

"CONCESSIONS"

a one act play by
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"In a world of dreams, there are certain concessions."

(A forgotten Nebraska backroad in August. The noon sun bakes the scene. Sticking out of a field of dried weeds is a lounge chair, a chipped and worn concession stand with wheels, and a faded and ripped amber camping tent that sits in the back. The concession stand has the words "CLAIRE'S CONCESSIONS" painted in silver metallic letters on the side. Dressed in a wild-print bikini, and elongated on the lounge, is CLAIRE. She's a thirty-seven-year-old fifth place beauty contestant with auburn locks that blaze in the sun like a morning star. She takes a bottle of suntan oil from behind the lounge and squirts the oil into her hands. This is the best part of her day. As she rubs the oil over her arms and calves, her motions are slow and smooth like waves on the ocean. When CLAIRE inches her way up to her crotch via her thighs, her arms become less coordinated and her tongue flashes across her lips. Her hands knead the tender, inside part of her thighs and the desire shows in her face. She smiles and throws her head back. As she is about to scream, FLOYD, her twenty-eight-year-old husband comes out of the tent.)

FLOYD

Claire, you been a suckin' the
flavoring again?

(CLAIRE'S passion is broken, and for a moment, she is lost. FLOYD is a tarnished man, rounded by inactivity. He goes to the concession stand and flips open all the doors, searching. He is a powerful man in his prime, but always looking to attack. He seems to know that everything, including the stars, are just out of his reach. He is dressed in cut-off sweatpants and a wrinkled dress shirt with green and cream stripes.)

CLAIRE

Floyd, fetch me a pill.

FLOYD

You havin' another one of your
fantasies, Claire?

CLAIRE

Dr. Birney diagnosed me as a
perfectly normal woman. Now
fetch me a blue pill. I'm
starting to feel a chill.

FLOYD

If it's another plague or cold
you're comin' down with, you must
be playin' in your head again.
You been doin' that regular
lately. You see too many things.

CLAIRE

I'll have you know, that I actually have encounters with people. Through no fault of my own has no one else ever seen then. Floyd, get me the new thermometer. I feel a hot flash waiting to pop.

(FLOYD takes her bottle of suntan oil and throws it off stage. The plastic bottle bounces and skids in the distance.)

FLOYD

There! Now you won't have to worry about feelin' the heat! Floyd fixed it for you.

CLAIRE

I paid a whole six dollars and eighty-three cents for that bottle of Tropical Coconut-Colada suntan oil, direct from Cuba.

(FLOYD bends down and cups his hands over CLAIRE'S thighs and scrapes off the excess oil from her legs. He then turns her around and angrily starts to rub the oil onto her back.)

FLOYD

Here sweets, let me rub it into yourback like I always got to. How's this, Claire? Gettin' your precious money's worth?

CLAIRE

You're hurting me!

FLOYD

Naw. This is good. You always say so. Can you feel it?

CLAIRE

Stop it! You're hurting me!

(FLOYD is so engrossed, that he rubs too hard and pushes CLAIRE to the ground. CLAIRE begins to cry and FLOYD stands over her, glistening and his chest heaving. He rubs the extra on his arms.)

FLOYD

I can't take these times. All you do Claire, all day long is sit and sun yourself.

CLAIRE
(through tears)
There are certain concessions
one must make to the passions
of a heated heart.

FLOYD
Shut up that talk.

(CLAIRE begins to shake and sob. FLOYD goes to her, runs his fingers through her hair and picks her up in his arms. They give each other a delicate kiss.)

FLOYD
(continuing)
Shush, now. I'll take care of
you, baby.

(He gently puts her back on the lounge. He strokes her arms and kisses the fleshy part of her ear.)

CLAIRE
You are my man, Floyd.

FLOYD
You still need a pill, honey?
Want me to bring a blanket?
Orange juice? A vitamin?

CLAIRE
You can scoop me up another
cherry sno-cone, okay?

