANCE. HE STUMBLES DOWN THE STAIRS. HE TAKES THE RECLINER AND SHOVES IT IN FRONT OF THE BACK DOOR STAGE LEFT. HE THEN PUSHES THE SOFA IN FRONT OF THE DOORLESS/TRASH BAGLESS FRONT DOOR STAGE RIGHT. BELGDOFF SHUDDERS IN THE COLD, PICKS UP THE TRASH BAGS FROM THE FLOOR AND WRAPS THEM AROUND HIS SHOULDERS. HE CROSSES TO THE STAIRS, LOOKS UP AT THE MESS HE HAS TO NAVIGATE, AND LEANS AGAINST THE UPSTAGE WALL BY THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS. HE DOESN'T HAVE THE ENERGY TO GET BACK UPSTAIRS. HE FALLS ASLEEP IN THIS STANDING/LEANING POSITION WITH HIS MOUTH HANGING OPEN. HE DOES NOT SNORE.

ARLEN STICKS HIS HEAD IN THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR. HE IS CHEWING GUM LOUDLY.

ARLEN: Hello?

MARY: (OFF) Ring the buzzer.

ARLEN: C'mon.

ARLEN CLIMBS OVER THE SOFA. HE IS BURLY. AT 21 HIS ARMS ARE THICK WITH MUSCLE AND HIS LEGS ARE STUMPY. HIS HAIR IS CUT SHORT AND HE IS CLEAN SHAVEN. HE REACHES OUTSIDE TO HELP MARY INSIDE. HE GRABS HER ARM AND DRAGS HER OVER THE SOFA LIKE A BAG OF CHARCOAL. MARY IS SUBDUED. HER VOICE IS SOFT, SHE IS DRESSED IN BLUE-JEAN OVERALLS AND A CABANA HAT. HER BLACK HAIR IS PULLED INTO A PONY TAIL.

ARLEN: This is it. Washington, D.C.

MARY: Arlen, we're being rude.

ARLEN: Bull. This is our home now.

MARY: We don't know if it's available.

ARLEN: You worry too much.

MARY: I'm being considerate.

ARLEN: You're being weak.

ARLEN GOES TO MARY. HE KISSES HER ON THE FOREHEAD AND STICKS HIS CHEWING GUM TO HER FOREHEAD WITH HIS TONGUE. HE LAUGHS.

MARY: You are so gross.

ARLEN: I am funny.

MARY PICKS THE GUM OFF OF HER FOREHEAD.

MARY: You disgust me.

ARLEN: Break up with me then. You have no appreciation for humor. You are humorless. Colorless. You have no texture of imagination. I pity you. Here's a quarter. Call someone who cares. Better yet. I'll keep the quarter. Dial the 800 operator. It's free.

MARY: I hate you.

ARLEN: You're fascinated by me. I'm the accident your mother always warned you about. I'm the reason you wear clean underwear so you won't be embarrassed with the medics scrape you off the pavement. You worship me. You relish my company. You think I am Jesus Christ. Stop. Enough. You're embarrassing me. Admit it. You love me. How can you hate Salvation?

MARY HAS TEARS STREAMING DOWN HER FACE. SHE DOES NOT WEEP, BUT SHE CAN'T CONTROL THE TEARS.

MARY: You are so mean.

ARLEN GOES TO HER. HUGS HER. KISSES HER REPEATEDLY.

ARLEN: I'm sorry, Mary. God kill me and rip off my balls beforehand with a rusty ball peen hammer if I'm lying. I love you, sweetheart. I was only joking. I didn't mean anything I said. I take it all back.

MARY CONTROLS HER TEARS NOW. ARLEN STEPS BACK AND HOLDS HER HAND.

ARLEN: Everything's gonna work out fine.

MARY: My mother will kill me.

MARY LAUGHS A LITTLE.

ARLEN: If you listened to your mother you wouldn't be here now.

MARY: Don't push me so much.

ARLEN: Good girls don't have to leave home...

MARY: Don't start on me!

ARLEN: You?!

MARY: You won't stop 'til I cry.

ARLEN: Bull.

MARY: I'm ignoring you. From now on I have no feeling for you. You are nothing but a fire hydrant on the corner. I will piss on you three times a day.

ARLEN: I dare you to try it.

MARY: Don't tempt me, then. It's too cold in here.

ARLEN: I'm a little warm. Looks pretty good here. Can't be too expensive. There are Burnt Ones on the corner. Don't know their area like they do back home.

MARY: You're one insult. A huge, draining pustulate boil of bigotry.

ARLEN: Don't flatter me.

MARY: Well, you better get used to those Burnt Ones. Develop a taste for the bitterness of ash. They're everywhere.

ARLEN: I'll have to see about that. This is the District of Columbia, for Chrissakes. Home of the American Way. Birthplace of the WASP. The White House is here for God'sakes. They don't belong inside the Beltway.

MARY: What's your plan?

ARLEN: Oh, shut up. I'm brilliant but not practical.

MARY: We could make them all live underground. In the Metro! No, better yet, we'll dig out caves and let them read by candlelight. Then let them dig their way out to Canada using their toe nails. We'll call it "The Ingrown Railroad."

ARLEN: It's been done before. Your passion for the obvious is riveting. Really.

MARY: If I only had the strength to shake some sense into you.

ARLEN FLEXES HIS BICEP. MARY WALKS AWAY FROM HIM AND EXAMINES THE FIRST FLOOR.

ARLEN: Long as I got this, baby. I got all the sense I need. Strength is power and power resides in the twitch muscles. I'm the strongest man in the world. If you forget that, I'll kill you.

MARY: You are such a boor.

ARLEN: But I'm adorable.

MARY SEES BELGDOFF. SHE STOPS.

MARY: Oh, my God.

ARLEN: Yes, my child?

MARY: Put your ego back in your pants and come here.

ARLEN CROSSES TO HER.

ARLEN: What's his problem?

MARY: Don't touch him.

ARLEN: Looking is not touching.

ARLEN PUTS HIS FACE AN INCH AWAY FROM BELGDOFF'S.

MARY: Is he okay?

ARLEN PUTS HIS EAR NEXT TO BELGDOFF'S NOSE AND LISTENS FOR BELGDOFF'S BREATHING.

MARY: Well?

ARLEN: He's alive all right.

MARY: Thank God.

ARLEN: You're welcome. But...

MARY: What?

ARLEN: He's a Butter Butt.

MARY: How do you know that?

ARLEN: He's blowing in my ear! Yeech!

ARLEN JUMPS AWAY FROM BELGDOFF AND LEAPS INTO MARY'S ARMS. SHE CANNOT HANDLE HIS WEIGHT AND THEY CRUMPLE TO THE FLOOR TOGETHER.

MARY: Everything's a punch line to you.

ARLEN: Look at that. A live, breathing example of sin.

MARY: Shut up, Arlen. Let's get out of here.

ARLEN: Tell me to shut up when the world is dying. Tell me to calm down when the earth is all buildings and the people are rotting in the ground because I didn't do anything about it! There's not even ash when these boys are done burning in Hell. This is even better...

MARY: Fine. But let's get outta here. The poor guy's sleeping.

ARLEN: I can help him. The despair is embroidered on his face with tears.

MARY: Don't start.

ARLEN: I can Save him.

MARY: Let's go home, Arlen.

ARLEN: Healing won't Save him.

BELGDOFF OPENS HIS EYES. HE LOOKS LIKE HE IS READY TO CRY. THE EYES ARE PUFFY AND HIS THROAT IS QUITE DRY.

BELGDOFF: I'll give you anything. Just don't take the drapes.

ARLEN: Alren Buss. Pleased.

ARLEN RISES AND STICKS OUT HIS HAND FOR A SHAKE. BELGDOFF DOES NOT MOVE.

BELGDOFF: If I could only sleep...

ARLEN: I am here to help you. Me and Mary. Stand up so he can get a look at you.

MARY RISES.

ARLEN: We're fresh from Selma, Alabama. This is Mary, my Southern Belle. And I'm Arlen, her Southern Bub.

BELGDOFF: If you two are from the real estate office, we took the rent over yesterday. I swear it. Do anything you want to me. Just don't break my legs. I danced with Isadora Duncan, you know.