FLOYD
Claire, we're out of flavoring.

CLAIRE
There's extra someplace. I think
in the mustard bottle. I try to
plan for this type of crisis.

FLOYD
How much longer, Claire? How
many more services do I got to
perform before I get what a man
needs?

CLAIRE
Why, now, darling!

(FLOYD comes to CLAIRE and she allows him to feel her chest. As he moves his hand to her breast, she grabs his hand and quickly kisses it.)

FLOYD

You're warm and moist.

CLAIRE

Fetch me a sno-cone now, huh?
With extra flavoring. The mustard
bottle and my taste buds are
waiting.

FLOYD

You know it's sly-worded women
like you that give sensuality
a dirty name.

(CLAIRE bolts up and stares at FLOYD. Her arms move in large, sweeping circles. Her hair swooshes as she talks.)

CLAIRE

Sensuality? Sensuality! My dear
boy, it's about time you were
introduced to the ways of a today
woman! You must come out from the
shadow of youthful ignorance and
become an enlightened human being.

FLOYD

So flip on the electricity.

CLAIRE

It is all based on the mystery
of...deception! The art of
appearing normal.

FLOYD

Well, you ain't got that down
yet.

(FLOYD goes to the concession stand and looks for the mustard bottle.)

CLAIRE

Oh, but I have. All the hate in
the world has built itself a ledge
on my heart. I'm waiting for a man
to come along strong enough to
knock it down.

(FLOYD finds the bottle and squirts some of the cherry flavoring in his hand. He smells the red juice and wipes it off on his shirt. He begins a sno-cone for her.)

FLOYD

With no customers for weeks,
that's all this place needs
is a stranger comin' in and
givin' things a shove.

CLAIRE

And we'd fall down and become
real again. We're just fading
stars in a dusky sky filled
with comets. Someday, we'll
breakdown and see the heavens
for our own.

FLOYD

Not me, Calire. I'm not clingin'
to no star, anytime.

(He hands her the sno-cone and begins to do push-ups with a hand clap in between. The sound of his claps and his heavy breathing punctuate CLAIRE'S words.)

CLAIRE

Ooo, my ritual of self-indulgence.
Next to oiling my skin, there is
nothing finer on a stinking after-
noon than sucking on the shattered
ice of a sno-cone, bathed in rosy
cherry juice.

(FLOYD gets up and hitches up his shorts.)

CLAIRE

(continuing)

It's a paper crown filled with
the King's jewels.

FLOYD

My favorite's lemon ice cream.
Makes your tongue go limp from
all that cold.

CLAIRE

When's the dairy man due?

(CLAIRE examines her nails in the sun.)

FLOYD

Old Petersan quit last week.
We're do for a new boy next
week probably.

(CLAIRE brushes flies off her legs.)

CLAIRE

Lord, the insects cling to my
body like freckles.

FLOYD

Maybe I should rub some of my
lemon ice cream 'cross you.
They say lemons get rid of all
blemishes. That'd keep you
cool, too. It'd sure make your
body less hurtin' to my nostrils.

(CLAIRE gets up and pulls a candy cane stiped robe from under
the lounge. She puts it on and ties the sash on her last
sentence.)

CLAIRE

I strip myself naked and crouch
in that lake every night when the
moon is bright. It is certainly
not any fault of mine that God
endowed me with vibrant scents.

FLOYD

Do less crouchin' and more suds in'
next time.

CLAIRE

You can make me another sno-cone.
And, also a strawberry malted to
follow it down the tube. I always
have liked the sweetness of delicate
berries on my lips. Just like my
first lover used to refer to me as...

(FLOYD speaks the same time as CLAIRE.)

FLOYD

'His delicate little red
cherry dessert.'

CLAIRE

'His very delicate little
red cherry dessert.'

FLOYD

You added a 'very' this time.

CLAIRE

Words are sometimes fuzzier
than meanings.