ARLEN: I'm here to take that room you got advertised.

BELGDOFF TAKES OFF THE TRASH BAGS. MARY STIFLES A SMALL SCREAM WHEN SHE SEES BELGDOFF IN HIS UNDERWEAR. ARLEN SIZES UP BELGDOFF'S BODY. BELGDOFF TRIES TO TAKE A STEP. HE IS WEAK AND FALLS. HE GRABS ARLEN'S ARM. MARY GOES TO BELGDOFF AND TAKES HIS OTHER ARM TO STEADY HIM.

ARLEN: Good, boy. Give it a squeeze. 100% pure grade beef. Healthier than a quarter pounder at McDonald's and better for your cholesterol count.

MARY: Arlen, he's sick!

ARLEN: He's drunk. His body needs the tone of religion.

MARY: Some people don't think you're very funny.

ARLEN: (TO MARY) We might as well be honest. (TO BELGDOFF) We're a family now. Go ahead, sneak a feel. Grab it and wet your panties.

BELGDOFF TAKES A QUICK STEP TOWARDS MARY. HE GRABS HER AROUND THE WAIST AND PULLS HER CLOSE FOR A KISS. ARLEN QUICKLY WEDGES AN ARM IN BETWEEN THEM AND TIGHTENS HIS HAND AROUND BELGDOFF'S THROAT BEFORE HE CAN KISS MARY.

ARLEN: Ah, weakness! The flesh speaks your name and you ignore temptation. Take it easy, boy. You've got a man in your life now. And I'm not taking any of your games. I'm smarter than you. I can hurt you. I'll laugh and spit in your face as I twist the breath from your neck.

MARY: Leggo of him, Arlen.

ARLEN LETS GO OF BELGDOFF'S NECK. BELGDOFF TAKES A STEP BACK. HE CALLS UP THE SNOT FROM HIS NOSE, SWALLOWS IT, CLEAR HIS THROAT AND SPITS IN ARLEN'S FACE. BELGDOFF CROSSES TO THE RECLINER.

ARLEN: You've found strength in God. Congratulations.

BELGDOFF PUSHES THE RECLINER BACK TO THE WINDOW ACROSS STAGE.

ARLEN: Lesson One: Cleanse me of your sin.

ARLEN TAKES OUT A HANDKERCHIEF FROM HIS BACK POCKET. BELGDOFF STOPS PUSHING THE RECLINER AND ACCEPTS THE HANDKERCHIEF. BELGDOFF GETS CLOSE TO ARLEN'S FACE. BELGDOFF LICKS HIS SPIT OFF OF ARLEN'S FACE.

MARY: Guess you should wash his feet now, Arlen.

ARLEN: This is not your concern.

MARY: Might as well go all the way.

BELGDOFF REARRANGES THE RECLINER AND SOFA.

BELGDOFF: This is your room. Fifty dollars covers your deposit and first month's rent.

ARLEN: I love you, Sissy Boy. You are more despised than the Burnt Ones. That is why I have come to you. We will become one. Redeem yourself in my eyes.

BELGDOFF: That'll be fifty dollars.

ARLEN: Pay the man.

MARY REACHES INSIDE HER SOCK AND PULLS OUT FIVE TEN DOLLAR BILLS. SHE GIVES THEM TO BELGDOFF.

BELGDOFF: Now if you will excuse me, I need to get some sleep.

ARLEN: We bring no secrets.

BELGDOFF: Excuse me.

BELGDOFF CROSSES TO THE STAIRS.

ARLEN: Hey, Butter Lips. Let's try to wear some kind respect, okay? Your bodily dimensions don't give me rise and Mary's well-taken care of all right? Keep it in mind.

BELGDOFF PICKS HIS WAY UP THE STAIRS.

BELGDOFF: Your worth to me is sewn into the the lining of your wife's stockings. You remember that.

BELGDOFF CONTINUES UP THE STAIRS. MARY PULLS ARLEN ASIDE.

MARY: He doesn't think you're funny.

ARLEN: He loves me. I was only joking. He knows it. He just doesn't break down and weep like you do. He's a lot of fun. We'll have a great time here.

BELGDOFF TURNS INTO HIS ROOM. BEFORE HE GENTLY CLOSSES HIS DOOR, HE QUIETLY SPEAKS BACK OVER HIS SHOULDER TO ARLEN.

BELGDOFF: Asshole.

ARLEN AND MARY DIDN'T HEAR HIM.

MARY: I don't have a good feeling about this.

ARLEN: I do.

MARY: The body doesn't lie. There's an evil here.

ARLEN: The evil is inside you.

MARY: Don't joke with him any more.

ARLEN: Don't tell me what to do.

MARY: I don't want to stay here.

ARLEN: He has our last buck. What can I do now?

MARY LETS OUT A SIGH. SHE SITS ON THE ARM OF THE RECLINER AND HOLDS HER ABDOMEN.

ARLEN: Still bleeding?

MARY: Only a little.

ARLEN: Blood is God's Mule Team Borax. Blood is the nectar of birth.

MARY: Don't rub it in.

ARLEN: Truth has no rub.

MARY: Would you get my bag?

ARLEN: Dear, dear, Bloody Mary...

MARY: I'll get it myself.

MARY MAKES A MOVE FOR THE DOOR. ARLEN GRABS HER.

ARLEN: For the rest of your life you will be followed by a streak of grey... not a shadow, because they are the burnt remains of things living. This streak will be a stain of the knife between your legs, the nagging plunder of youth, the neverending proof of unrealized hope.

MARY: I will kill you, Arlen. It swear to Jesus Christ. Or Satan. Or the Maytag Repair man. It doesn't matter. Whoever will grants me that wish will get my undying love. Your death is my only hope.

ARLEN LAUGHS.

ARLEN: How can two deaths be better than one? The taste of your own flesh isn't satisfaction enough? Indulge yourself. Blood of my blood. Flesh of my flesh.

ARLEN UNZIPS HIS PANTS. HIS BARE BOTTOM IS TO THE AUDIENCE. MARY STARES AT HIS CROTCH. HER HANDS PRESS HARD ON HER ABDOMEN. SHE BACKS AWAY, TERRIFIED.

MARY: You are such a horror.

ARLEN: And you are the snake in the garden. You cannot hide the hiss of your gender.

ARLEN HIKES UP HIS PANTS.

MARY: You owe me.

ARLEN: Don't make me laugh.

MARY: I'll never forget.

ARLEN: I pay everyday when the dead weep for the living. The pity of the damned is no blessing.

MARY: They don't give birth certificates for conception.

ARLEN: You're lost. And blaming me...

MARY: Let me have it. I'm sick of the ravages. Either kill me off, or give me chance to recover. It's not living when every word is a plea for breath.

ARLEN: You want life without the suffering.

MARY: Thank God you finally understand! I'm sick of living. I don't want it any more: I reject it. I want nothing. I am begging you for death. I will give you anything if you will only kill me.

MARY RUNS TO THE STAIRCASE AND GRABS A LENGTH OF LEAD PIPE. SHE GIVES IT TO ARLEN.

MARY: Use it. Cock it and let me have it. I am begging you in the name of God to do what I ask for once in your life. Put me out of my misery. Show me the brilliance of the love you have for me.

ARLEN COCKS HIS ARM BACK AND SWINGS WITH ALL HIS MIGHT. MARY SCREAMS AND DUCKS OUT OF THE WAY.

MARY: Jesus Christ, are you crazy?!!

ARLEN TAKES ANOTHER SWING AND MISSES. MARY IS RUNNING FOR HER LIFE.

ARLEN: I do love you, Mary. I will obey your wish.

MARY: My God, I was only joking. I was kidding around, Arlen. Put that fuckin' pipe down!

ARLEN GOES AFTER HER, JABBING THE PIPE AT HER ACROSS THE KITCHEN TABLE LIKE A SWORD.

ARLEN: Stay, my lamb. I can't show you Heaven if you're dancing like Hell.

MARY: Arlen, Goddam you! If you joke around it's okay. If I do it, you take me at my word! It isn't fair!

ARLEN FAKES HER OUT AND LANDS A BLOW ON HER WRIST. SHE SCREAMS IN PAIN. ARLEN DROPS THE PIPE AND RUNS TO HER.

ARLEN: Shit, no! Are you okay? I didn't mean it. I was only joking. Did I really scare you?

MARY: I'm okay. I'm fine. I know. I know. Let's get out of here.

ARLEN: Sweetheart...

MARY: I'm not having fun any more.

ARLEN: We don't have anywhere else to go. It's us or nothing.

MARY: I know.

ARLEN: I love you, Mary. No matter what happens, I love you madly.

MARY: I know. I know. I've heard it all before. We'll stay here. We'll stay as long as you want. I give. You win.

ARLEN: I don't want to win.

MARY STARTS TO EXIT THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR. ARLEN FOLLOWS HER. SHE CRADLES HER WRIST.

MARY: True. You want submission. Winning only gives you a victory. But to rule a Kingdom, well, that gives you immortality.

ARLEN: No, baby!

MARY: Yes, Arlen. But you tell me what you want to hear and I will repeat it exactly. If I do that you must never touch me again.

ARLEN: Whatever I did, I'm sorry.

MARY: I forgive you. Whatever you do, you are forgiven, so never ask for it again. You have forgiveness on credit, okay?

ARLEN: You're beautiful.

MARY: And you broke my fucking wrist.

THEY ARE GONE. BELGDOFF COMES OUT OF HIS ROOM STILL IN HIS UNDERWEAR. HE HAS A HAMMER IN HIS HAND AND FOUR NAILS IN HIS MOUTH. HE GOES DOWN THE STAIRS, PULLS OUT FOUR BANNISTER RAILS AND GOES TO THE BACK DOOR STAGE LEFT. HE WEDGES ONE RAIL BETWEEN THE DOOR AND THE FLOOR SO IT CANNOT BE OPENED. HE USES A BEER KEG TO STOP THE RAIL FROM SLIDING ON THE FLOOR. BELGDOFF CROSSES TO THE FRONT DOOR AND NAILS THE REMAINING TWO RAILS ACROSS THE OPEN FRAME. HE TURNS, DROPS THE HAMMER BEHIND HIM AND STALKS SLOWLY BACK UP THE STAIRS TO HIS BEDROOM AND CLOSSES THE DOOR BEHIND HIM. EFFIE ENTERS BY BURSTING THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR AND BREAKING THE BANNISTER RAILS NAILED INTO PLACE. SHE IS OBLIVIOUS TO WHAT SHE DID. SHE IS DRESSED IN A JOGGING OUTFIT THAT IS MUCH TOO SMALL. HER HAIR IS WET. SHE CARRIES A SMALL BOOK BAG. SHE DROPS THE BAG ON THE SOFA, GOES TO THE KITCHEN, FILLS THE TEA KETTLE WITH WATER AND PUTS IT ON THE STOVE TO BOIL. SHE THEN GOES TO THE COUCH AND PULLS OUT A SHOE BOX FROM THE BAG. SHE HUMS AN IRISH DRINKING SONG THIS TIME AND STRAPS THE SHOES ON HER FEET. THEY ARE TAP SHOES. SHE GOES TO THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOOR AND BEGINS TO DO A FEW BASIC TAP DANCE STEPS. SHE STOMPS LOUDLY, HER MOVES ARE CLUMSY, BUT SHE IS TRYING HER HEART OUT. THIS IS SERIOUS BUSINESS TO HER. THE KETTLE WHISTLES. ARLEN AND MARY ENTER WITH TWO SMALL SUITCASES. MARY CARRIES BOTH SUITCASES. ARLEN CARRIES NOTHING. MARY SITS ON THE SOFA, OPENS HER SUITCASE AND TAKES OUT A RED SCARF. SHE DELICATELY WRAPS HER WRIST WITH IT. ARLEN GOES TO EFFIE, FASCINATED BY HER MOVEMENT.

ARLEN: That's pretty good. Nothing like the sound of cattle on stampede that can make a man's blood rush to his crotch.

THE KETTLE WHISTLES. EFFIE'S TAP DANCING IS SLOW AND PLODDING.

MARY: Arlen. You promised me. You said you'd leave people alone.

ARLEN: She knows I'm joking.

MARY SEES THE WHISTLING STEAM POURING FROM THE KETTLE.

MARY: Should someone get that?

EFFIE: Are you here to fix the door?

ARLEN: This is our paradise picked.

MARY: I think the water is burning.

MARY IS IGNORED. SHE GOES TO THE KITCHEN AND TURNS OFF THE WATER.

EFFIE: Put your estimate on the table.

ARLEN: We live here.

EFFIE: Ooops. Sorry.

ARLEN: Arlen Buss.

EFFIE: I'm Effie...

ARLEN: ...Pleased...

ARLEN OFFERS HIS HAND IN A SHAKE. EFFIE IGNORES HIM.

EFFIE: ...the Diane Sawyer of Ireland.

ARLEN: Never heard of you.

EFFIE: I was quite well known in Ireland. But the taxes! Seventy percent! I came to America.

ARLEN: Still never heard of you.

MARY CROSSES TO THE RECLINER AND RELAXES. SHE PUTS HER INJURED WRIST ABOVE HER HEAD. EFFIE CHANGES HER TAP DANCE TO SOMETHING A LITTLE QUICKER.

EFFIE: I was a star back home. Met the Queen when I was fourteen. Threw up on her gown. I was drunk, not nervous.

ARLEN: We got a banger here, Mary. A real live home run. This one's outta the ballpark.

EFFIE: Nothing was worse than when my lover left me in Barcelona.

MARY: That's terrible.

EFFIE: I lost our child.

MARY: I'm sorry to hear that.

EFFIE: God, he beat me bloody. Strangled me so hard that he burst the blood vessels in my eyes. I didn't mean to lose the little shit.

MARY: You should've killed him.

EFFIE STOPS DANCING AND TALKS TO MARY.

EFFIE: Well it wasn't my fault, really. The bugger was practically five. Can you blame me? The market was flush filled with beggars. I told her never to leave me. Someone took her who needed her more than us. I was buying soap powder and she didn't wait. Her fault, not mine. The little bitch deserves to be lost. Incredibly stupid of her, really. Her father disagreed, and proved it with his fists. So I came to America. No one here cares if you're lost. You come here to find yourself.

ARLEN: And you're still looking.

MARY: You're much too hard on yourself.

EFFIE: Took my first dance lesson today. Hecky says I thump when I walk. I want to lighten my step. For Hecky I will do that.

MARY: You must care about him a lot.

EFFIE: Oh, God, he hates me. Despise is not a deep enough word to convey the despise Hecky cradles for me. I think it's because I'm a woman. He thought of me sickens him. He's afraid of falling in love with me. But through Hecky's love I will discover myself. I feel strongly about that.

EFFIE BEGINS TO TAP DANCE AGAIN. BELGDOFF ENTERS THE HALLWAY FROM HIS BEDROOM. HE IS A PHYSICAL MESS. HE HAS NOT SLEPT. HE CARRIES AN UN-LIGHTED BLOW TORCH IN ONE HAND AND A SPARK IGNITER IN THE OTHER HAND. HE WALKS DOWN THE STAIRS TOWARDS EFFIE.

ARLEN: So you slept with Hecky?

MARY: Why must you be so rude? You don't have to get to the bottom of everything.

ARLEN: I already know the bottom of things. It is my job to explain what crawls on the floor there to everyone else.

EFFIE: I'm sure you do a very good job of it. Hellooo, Belgdoff! Slept it off?

BELGDOFF SITS ON THE FLOOR CROSS- LEGGED NEXT TO EFFIE. SHE CONTINUES TO DANCE. BELGDOFF TURNS ON THE GAS TO THE BLOWTORCH. HE STRIKES THE IGNITER A FEW TIMES. IT DOES NOT LIGHT THE TORCH.

EFFIE: I just signed up for lessons. It will make me walk softer. Do you think Hecky will like it? I pray for it. He'll appreciate the quiet.