FLOYD

I'm heading to town for more
flavoring. I think we should
sell more than one flavor.

CLAIRE

Never! Cherry is the only kind
worth the price.

FLOYD

You think about that some more.
I'll be gone all afternoon.
So, don't wait for me if you're
goin' on another fantasy or the
like.

CLAIRE

Get some fuses for the neon. I
cannot wait until my sign arrives.
'Claire's Concessions' will light
the sky for all to see.

FLOYD

We need the sign before we can buy
fuses, and we need money before we
can buy fuses. Don't plan for
things that'll never come.

CLAIRE

Oh, it'll come. I have my trunk
of gold, Floyd. And what do you
mean you'll be gone all afternoon?
It takes half an hour by truck.

FLOYD

Claire, you got to remember the
other night when you were in one
of your dramatic fits. For a
solid hour you chased me in the
truck. Tryin' to maim me no
less!

(CLAIRE'S forehead wrinkles, as she tries to remember. In a
moment, she shrugs her head and gives a deep sigh.)

CLAIRE

I'm sorry, Floyd.

FLOYD

What now? You need another pill?

CLAIRE

I'm sorry I can't go along to town with you, but I am delicate. Yes, my delicacy has never allowed me the freedom of participation like most young brides.

FLOYD

'Bye, Claire.

CLAIRE

Fly away, little boy!

(FLOYD slides off stage. CLAIRE stretches and lies down on the lounge on her stomach. CHARLIE, enters. He is the nineteen-year-old dairy man, but he physically looks to be only twelve. He has pinpoint brown eyes and is dressed in a porcelain cotton uniform and coal shoes. He looks unreal with slicked hair and tiny ears. He has a stilted walk and moves like vagrant smoke from a stack; swirling, wandering, ashen and lung-burning.)

CHARLIE

Excuse, me.

CLAIRE

Oh!

CHARLIE

Didn't mean to sneak up.

(CLAIRE flips over on her back, and becomes hostess.)

CLAIRE

Oh, my, my! This humid and over-baked day has brought me a raw young man.

CHARLIE

I'm your new dairy man.

CLAIRE

The new dairy man! That cannot be true! Impossible! You're much too young to have such a dead-end job. Your face still has the elasticity of a Halloween mask!

CHARLIE

I'll get your order.

CLAIRE

Wait. My husband Floyd said that we aren't do for a delivery until next week sometime.

CHARLIE

Oh. That is odd. I personally was told you were out of flavoring. Cherry flavoring.

(CLAIRE looks at the boy. Her gaze travels the length of his body, as if she is digesting his person.)

CLAIRE

Well. I suppose if you were personally informed. I may have been dreaming at the time.

CHARLIE

Yes, Ma'am. I have your order in the truck. Heck of a time finding this place.

CLAIRE

What a kind vocabulary. Yes, yes. Floyd and I like to be protected by the woods. Really, by anything that's strong. You have an alarming forcefulness to your eyes.

CHARLIE

And passion swims in yours.

CLAIRE

What do they call you, son?

CHARLIE

Charlie. With an i.e.

CLAIRE

i.e. King Charles! What a pleasure it is to meet such a noble and royal young man.

(CHARLIE takes his turn, and stares at CLAIRE'S body. In the sun, she glows and CHARLIE is pleased by the form of her body. CLAIRE knows she passed the test, and she smiles and hugs her arms and stares back into the boy's eyes.)

CHARLIE

You're not a Princess? I don't have to kiss you to bring you out of your dream?

CLAIRE

No, my King. I kiss you.

(CLAIRE bursts from the lounge and plants a surprise kiss on CHARLIE. He has no reaction. CLAIRE, surprised at his non-reaction, and her brashness, tries to cover.)

CLAIRE

(continuing)

You see, you were a frog disguised as a lowly dairy man. A good disguise, too. But, I can sense royalty. I wouldn't be surprised if a percentage of my blood is blue. I can feel a Prince soon to be King most times. Two kisses and I'm positive.

(This time, CLAIRE slowly goes to CHARLIE. This time, he turns his face away from her.)

CLAIRE

(continuing)

You're stronger than I thought. Apologies to you, my King.

CHARLIE

Listen, I'm no King. I know your species, though. You don't believe in Fairytales. You take the liberty of living them!

CLAIRE

Oh, God, yes! You're the first to understand.

CHARLIE

Understand? I don't figure out much.

CLAIRE

I have this uncomfortable feeling that you can fix more than you break. You understand about us fantasy people, though. The people who dream.

(CHARLIE takes out a red cloth from his back pocket and pats the sweat off his face as he speaks. He never takes his eyes off of CLAIRE'S body.)

CHARLIE

All I know, is that people in
Fairytale are only words on a
beat up piece of canary paper.
You can't hold them or smell them
or become friends with them. And
they can't touch or reach out.
And when you slam the book closed
on them -- they disappear!

CLAIRE

How do you think you know so much?

CHARLIE

I used to be one.

CLAIRE

Then, you must help me escape!
You have the power to lift me out.
Carry me on your shoulders. King
Charles, let me rise above the
crowd and see across the horizon.
Show me the end of the world and
leave me there.

(CLAIRE tried to stay cool. CHARLIE carefully replaces the red
cloth and crosses his arms across his chest.)

CHARLIE

No.

CLAIRE

Why?

CHARLIE

No. I'm sorry.

CLAIRE

If it's money, don't worry. I
have stacks of money.

(CHARLIE'S pinpoint eyes become slits as he brightens.)

CHARLIE

Oh, really?

CLAIRE

Yes, yes!

CHARLIE

Go get the money.

CLAIRE

I can't. It's buried deep in the mud. I'll get it to you soon, though.

CHARLIE

How'd you get the money?

CLAIRE

(a whisper)

I stole it.

CHARLIE

I didn't catch that.

CLAIRE

(louder, but not much)

I robbed a gas station. Up the road. Had to kill a man. If you tell anyone about this, I'll shoot you too.

CHARLIE

How much did you make off with?

CLAIRE

I only told you because I like you, and because you'll take me away from here. I just hid it. Buried it like a child in the ground. Will you take me where I asked?

CHARLIE

I can't. I'm not a fantasy person any more.

CLAIRE

Why'd you make me tell?

CHARLIE

I only listened.

CLAIRE

What happened? If I stop being a fantasy person, I'll die.

CHARLIE

Something terrible happened to me.

CLAIRE

Tell Claire.

CHARLIE

I held my father in my arms when he died.

CLAIRE

Ooo. I have a chill.

CHARLIE

I've been cold ever since. I realized as they took him from my arms that life was deadly. Fairytale were for children that got money from Fairies for their pain.

CLAIRE

How'd he die?

CHARLIE

I don't want to talk anymore.

CLAIRE

You can tell me, honey.

CHARLIE

Not now. Tell me what you like to do?

CLAIRE

Well, since you're not feeling up to it...I like to read books. Those confession novels excite me. Lovers giving their lives over to fate. I get goosebumps when I finish the last paragraph. I'm practically jumping when I read the last sentence. Then, I have to take my pills.

CHARLIE

Pills for what?

CLAIRE

I'm prone to illness. Weak defenses.

CHARLIE

What else do you like?

(CHARLIE brushes off the tips of his shoes and straightens the cuffs on his shirt.)

CLAIRE

I like cherry sno-cones and neon signs. My own neon is on the way. It'll flash 'Claire's Concessions' when I can't. When I sleep, my neon'll be the thing to see in the dark of night.

CHARLIE

You married?

CLAIRE

Well, there is Floyd. He's gone right now. But don't worry about Floyd.

CHARLIE

Why? Why should I worry?

(CLAIRE seems to have her communication wires crossed.)

CLAIRE

I...I thought you and I.... Never mind. I was dreaming again.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry I can't help you.