BELGDOFF DOES NOT RESPOND. HE GIVES THE TORCH MORE GAS. HE SPARKS THE IGNITER AND THE BLOWTORCH SHOOT TO LIFE. THE FLAME IS HUGE AND MENACING. BELGDOFF TURNS THE FIRE ON EFFIE'S FEET. EFFIE MOVES HE FEET OUT OF THE FIRE. SHE CONTINUES TO DANCE. SHE CIRCLES HIM AS HE TRIES TO BURN HER FEET OFF. EFFIE IS QUICKER THAN BELGDOFF. HIS REACTIONS ARE EMBARRASSINGLY SLOW. IT IS A GAME TO EFFIE.

MARY: Oh, my God!

EFFIE: Don't worry, dear. It happens all the time.

MARY RUNS TO THE KITCHEN FOR WATER. SHE GRABS THE KETTLE. BELGDOFF CONTINUES TO TRY TO BURN OFF EFFIE'S FEET. EFFIE DANCES. ARLEN WATCHES AND TRIES TO DIRECT BELGDOFF.

ARLEN: Left. No, around the the right. It's a two step! Anticipate!

EFFIE: Really, Belgdoff. You're such a child.

MARY ARRIVES WITH THE KETTLE OF WATER. SHE DUMPS IT ON THE BLOWTORCH. THE FIRE IS DOUSED. EFFIE STOPS DANCING. BELGDOFF CLOSES HIS EYES AND TRIES TO SLEEP WHILE SEATED.

EFFIE: I hope that wasn't my tea water!

MARY: It was boiling over...

EFFIE: Don't touch things that don't belong to you!

ARLEN: It was getting good, Mary. He singed her ankle hair.

MARY: I'm sorry. I was trying to help...

MARY IS STUNNED. THE KETTLE DROPS FROM HER HAND. SHE TEETERS ON HER FEET. SHE BECOMES DIZZY AND FAINTS. ARLEN RUNS AND CATCHES HER. EFFIE BEGINS TO TAP DANCE AGAIN. BELGDOFF IS JARRED AWAKE AGAIN. HIS EYES WIDEN. HE GRABS ONE OF EFFIE'S LEGS. BELGDOFF IS JIGGLED UP AND DOWN AND HE TRIES TO HOLD DOWN HER LEG FROM DANCING. ARLEN PICKS UP MARY IN HIS ARMS AND TAKES HER TO THE SOFA. BELGDOFF ARRANGES HIMSELF SO THAT HE IS SITTING ON EFFIE'S FOOT AND HOLDING HER LEG AS WELL. IT WORKS. HER LEG STOPS DANCING. BUT THE OTHER LEG CONTINUES TO DANCE. HECTOR ENTERS STAGE RIGHT.

HECTOR: Those goddamn bastards!

EVERYONE FREEZES. EFFIE STOPS DANCING. BELGDOFF HANGS ON HER HER LEG FOR DEAR LIFE. ARLEN HOLDS MARY IN HIS ARMS.

HECTOR: I will kill them! I will kick their balls through their stomachs so they pop out their assholes like marbles.

HECTOR TAKES STEPS FORWARD. HE TURNS AND WE SEE ONE SIDE OF HIS FACE IS BADLY BEATEN. HIS LIP IS CUT. HIS CLOTHES ARE TORN.

HECTOR: I came out of the Metro and they jumped me. Five. And there's a... a boot. Look, over there's a fucking elbow in my eye. "Poisoning the World." And then they took me down on the ground and... Dear God... they...

HECTOR FIGHTS BACK THE TEARS. HE ERUPTS WITH ANGER.

HECTOR: Damn them to Hell! They spread my... they...

IN A FURY OF ANGER AND TEARS, HECTOR GOES TO HIS PAINT EASEL. HE RIPS OFF THE CAP TO THE RED ACRYLIC PAINT. HE STABS AT THE CANVAS WITH THE PAINT TUBE, BUT DOES NOT SQUEEZE ANY PAINT OUT. HE STRUGGLES TO CONVEY THE HORROR OF THE MOMENT. HE PULLS BACK HIS ARM IN SLOW MOTION, HIS ARM SHAKES WITH FURY AS HE TRIES TO CONTROL HIS BODY. HIS FIST MEETS THE CANVAS. HE SQUEEZES A TINY BIT OF PAINT IN THE CENTER OF THE CANVAS BUT DOES NOT LIFT THE TUBE FROM THE CANVAS. THE MOMENT THE DAB OF PAINT IS OUT OF THE TUBE AND ON THE CANVAS, HECTOR'S ENERGY IS DISSOLVED. HIS ARM GOES LIMP, AND THE PAINT TUBE SMEARS THE DAB OF PAINT DOWNWARD. HECTOR DROPS THE TUBE OF PAINT.

HECTOR: ...They gave me Jesus.

HIS HANDS SHAKE AND GO TO HIS FACE AS HE WEEPS QUIETLY TO HIMSELF.

BLACKOUT.

Scene Two

IT IS THREE IN THE MORNING, THE NEXT DAY. ARLEN IS ASLEEP ON THE COUCH. MARY SLEEPS ON THE RECLINER. THEIR CLOTHES ARE UNPACKED AND HUNG ACROSS A WIRE THAT ATTACHES FROM THE DOWNSTAGE DOOR FRAME TO THE UPSTAGE WINDOW FRAME. EFFIE IS ASLEEP IN HER ROOM. HECTOR IS SLEEPING DOWNSTAIRS. THE FRONT DOOR IS NOW BLOCKED WITH STACKED BEER KEGS THAT SERVE AS A WARNING SYSTEM IF ANYONE TRIES TO ENTER THE HOUSE. HECTOR'S PAINTING NOW HANGS ON THE DOOR TO HIS BEDROOM DOWNSTAIRS, THE CANVAS IS UNCHANGED FROM THE ORIGINAL DAB AND SMEAR. BELGDOFF ENTERS BY KICKING AND SHOVING DOWN THE BEER KEGS. BELGDOFF IS DRESSED IN BLACK PANTS, SOCKS, SHOES, SHIRT, A RED TIE AND A BLACK TRENCH COAT. HE FLICKS ON THE CHANDELIER. HE IS DRUNK. ARLEN AND MARY SIT UP IN UNISON, BOTH NOW WIDE-AWAKE. BELGDOFF IS ALIVE WITH SPIRIT AND ENGERGY.

BELGDOFF: Hello, darlings!

MARY: Arlen, you okay?

BELGDOFF: The turd-ball's just fine. It's only me, dear.

ARLEN: It's three in the morning. We're trying to get a little sleep.

BELGDOFF: You're boring me.

ARLEN: I crack you up, son...

BELGDOFF: Shut up!

MARY: Let it go, Arlen. He's drunk.

BELGDOFF: I'm not drunk, honey. I am finally alive! My imagination is filled with wonder. I am free of the nibbling hands of ordinary minds. I am soaring.

BELGDOFF TAKES OFF IN A BALLET LEAP. HE LANDS HARD ON THE FLOOR.

MARY: Belgdoff, Hector's asleep downstairs. He finally calmed down after you left.

ARLEN: After you deserted him.

BELGDOFF: Listen, Piss Head. It happens all the time. It's the truth of the lifestyle. If you can't handle a little blood on your lip, then then get out of the business.

ARLEN: Where I come from we stick by our friends.

BELGDOFF: Where you come from they stick rings through their noses and snort like bulls.

BELGDOFF CACKLES AT HIS OWN JOKE. ARLEN GETS OFF OF THE SOFA. HE IS DRESSED IN SHORTS AND SOCKS.

ARLEN: I'm gonna go easy on you, pal. I'm tired and not real clear in the head. I am telling you to shut up and go to bed.

BELGDOFF: Shit on you. Bastard. Don't come near me.

MARY: Don't start a fight!

BELGDOFF PICKS UP MARY IN HIS ARMS. ARLEN STOPS.

ARLEN: Put her down.

BELGDOFF: The nerve is raw.

MARY: I don't feel well.

BELGDOFF SWINGS MARY IN HIS ARMS AND LAUGHS.

ARLEN: Put her down!

BELGDOFF: Test the line...

MARY: He isn't hurting me.

BELGDOFF: ... a little furthur.

BELGDOFF KISSES MARY. ARLEN STARTS TO RUN.

MARY: Arlen, no! Don't start a fight.

BELGDOFF LAUGHS.

BELGDOFF: Struck down by the beauty of a whore's kiss.

MARY SLAPS BELGDOFF HARD ACROSS THE FACE. HE IS STUNNED FOR A MOMENT.

BELGDOFF: (TO MARY) So the flesh is not weak!

BELGDOFF SHAKES OFF THE PUNCH.

BELGDOFF: In fact, it packs quite a whallop!

BELGDOFF PUTS HER DOWN AND RUBS HIS JAW. ARLEN MAKES A RUN FOR BELGDOFF.

ARLEN: I'll kill you.

BELGDOFF: Get in line.

BELGDOFF LAUGHS AS HE TRIPS ARLEN. HE FALLS HARD.

MARY: Don't, Arlen. I'm fine. Forget it. Go to sleep. Please.

ARLEN: I'm gonna break your neck.

MARY: He's drunk!

BELGDOFF BEGINS TO DANCE A BALLET.

ARLEN: I said, I'm gonna kill that son-fa-bitch.

MARY: No.

ARLEN: I'll bust him up so bad, he'll be lickin' the pavement for a dime.

MARY: Shut the fuck up, Arlen!

ARLEN IS SHOCKED AT MARY'S LANGUAGE. ARLEN GOES BACK TO THE SOFA. BELGDOFF BEGINS TO LEAP ACROSS THE LENGTH OF THE LIVING ROOM.

MARY: Belgdoff, sit down here and talk to me. We don't want to wake up Hector.

BELGDOFF: He can go to Hell. So can you, and the Jock and the Ditz-brain too.

BELGDOFF RUNS TO THE STAIRS AND SCREAMS.

BELGDOFF: Effie! The house is on fire! Fire! We've been sent to Hell to lick flames from the Devil's shoes! (TO MARY) See? Hopeless. Sleeps through anything. Give 'em a shillelagh and a shot of whiskey and they're in Heaven.

MARY: You don't mean that.

BELGDOFF: The truth isn't kind, child.

ARLEN: Why don't you go to bed?

BELGDOFF: Oh, fuck off.

ARLEN: Watch your mouth!

MARY: You can sleep now.

BELGDOFF: Why should they sleep when I can't?

MARY: I'll help you upstairs!

BELGDOFF RAGES AT MARY.

BELGDOFF: Lay off the preaching, honey. Shut up, spread your legs and let the poor lick for salt. You have your pleasure, I have mine.

MARY: But Hector's trying to ...

BELGDOFF: Hector has the rest of his life to sleep!

MARY: I was only helping...

ARLEN MOVES TO BELGDOFF. HE READIES HIS FISTS.

ARLEN: Let's go, Sissy. Let's just have it out. We'll see can take care of business. We'll finish it right here.

BELGDOFF PICKS UP A BEER KEG AND THROWS IT AT ARLEN. ARLEN STRUGGLES TO CATCH IT.

BELGDOFF: (SCREAMING OUT THE FRONT DOOR) I will not have this asshole in my house! In the name of Jesus Christ, Satan get out of my life!

BELGDOFF TAKE ANOTHER BEER KEG AND HEFTS IT TO HIS SHOULDERS. HE TOSSES ONE TOWARDS EFFIE'S ROOM. IT BOUNCES OFF THE RAILING AND THUDS TO THE FLOOR.

BELGDOFF: Sound of beer knocking won't wake her either.

BELGDOFF PULLS OUT A FLASK OF WHISKEY FROM HIS COAT.

BELGDOFF: Give me your foot.

BELGDOFF SPLASHES THE WHISKEY ON ARLEN'S FOOT.

BELGDOFF: Satisfied?

ARLEN TAKES OFF HIS SOCK AND WRINGS OUT THE WHISKEY. ARLEN IS ANGRY AND LOOKS AS IF HE IS ABOUT TO PUNCH BELGDOFF ANY MOMENT.

ARLEN: Don't touch me again.

BELGDOFF: What do you want from me? You want me to whip you? You want me to dress you in thorns? Why won't you let me sleep? Goddamn you, I washed your feet! What the fuck else do you want?

ARLEN: Show me your Faith. You're lost and I came to take you home.

BELGDOFF: You're too late.

ARLEN: It is never too late for Salvation.

BELGDOFF: Prove it.

ARLEN: Name your miracle.

BELGDOFF: Heal me. I'm dying.

ARLEN: I can't do that.

BELGDOFF: Make me better.

ARLEN: I cannot heal you.

BELGDOFF: You want me to beg?

ARLEN: Do you believe in me?

BELGDOFF: There's no time for belief.

ARLEN: I can't help you, then.

BELGDOFF: Yes you can. I've been thinking about it.

ARLEN: Name it.

BELGDOFF: Cleanse me of my transgressions.

ARLEN: Fine.

BELGDOFF: Die for my sins.

ARLEN: What?!!

MARY: Arlen. The joke's gone far enough.

BELGDOFF: God knows I've sinned enough. I ask you to die for me so I can go to Heaven. Will you Save me with your death?

ARLEN: Will that be enough?

BELGDOFF: Yes. Only then I will believe.

ARLEN: Are you sure that's what you want?!!

BELGDOFF: Yes! Dear God, restore my faith.

ARLEN: Can you deal with the Resurrection?

BELGDOFF: If you die, I can deal with anything after that. With your death I can sleep in peace. Do it for me.

ARLEN: You're sure?

BELGDOFF: I named my miracle.

MARY: Arlen. Let's go to bed.

ARLEN: I can't, Mary. I did ask him to name his miracle.

MARY: You aren't funny.

BELGDOFF: Will you do it?

MARY: Please. I need you over here!

ARLEN: All right. You got it.

MARY: No! Arlen! You are so stupid!

ARLEN: (TO MARY) Arlen Buss keeps his word. He may not be the smartest man in the city, or the best looking, or the cleanest, but when Arlen Buss says he'll do something, by the will of God he'll do it.

MARY: You are so dumb.

BELGDOFF: (TO MARY) This is the beauty of reality tested.

HECTOR ENTERS FROM THE BASEMENT. HIS FACE IS SWOLLEN AND BRUISED. HE IS DRESSED IN AN ORIENTAL SILK ROBE.

HECTOR: Belgdoff. Go to bed.

BELGDOFF: Hector. I can't sleep. I can't sleep with them in the house.

HECTOR: It's all right, baby.

BELGDOFF: I can't close my eyes any more.

HECTOR: I know. Let's go to bed.

HECTOR CROSSES TO BELGDOFF. HE LIFTS BELGDOFF UP AND OVER HIS SHOULDER. BELGDOFF'S BODY GOES LIMP INSTANTLY. HECTOR TAKES HIM UP THE STAIRS TO HIS BEDROOM.

HECTOR: He's not feeling well. I'm sorry if he woke you up. Good night.

HECTOR ENTERS BELGDOFF'S ROOM AND CLOSSES THE DOOR QUIETLY. ARLEN AND MARY ARE LEFT ALONE.

ARLEN: Well. Let's go kill me.

BLACKOUT.

ACT TWOScene One

IT IS TEN A.M. THE SAME MORNING. IN BLACKOUT, THE TEA KETTLE IS HOWLING. IT'S SCREECH IS SO LOUD THAT IT IS UNDESCRIBABLE. AS THE LIGHTS ON THE CHANDELIER COME UP WE SEE BLUIISH SMOKE RISING FROM THE STOVE. THE TEA KETTLE HAS BEEN LEFT ON TO BOIL, AND IT HAS BOILED DRY AND CAUGHT ON FIRE. HECTOR ENTERS RUNNING FROM THE BASEMENT. HIS HAIR IS MUSSED AND WILD. HIS EYES ARE UNDERLINED IN DARK CIRCLES. DRIED BLOOD SPOTS HIS ORIENTAL ROBE.

HECTOR: Effie! You're water's ready!

HECTOR SEES THE FIRE AND HIS ANGER CHANGES TO FEAR.

HECTOR: Jesus! Fire! We got a fire in here!

HECTOR BRAVES INTO THE CLOUD OF SMOKE AND TURNS OFF THE STOVE. HE PULLS OUT A BIG POT AND FILLS IT WITH WATER.