CLAIRE

Being here to talk with me is enough for now. What do you plan to do when you exit the dairy business?

CHARLIE

I like to dance.

CLAIRE

Me too! What luck! I happen to have my dancing shoes on!

(CLAIRE looks at her feet and wiggles her bare toes. CHARLIE comes to her and takes her close in his arms. They begin to slowly dance around in each other's arms.)

CHARLIE

You're very soft.

CLAIRE

My delicacy is one of my exploitable tendencies.

CHARLIE

Your hair smiles at me. I
like it's breath.

CLAIRE

That must be my shampoo! So
kind of you to smell. I spent
fifteen dollars on a bottle of
'Glamour Strands.'

CHARLIE

What a buy.

CLAIRE

I can feel the muscle move in
your shoulder. It's nice to have
a sturdy young man for balance.

CHARLIE

You move like a wind on a
summer night. Silent and warm.

CLAIRE

What else would you like to do
besides dance?

(CHARLIE dances her to the lounge and dips her safely down to
the fabric.)

CHARLIE

I want to build billboards.
Put my own art work up for
every person to see.

CLAIRE

You can make a billboard of me.
I'll be up there in the blue,
looking down on all those plain
people, their necks straining to
get a good look at old Claire.
I'd like that.

CHARLIE

I'm not sure I'll remember you.

CLAIRE

I'll come and pose outright for you.
You can draw my likeness from my
flesh. You can feel the skin tones.
If you're a good boy...I might even
lower my blouse for a more provocative
pose.

CHARLIE
I might like that.

CLAIRE
You will love it sonny-boy! For
the first time in your young
career you'll feel steam.

CHARLIE
Come find me when you're ready.

CLAIRE
You know I will, baby.

CHARLIE
Let me take one more glance. I
want to try and remember just
how you look now.

CLAIRE
Gaze away, Prince.

(CHARLIE circles the lounge and CLAIRE'S eyes follow him.)

CHARLIE
Finished.

CLAIRE
What did you see?

CHARLIE
A whole lot of skin, a pinch of
woman. And a lonely feeling that
gives me the spooks.

CLAIRE
Better take one of my pills,
honey.

CHARLIE
Stand up. Come over here.

(CLAIRE casually rises and faces CHARLIE with her arms limp. She
does not go to him.)

CLAIRE
Here I am.

(CHARLIE goes in front of her. He smiles at her and un-ties her
robe. CLAIRE shakes in anticipation and CHARLIE pulls open her
robe so only he can see.)

CLAIRE

Here I am, baby.

(CHARLIE takes off her top and it drops to the earth. He goes to his knees and pulls off her bikini panties. He holds the fabric to his nose and inhales. It slips out of his grip to the ground. CHARLIE steps away from the naked CLAIRE. She holds open her robe for him to look and enjoy.)

CLAIRE

(continuing)

You can feel with your fingers.

(CHARLIE pauses, then rears his head back...and spits on her breasts. CLAIRE closes her robe fast and backs away as he continues to spit at her.)

CLAIRE

(continuing)

What are you doing? You selfish little boy! I'm feeling dirty and weak.

CHARLIE

You're going to be dead.

CLAIRE

What? Dead, me! What did I do? You're not the dairy man!

CHARLIE

I been stalking you.

(CHARLIE is no longer cool. He matches CLAIRE in intensity and pressure. His act is no longer needed. He can emerge from shadow.)

CLAIRE

I'm only a woman!

CHARLIE

You murdered my father!

CLAIRE

I never!

CHARLIE

I've waited and prayed that I could get you back!

CLAIRE

I need a pill.

CHARLIE

You're going to bleed. Blood'll
run in other places besides
between your legs.

CLAIRE

(searching)

My Prince! I don't even know you.
Please. You can do what you want
but don't hurt my body.

CHARLIE

I watch you from the bushes. I
came looking for a flaming red
haired woman and I found you.
It was my father you robbed and
shot. I held him in my arms after
you murdered him. Remember him?
He pleaded with you.

CLAIRE

(sobbing)

No.

CHARLIE

And now I can sleep at night.

CLAIRE

No. It wasn't me.

CHARLIE

Yes it was. You match the
description and you even admitted
it to me.

CLAIRE

(frantic)

I made it up! I didn't do anything
like that. I can't shoot. I read
about it in the papers. It wasn't
me, I swear. I swear. I made it up!

(CLAIRE falls to her knees and tries to keep her composure.)

CHARLIE

I want the money you stole from him.

CLAIRE

(screaming)

There is no money! I was lying!
Damn you, I was playing. Dreaming!
I have to dream, there's nothing
else! I live in a dream world!

CHARLIE

You're paying the price for
pretending.

(CHARLIE grabs CLAIRE and picks her up to face him.)

CLAIRE

I was acting. Like they do in those
confession novels! Please understand.
It's so much easier and convenient to
tell everybody you're in a dream.
You don't have to deal with ordinary
things, then. You're special.

CHARLIE

I memorized the police report. A
red haired old woman shot my father.
Red hair, you have and suspicions,
you birth.

CLAIRE

It wasn't me! I tell you I'm a
diagnosed hypochondriac that only
wants a cherry sno-cone. You ask
Dr. Birney, my psychiatrist. He
did extensive tests. I can get you
his address.

CHARLIE

All I want, is a hole in you, and
worms chewing your brain.

(CHARLIE lifts his pant leg and exposes a gun. He removes it and
aims it at CLAIRE.)

CLAIRE

No! Ask Floyd. He'll tell you
it wasn't me.

CHARLIE

I don't care. You're close enough.
I've been standing in line for three
years solid. With you dead, I can
sit down for a decade.

CLAIRE

No!

(CLAIRE runs behind the lounge and searches the audience for help.
She then looks off stage, and sees FLOYD.)

CHARLIE

Tell me good-bye.

CLAIRE

You're too late! Floyd! Floyd!!
Run faster! Floyd, he's gonna
kill me!

(CHARLIE sees FLOYD in the distance and puts his gun back under his pant leg.)

CHARLIE

I'll come back. Someday I will
hunt you down and get you.
Murderers should be shot and I'm
gonna shoot you. Dream about that
for the rest of your life.

(CHARLIE takes his time on his exit off stage.)

CLAIRE

You get away from me! I got a
witness running up the hill, so
you scoot! I really need a pill.

(FLOYD enters. He is empty handed.)

FLOYD

Claire! What's all the screechin'?
I saw you wavin' those arms of yours
and I ran fast! Forgot the frog
backs, so I had to come back and
get my wallet.

CLAIRE

Oh, Floyd! He was here. The
dairy man tried to kill me!

FLOYD

Stop cryin'. The dairy man?

(FLOYD wraps his arms around CLAIRE.)

CLAIRE

Yes. He wanted to kill me. He's
an awful boy that thinks I killed
his father.

FLOYD

Do you need a pill? I'll fix you
a sno-cone.

CLAIRE

I need you to call the police.
Run and call the law. He's
coming back to get me, Floyd.

FLOYD

Nobody's out to get you, honey.
It's all a bad dream. Dr. Birney
said you shouldn't read all those
confession novels. Look at you.

CLAIRE

He was real, Floyd. It wasn't a
dream. We danced and he took my
clothes off.

FLOYD

He what? What?

(FLOYD is losing his patience with her.)

CLAIRE

He spat on my breasts! He smelled
my panties, then he spit his awful
liquid on my flesh!

FLOYD

(disgusted)

Them novels have eaten away your
heart and your mind has starved.
You need a good rest, Honey.

CLAIRE

I can see him! There! He's
reflected in your eyes. The
uniform, his slick hair! He's
here to kill me!

FLOYD

Shut up, Claire.