HECTOR: No, no, stupid. No water on eletric. Shit!

HECTOR DROPS THE POT OF WATER. THE FLOOR IS SOAKED. THE SMOKE CONTINUES TO RISE AS THE METAL IN THE KETTLE CONTINUES TO BURN. HECTOR COUGHS. HE RUNS TO HIS DRAPERIES AND YANKS THEM DOWN FROM THE WINDOW. HE RUNS TO THE STOVE AND BEATS THE DRAPERIES AGAINST THE KETTLE TO SMOTHER THE FIRE. FINALLY, THE FIRE IS OUT. HECTOR GATHERS HIS BREATH AND COUGHS OUT THE SMOKE FROM HIS LUNGS. BELGDOFF COMES OUT OF HIS BEDROOM. HE IS DRESSED IN PAJAMAS. HE IS NOT DRUNK, BUT HE IS CRANKY BECAUSE OF THE EARLY HOUR. HECTOR TAKES THE DRAPERIES OFF THE STOVE. THEY HAVE BEEN BURNED AND BLACKENED BY THE FIRE. HE HOLDS THEM UP. HE DOES NOT CRY NOR DOES HE SEETHE WITH ANGER. HE IS INCREDULOUS.

BELGDOFF: Hector, I think your toast is burning.

HECTOR: She did it! She finally tried to kill us! Thank God the pressure's off.

BELGDOFF CROSSES TO THE KITCHEN AREA. HE GRABS A MOP FROM THE CORNER AND GATHERS UP THE WATER WITH IT.

BELGDOFF: We'll have to teach her a lesson.

HECTOR: Ditz-Brain.

BELGDOFF: I'll talk to her.

HECTOR: She's always hated us.

BELGDOFF: But she did always have the money.

HECTOR: We needed her money to make the rent.

BELGDOFF: You get what you pay for.

BELGDOFF FEELS THE DRAPERIES.

HECTOR: Ruined!

BELGDOFF: She tried to burn them too?!

HECTOR: I used them to beat out the flames.

BELGDOFF: Flames! Dear God, I wondered what smelled.

HECTOR: They're rags now, sweetie. I'll rip them up and use them to wash the dishes. Ashes to ashes. We're alive. That's all that matters.

BELGDOFF INSPECTS THE STOVE.

BELGDOFF: We better call the landlord.

HECTOR: I can fix it. A new burner, replace the wiring, it'll be fine.

BELGDOFF PICKS UP ALL THAT REMAINS OF THE TEA KETTLE: THE BLACK PLASTIC HANDLE.

BELGDOFF: Here's your kettle.

HECTOR: There was nothing better than tea in the morning.

BELGDOFF: Tea is your comfort.

HECTOR: Gone. All gone, Belgdoff.

BELGDOFF: We'll have to have a talk with her, that's all.

HECTOR'S CALM HAS BEEN AN ACT. HE EXPLODES WITH ANGER. BELGDOFF BACKS OFF.

HECTOR: Sure. We'll explain to her that we don't fucking appreciate her trying to burn us like goddamn marshmallows!

BUT AS SOON AS HE HAS ERUPTED, HECTOR TRIES TO CONTROL HIS BREATHING AND CALM HIMSELF. HIS BEATHING IS HEAVY.

HECTOR: I can't abide her any more, Belgdoff.

BELGDOFF: Ok. We'll get rid of her. We'll ask her to leave.

HECTOR: It's crazy to live like this. We can find a small place of our own.

BELGDOFF: Sure. Anything you want.

HECTOR: A little hope. It's all I need.

BELGDOFF: I understand.

EFFIE ENTERS THROUGH THE BACK DOOR. SHE IS DRESSED IN NICE CLOTHES. HER ANKLE BOOTS ARE REPLACED WITH HIGH HEELS. SHE WEARS A BUSINESS SUIT AND HER HAIR IS STYLED. FOR THE FIRST TIME SHE WEARS MASCARA, BLUSHER AND LIPSTICK. SHE MAKES AN EFFORT TO CLOSE THE DOOR AS GENTLY IS POSSIBLE. SHE THEN TIP-TOES TO THE KITCHEN. HECTOR AND BELGDOFF FREEZE. EFFIE WATCHES HER FEET AS SHE COMMANDS THEM TO WALK SOFTLY. SHE ENTERS THE KITCHEN AND SEES THEM.

EFFIE: Hellooo, boys, you're up! I've been trying to be quiet in the mornings, you know.

HECTOR NODS.

BELGDOFF: We appreciate that, Effie.

EFFIE: Eastern Market's packed. A good sale on tomatoes. I could make chili tonight. Would you like that?

HECTOR: Sounds good.

EFFIE: Terrific! I'll make it for dinner. Anything else? Carrots, peas? My Mum taught me how to make a meat pie with spinach. Would you like that instead?

HECTOR: Chili's, enough. Thank you.

EFFIE: That will be fine, then. Like some tea?

EFFIE GRABS THE BURNED HANDLE OF THE KETTLE. SHE DOES NOT NOTICE IT IS MISSING THE KETTLE PART.

HECTOR: Love some.

EFFIE: I'll make it for you.

HECTOR: You're a dear.

EFFIE IS NERVOUS AROUND HECTOR. SHE IS CAREFUL TO NOT MAKE ANY MISTAKES. SHE KEEPS HER EYE ON HIM AS SHE TURNS ON THE WATER AND PUTS THE PLASTIC HANDLE IN THE SINK TO CATCH THE WATER.

EFFIE: I found this outfit at a ladies' second hand shop at the second hand shop. Loved it so much I wore it home. Do you like it?

HECTOR: Sure is something.

BELGDOFF CROSSES TO EFFIE AND TURNS OFF THE WATER.

EFFIE: Ooops. Sorry.

EFFIE BRINGS THE HANDLE OUT OF THE SINK. SHE STARES AT IT.

EFFIE: God, what happened? I get nervous as a school girl around you, Hecky.

HECTOR: It burned up.

BELGDOFF: We had a fire.

EFFIE: God! Really?

HECTOR: Can't you smell my kettle?

EFFIE: No.

HECTOR: Bits of my tea pot hang in the air poisoning our lungs with lead.

EFFIE: Actually, I think it was aluminum.

HECTOR: (TO BELGDOFF) I'm going to kill her.

EFFIE: Take a blood pressure pill. Take care of yourself. I'll get it for you.

EFFIE REACHES FOR HECTOR'S BLOOD PRESSURE PILLS. HECTOR GRABS HER WRIST AND TWISTS IT.

HECTOR: Don't ever do that again!

EFFIE: Hecky, you're hurting me.

BELGDOFF: Hector. Don't.

HECTOR: I'm tired of it. You do it again and again. Other people live here too!

EFFIE: Tell me what I did!

HECTOR: You tried to burn the house down!

EFFIE: I did not such thing...

HECTOR: Leave.

EFFIE: I have no place to stay!

HECTOR: Sleep in the backyard.

EFFIE: The backyard is an alleyway!

HECTOR: Lie down with the dogs!

EFFIE: You owe me!

HECTOR: You want the money I owe you? Sue me for it.

EFFIE: Hecky!

HECTOR: You won't get blood from a grave.

EFFIE: I can't leave!

BELGDOFF: We've decided it's best.

EFFIE: I won't go...

HECTOR EXPLODES. HE RAGES AT EFFIE.

HECTOR: You will get out of here now, before I punch you one in the face!

EFFIE: I'll make it up to you.

HECTOR: Get out of here.

EFFIE: I'm sorry.

HECTOR: You ruined my curtains!

EFFIE: I said I was sorry!

HECTOR: You destroyed my tea pot!

EFFIE: I swear I'll never do it again!

HECTOR: You keep me up at night with your dancing!

BELGDOFF: (TO HECTOR) That was me last night.

HECTOR: You make it a Hell to live here!

EFFIE: Grow up, Hecky. You've erupted yourself out of every opportunity you ever had!

BELGDOFF: You don't talk to him that way!

EFFIE: I do what I want!

HECTOR: You better get outta here!

EFFIE: You're such children!

HECTOR: I'll sue you for pain and suffering! By the power of God I will make you pay for the fright you bring to his house.

BELGDOFF: You better leave, now!