CLAIRE

You don't believe me! You want
worms to eat my brains! He
had a gun aimed at my heart,
Floyd! Help me!

(FLOYD rears his hand back and slaps her hard on the face. For
a moment...there is not movement, no sound.)

FLOYD

(building)

You shut up. There wasn't nobody here. You make up stories just to make fun of me. You think I don't know when you try to make me feel stupid? I know, Claire. I know for a long time now. When you get those dreams, I play along because it's easier to believe than deny. Yesterday, it was a group of ten foot tall black African natives was chasin' you with spears and no clothes. I'm not playin' any more. It's not fun for me.

CLAIRE

Floyd, you're right. Those were silly little stories. I only wanted attention, okay? I told the dairy man I had all this treasure buried, and he wanted it. All a joke. Just a small...joke.

FLOYD

I'm done with your jokes. No more kickin' Floyd in he head for you. You joked yourself out of a man.

(FLOYD gets up and starts to leave.)

CLAIRE

He was real. He's coming back. Stay with me, Floyd. Stay just a few minutes. I need a blanket. I need a pill and a blanket. Get them for me and you can go. I don't want to die. My neon's coming! Don't leave me, please, Floyd.

FLOYD

I'm goin' to fetch Dr. Birney in town. You'll be fine. You got your jokes and your dreams and your fantasies to keep you company. I'll be back, Claire.

(FLOYD quickly exits. CLAIRE holds herself and goes to the concession stand and starts to make herself a cherry sno-cone. She wipes her eyes. MANNY, 52, enters. He is the neon man and wears overalls and has a large white silver beard. A tuft of white hair the exact size and shape of a golf ball rests atop his head. He has CLAIRE'S neon sign with him.)

MANNY
Howdy! You Miss Claire?

(CLAIRE drops the scoop of ice she was about to put in the paper cup. She backs away from the stranger.)

CLAIRE
Just who are you?

MANNY
I'm here with your neon sign.

CLAIRE
You're not due until next week.

MANNY
I got it finished early. I hope that's okay.

CLAIRE
You keep your distance. I'll scream if you touch me.

(MANNY spits a large wad of tobacco on the ground.)

CLAIRE
(continuing)
Don't! You ever do that again. If you're going to spit, you do it on your own ground. That's filthy.

MANNY
No offense meant. Thought the great outdoors belonged to every man, woman and child.

CLAIRE
Not in this neck of the woods. You bring fuses? I been waiting for this sign all my life.

MANNY
Everything you need to get it lighted is here. Even fixed it so it runs on batteries.

CLAIRE
Let me see it.

MANNY
I did quite a job.

(MANNY cautiously brings the neon close to CLAIRE. To her horror, the sign is incorrect! It reads "CLAIRE'S CONFESSIONS" instead of the proper, "CLAIRE'S CONCESSIONS.")

CLAIRE

(screaming)

Nooo! It's wrong!

MANNY

What, what, what?

CLAIRE

It's not 'confessions.' It should read 'concessions.' I run a concession stand!

MANNY

Oh. I see it on the side of your stand there, yes. I thought in your letter you wrote 'confessions.' You should learn a neater cursive.

CLAIRE

There is nothing wrong with my penmanship. There is something drastically wrong in your sign making.

MANNY

No need to go tradin' insults, Ma'am.

CLAIRE

You take this away. I want a correct sign. I'm not going digging for gold if I'm not happy with my rainbow.

MANNY

Afraid I have to leave it here for now. My boy took off with the truck. I got to hike back in town myself.

CLAIRE

Leave me alone. I'm not feeling well.

MANNY

All right. Sorry about the confusion. I'll get right on the sign when I get home.

(MANNY flips the switch to the neon sign on. In a bright, flourescent emerald, "C-L-A-I-R-E- 'S CONFESSIONS" flashes on and off. It is a beautiful, glowing sign.)