EFFIE: No, I won't!

HECTOR: Yes!

EFFIE: No!

BELGDOFF: You are leaving!

HECTOR GRABS HIS DRAPERIES AND FLINGS THEM OVER EFFIE. SHE IS UNABLE TO SEE NOW. HECTOR WRAPS THE DRAPERIES AROUND HER. BELGDOFF SPINS HER AROUND. EFFIE SCREAMS. HECTOR GRABS HER TORSO. BELGDOFF PICKS UP HER FEET. THEY TAKE HER TO THE OPEN FRONT DOOR STAGE RIGHT AND SWING HER THREE TIMES. ON THE THIRD TIME, BEFORE THEY TOSS HER OUT THE DOOR, EFFIE SCREAMS. SHE IS CRYING. HECTOR AND BELGDOFF STOP. BELGDOFF PUTS HER FEET DOWN. HECTOR CAN'T RESIST AND HE GIVES HER A LITTLE PUSH. SHE FALLS ON THE SOFA IN A TANGLE OF DRAPERIES. EFFIE FIGHTS HER WAY OUT OF THE DRAPERIES. SHE IS NOW A MESS. HER HAIR IS MUFFED, THE CLOTHES ARE WRINKLED, HER SHOES ARE KICKED OFF.

EFFIE: I didn't do it! I swear I didn't do it!

BELGDOFF: Don't play that game.

EFFIE: There's no proof!

HECTOR: I can smell your skin on the handle.

EFFIE: You always blame me. You're women haters. Well, I didn't do it. I've been in New York since yesterday evening. I didn't start any fire. But you blame me first. Because you know I like you. You put it on me because you know I'll take it.

HECTOR: You do it every day!

EFFIE: What about the kids? They're new here. But you didn't think of them did you? They probably never cooked before, you know. Electric is trickier than gas. But it didn't cross your mind, uhmm Hecky? Of course not. Because I am the evil here. If the wind itches your nose wrong it's because I asked it to, right Hecky?

HECTOR: No.

EFFIE: If you get turned down at Mister Henry's by a boy who calls you too old and fat, it's because I paid him a dollar to hurt your feelings, right?

HECTOR: Effie. No.

EFFIE: Or if you get constipated. It's my fault that you didn't eat your greens. I asked if you wanted spinach pie and you said "no." What else can I do? I take you at a your word and you explode because I can't read your mind.

HECTOR: That's silly.

EFFIE: Damn me for it, because I'm stupid enough to love you, right Hecky?

HECTOR: Don't change the subject. We've had this discussion before.

EFFIE: You don't want a friend, you want a Mommy.

HECTOR: I don't love you, Effie. I've made that clear.

EFFIE: Since when is love reciprocal?

HECTOR: I'm sorry.

EFFIE: I'm not trying to turn you around, Hecky. Give me some credit.

HECTOR: I give you credit.

EFFIE: On your terms! You go out of your way to hurt my feelings. I'm never good enough for you.

HECTOR: All right! You can stay.

EFFIE: I don't want to stay.

BELGDOFF: We want you to stay, Effie.

HECTOR: We need you.

EFFIE: You need my money.

HECTOR: We need your company.

BELGDOFF: I don't want to be alone.

EFFIE: I don't know.

HECTOR: Stay, Effie. Okay?

BELGDOFF: It would mean a lot to us.

HECTOR: I like you, Effie. Is that enough?

EFFIE: All right. I'll stay.

ARLEN AND MARY ENTER STAGE RIGHT. SHE IS DRESSED IN A RED DRESS. ARLEN IS NAKED, A TOWEL IS WRAPPED AROUND HIS WAIST. HE WEARS A SWEATBAND AROUND HIS FOREHEAD. ARLEN HAS A DOG'S CHOKE CHAIN AROUND HIS NECK. HE IS MUDDY, SWEATY AND WILD. HE PULLS MARY AS SHE STRAINS TO CONTROL HIM WITH THE LEASH WITH HER UNINJURED HAND.

ARLEN: Let's get it over.

ARLEN GRABS THE DINING ROOM TABLE AND MOVES IT ACROSS THE STAGE SO IT IS UNDER THE CHANDELIER.

MARY: You're cutting off the circulation to my hand.

ARLEN: Suffer with me, Mary.

MARY: That's nothing new.

HECTOR: Excuse me, but did you two leave the kettle on?

MARY: Arlen! My hand's turning purple!

ARLEN: You'll be free soon enough.

HECTOR: You two left here this morning and let the tea kettle boil dry.

EFFIE: Forget it, Hecky. I'll buy a new pot.

HECTOR: Effie, they need to know the rules of the house.

EFFIE: Forget it, Hecky.

HECTOR: Effie, I will make someone pay for the fright in this house.

MARY: This isn't funny, Arlen.

ARLEN: Tell me what I don't know.

HECTOR: There was a fire here...

EFFIE: Hecky. It might've been last week I was in New York.

HECTOR: You will pay, Effie. I will take it in flesh!

HECTOR GIVES EFFIE A LOOK. SHE TAKES A STEP BACK. ARLEN TAKES FOCUS BY STALKING UP TO BELGDOFF AND SPEAKING ONE INCH FROM HIS FACE.

ARLEN: Ready, Champ?

BELGDOFF: Where are you going, dear?

ARLEN: Like I promised, Butter Nuts. I'm gonna meet God for you.

BELGDOFF: Cute costume. What's the holiday?

ARLEN: Judgement Day.

BELGDOFF: What is it with him?

MARY: I told you, Arlen. He doesn't remember.

ARLEN: He remembers.

BELGDOFF: Piss off, lover boy.

ARLEN: Savor the wrath of God!

ARLEN SWINGS A FIST AT BELGDOFF BUT MARY YANKS ON THE CHOKE CHAIN AND PULLS ARLEN TO THE GROUND.

BELGDOFF: Am I missing something?

ARLEN: Listen up, sinners. My name is Arlen Buss and I keep my word. This young man, whose body is fuming with disease, asked me to prove my love for him last night.

BELGDOFF: I didn't ask him anything. I don't even like him!

ARLEN: And even though I don't like the kid either, I'm gonna do it anyway. I don't got much in life, but I do have love for my fellow man.

BELGDOFF: Get off.

ARLEN: I will give you back your spirit. On one condition.

BELGDOFF: He's crazy.

ARLEN: Release your regret. Allow the spite to drain from you. There is hatred that burns in this house. It is the despise you have for each other that is killing us all.

ARLEN STARTS TO RUN FOR THE TABLE. MARY HANGS ONTO THE CHAIN AND ARLEN IS STOPPED DEAD IN HIS TRACKS, CHOKING. ARLEN TURNS TO HER.

ARLEN: Thank you for holding it. You can leggo now. We've started.

ARLEN RIPS THE CHAIN FROM HER GRASP. HE RUNS TO THE TABLE AND STANDS ON IT. HE IS UNDER THE CHANDELIER.

ARLEN: If you would all gather here please.

ARLEN TIES THE END OF HIS LEASH TO THE CHANDELIER.

BELGDOFF: I have nothing to do with this.

EFFIE: We'll get him some help.

HECTOR: That is an expensive chandelier, don't muss it up. It's the only nice thing left in here.

EFFIE: He probably did try to burn the house down.

HECTOR: Humor the boy.

ARLEN: The love of God is no joke!

HECTOR: Belgdoff, what did you do to him?

BELGDOFF: Nothing! I came home and he started yelling at me. Making threats!

MARY: (A WHISPER TO THEM) Just go along with it. It's all very elaborate.

BELGDOFF, EFFIE AND HECTOR SLOWLY GATHER AT ARLEN'S FEET. THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE SCENE, EVERYONE SPEAKS OVER AN ON TOP OF EACH OTHER'S LINES.

ARLEN: I must have witnesses to the miracle.

HECTOR: Why don't you get down off the table, sweetie?

EFFIE: Yes, he did leave the kettle on.

ARLEN: When this man asked me to give my life for him, I was a little upset at first.

HECTOR: (TO BELGDOFF) You son-of-a-bitch!

EFFIE: (TO HECTOR) Now that's love!

BELGDOFF: (TO GOD) Jesus Fucking Christ!

ARLEN: I think you've sinned enough. Watch your mouth.

BELGDOFF: I never said anything like that!

MARY: I told you, Arlen.

ARLEN: And I thought about it for awhile. Sure, I could easily die for his sins. But anyone could do that.

EFFIE: Why did you ask him to hang himself?

BELGDOFF: I didn't ask him anything! I can't stand him!

EFFIE: I like the idea.

HECTOR: (TO ARLEN) Suicide isn't Salvation.

BELGDOFF: Why are you egging him on? Ignore him!

EFFIE: Christ was crucified. He didn't kill himself.

ARLEN: Have you no imagination? It is the sin in this room that begs for cleansing. The hatred inside of you all are the nails, your spite is the wood. I'm just helping you out a little bit.

EFFIE: He's really serious!

HECTOR: And it's on your head, Belgdoff.

ARLEN: So I decided that I would not only to die for your sins, but that I'd throw a little extra something in. Two miracles for the price of one. I will come back from the dead. Resurrection! But I'll do the act one better. It won't take me three days. I'll do it in thirty seconds.

MARY: You are such a grotesque.

HECTOR: (TO ARLEN) Don't mock my religion.

ARLEN: Mock? I'm making it clear! Redefining the myth! With you as my Apostles.

BELGDOFF: If you are basing this on what was said last night, let it go. I was drunk. I'm having a bit of a hard time. Don't damn me for that.

HECTOR: You can't take the word of a drunk.

BELGDOFF: Why are you taking his side?

EFFIE: He's right, Belgdoff.

BELGDOFF: God, I should join him! Anyone have an extra bit of chain? Or would you like to strangle me right here on the floor?

EFFIE: You're bitter.

BELGDOFF: My God I am dying!

HECTOR: And taking us with you.

BELGDOFF: I'm in a mad house!

EFFIE: Your regret burdens us all.

BELGDOFF: Next time I'll pick a more convenient way to die. But right now you're stuck with me. So fuck off.

ARLEN: No one has to be stuck. I'm here.

BELGDOFF: You fuck off too.

ARLEN: I don't break a promise.

BELGDOFF: You're boring me.

ARLEN: Do you hate me so much that you can't accept your life in return? Can't you admit you asked me to die for your sins?

BELGDOFF: Go to Hell. All of you!

BELGDOFF BEGINS TO LEAVE. ARLEN BENDS HIS KNEES JUST ENOUGH TO TIGHTEN THE CHAIN AROUND HIS NECK TO CHOKE HIMSELF. BELGDOFF SPINS TO THE SOUND OF ARLEN CHOKING. HE REACHES FOR ARLEN. ARLEN KICKS HIM AWAY.

BELGDOFF: You stop that! You don't have to die! You ungrateful little turd! He kicked me!

EFFIE: Can you blame him, Belgdoff?

MARY: Play along.

ARLEN: (CHOKING) Admit it!

BELGDOFF: I hate him! Why would I ask him to die for me?

ARLEN: (CHOKING EVEN MORE) Admit it!

MARY: That's enough, Arlen. You proved your point, now come down!

ARLEN: (RASPING) Say it.

BELGDOFF: All right! I don't want to die! I was desperate! I wanted to sleep! Why not exchange my his life for mine?

HECTOR: You wanted his life in exchange for a nap?

EFFIE: It's romantic, all right.

ARLEN EASES UP. HE NO LONGER CHOKES HIMSELF.

BELGDOFF: Go ahead and do it! I repent! I want to see the light! Jump! Resurrect in half a minute! I'm waiting for the miracle!

ARLEN: You admitted you lied. That small step is the beginnig of Faith. You have Saved yourself. You don't need me anymore.

EFFIE: Makes sense to me.

BELGDOFF: No! No, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's not good enough! You're gonna go through with it.

HECTOR: Belgdoff, leave him alone.

BELGDOFF: Jump! Keep your promise!

ARLEN: You saying I'm a liar?

BELGDOFF: He's a phony. He wants attention. Look at him for Chrissakes! Is this our Lord? Does Jesus Christ threaten us with death?

MARY: He's got a point, Arlen.

ARLEN: It was no threat. It was proof of my love for you. I forgave you. All I asked was that you love each other. With this man's admittance of his sin, the healing process can begin for all of us!

BELGDOFF: Take it to the street corner like every other Second Comer.

EFFIE: If you were really Jesus Christ, you would've picked love over hate.

HECTOR: You would've picked comfort over suffering because strength is better than sympathy and life is better than death.

MARY: They got you, Arlen.

ARLEN: Wait a minute. I think I'm getting the stink of the wind. Are you challenging the integrity of Arlen Buss? I demonstrate that this man does, in fact, have the love of God in him, that he wants life, that he admits his sin, and all that isn't good enough? How many miracles in a day do you people need?

ARLEN STARTS TO LOOSEN THE CHOKE CHAIN FROM AROUND HIS NECK.

ARLEN: Forget it. I'm not doin' it, screw you.

BELGDOFF: I told you! He's a fake!

ARLEN: If you don't appreciate my sacrifice, then you can all go to Hell.

BELGDOFF: There is a God! For the first time there is sanity in this house!

ARLEN KICKS THE TABLE OUT FROM UNDER HIS FEET. THE TABLE TILTS AND FALLS OVER. ARLEN SWINGS BY THE CHAIN AROUND HIS NECK. HE GASPS FOR AIR. ARLEN'S LEGS KICK AND HIS ARMS FLAIL IN THE AIR. THE SOUND OF HIM DYING IS A HORRIBLE RASPING AND GASPING FOR AIR. BELGDOFF TRIES TO GRAB HIS FEET, BUT ARLEN CONTINUES TO KICK.

BELGDOFF: God no! I didn't mean it! I take it back!

EFFIE: Grab his feet!

HECTOR: Careful, Belgdoff!

HECTOR AND BELGDOFF TRY TO GRAB HIS FEET. THEY GET KICKED.

EFFIE: I'll get the table!

MARY: Arlen! You promised me!

EFFIE: Help me!

MARY RUNS AND HELPS EFFIE WITH THE TABLE. THEY STRUGGLE TO GET IT UNDER ARLEN. ARLEN KICKS THE TABLE OVER AGAIN.

BELGDOFF: Please, God! No.

HECTOR AND BELGDOFF GRAB ARLEN'S LEGS. ARLEN IS LOSING HIS STRENGTH. MARY AND EFFIE WORK TOGETHER AND SLIDE THE TABLE UNDER ARLEN.

MARY: He swore to me!

HECTOR: Hold him down, Belgdoff.

BELGDOFF: I didn't mean any of it. He pushed me. I was kidding!

HECTOR LEAPS UP ON THE TABLE AND UNTIES ARLEN FROM THE CHOKE CHAIN. THE BLOODY CHAIN HANGS FROM THE CHANDELIER. ARLEN FALLS IN A HEAP ON THE TABLE. EVERYONE GATHERS AROUND HIM. ARLEN'S HEAD HANGS DOWN OVER THE EDGE OF THE TABLE. HIS FACE IS UPSIDE DOWN AND IT FACES THE AUDIENCE. THERE IS A MOMENT OF DEEP CONCERN. ARLEN DOES NOT MOVE. BELGDOFF HOLDS ONE OF ARLEN'S HANDS. MARY HOLDS THE OTHER ONE. HECTOR PULLS OFF THE SWEATBAND FROM ARLEN'S FOREHEAD. HE BLOTS THE SWEAT FROM ARLEN'S FACE WITH THE SWEATBAND. EFFIE TAKES HIS FEET AND GENTLY CROSSES ARLEN'S LEGS. AFTER A SHORT, TENSE MOMENT, ARLEN GATHERS IN A FINAL LUNGFUL OF AIR. HIS EYES OPEN FOR A MOMENT. HE HOLDS HIS HEAD UP A BIT, AND SEES THAT THEY ARE ALL TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME. HIS HEAD DROPS AGAIN. HE SMILES AND SPEAKS SOFTLY.

ARLEN: My work here is done.

THE AIR LEAVES HIS BODY FOREVER. PEACE SETTLES OVER THE HOUSE.

FINAL BLACKOUT.