MANNY

Don't that look fine? When I
get you a new one tomorrow,
it'll look even more pretty.

(CLAIRE goes to the sign and leans against it. The methodical flashing soothes her.)

CLAIRE

This is like me. Warm, bright
and alive.

MANNY

Sorry again. I'll replace it free.

CLAIRE

Oh, must you go so soon? I didn't
mean to snap. I just had a recent
scare. I could fix us a nice,
cherry flavored sno-cone. You'd
like that?

MANNY

I really have to go. I'll make
time special next time. How's
that sound?

CLAIRE

Sounds very lonely for old Claire
right now. But, you must earn a
living to get your money. Hurry,
please, with my neon.

MANNY

Of course. See you up in lights.

(MANNY waves as he exits. CLAIRE calls after him.)

CLAIRE

Hurry!

(CLAIRE is alone again. Her sign throbs. She stares at it.
CHARLIE enters again. He is greasy and dirty. His gun is
drawn, and trained on CLAIRE. He is a wild animal.)

CHARLIE

I been waitin' to get you alone.

(CLAIRE whirls around to face him. He moves closer to her.)

CLAIRE

I'll scream.

CHARLIE

I'll only be a second.

CLAIRE

I didn't kill your father. I have
this tendency...

CHARLIE

(upcut)

Shut up! In a world of dreams there
are certain concessions.

(CLAIRE races to her concession stand and wheels it at CHARLIE. He viciously kicks the stand over and the wood shatters. CHARLIE smiles and extends his arm, takes silent aim and shoots CLAIRE. She reels back and falls to the dirt. She is grasping her stomach.)

CHARLIE

Welcome to the world.

(CHARLIE exits. CLAIRE presses her hands against her stomach, and all the cherry flavored sno-cones she ever ate is pouring out her stomach. CLAIRE slowly gets up and stumbles to her lounge. She painfully leans back and talks to an imaginary friend that is passing away. During her final speech, the lights begin a slow fade and the neon sign becomes stronger, brighter, more truthful.)

CLAIRE

At thirty-seven years I have finally
figured out that I have been a captive
for almost half a century in the
institution of my mind. Not a day
passes that I don't think I'm dying
from an incurable disease, or that
every corner I turn will be the fatal
traffic accident that takes my life.
I live in constant fear of homosexuals
and childhood diseases. I have spent
my surplus cash on aspirin and cough
medicine. There even was a time when
I took a crusty, rusty nail and pushed
it into my wrist to test if my tetanus
booster was still working.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CON'T)

My best friends used to be those acquaintances I met in emergency waiting rooms. They were mothers, and fathers, friends and brothers waiting for mothers, and fathers, friends and brothers. They told me their life stories. Those people ripped open a vein and out shot their fears. And the funny part is... their fears aren't any different than mine. I don't fret my dying. I've seen young children struck by lightning and tossed by tornadoes in that sterile waiting room. All those young faces smiling with unconscious dreams of Góð. When I imagine my illness, I can only sketch his likeness in the back of my mind. I am never allowed to walk down a primrose path paved in pine needles. I'm only a sentinel posted on the outskirts of the real heaven. It is only now that I realize, with a bullet in my stomach...just how wrong I have been to be cautious and cool in my drive to stay healthy and dream-encrusted. I came down with just as many colds and had as many accidents as anybody dead. My dreams were only pauses in a life filled with nightmares. I magnified my pain to such portions that I thought I was seeing something Holy. All I was really seeing was my own self, twisted and burned by my own self-pity. I was alive and never lived. And only in death, can I hope to know life. My dreams are concessions.

(The lights are dark. Except for the neon. "CLAIRE'S CONFESSIONS" is a shining beacon in a dark world.)

END OF PLAY

(NOTE: Due to budgetary restrictions, the neon sign may not be possible. It is, therefore, acceptable to use a sign made with incandescent theatre bulbs, Christmas tree lights, or any other creative image. My heart, however, belongs to neon.)