

THE STRAIGHT-ARROW FROM BROKEN BOW

a play by  
David Boles

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## CHARACTERS

Willie Wood, 25  
Mother Vüdlacek, 55  
Budkin Sintek, 29  
Hallis Sintek, 29 and 51 seconds  
Millard, 62  
Mee, 19

## TIME

August, 1990

## PLACE

Broken Bow, Nebraska

## SCENES

I-i	The Living Room
I-ii	The Bar
II-i	The Living Room
II-ii	The Bedroom



ACT ONE

Scene One

BLACKOUT.

BROKEN BOW, NEBRASKA DURING AUGUST, 1990. IT'S TEN IN THE MORNING AND ALTHOUGH THE TEMPERATURE IS ONLY 60 DEGREES, THE HUMIDITY IS ALREADY AN OPPRESSIVE 97 PERCENT AND RISING.

A MEADOWLARK WHISTLES.

A PUTTERING POST OFFICE JEEP ARRIVES FROM THE DISTANCE. THE BRAKES SQUEAL TO A STOP ON A LOOSE GRAVEL ROAD. QUICK FOOTSTEPS ARE HEARD CROSSING THE LAWN AND THEN STOMPING ACROSS THE FRONT PORCH.

A SCREEN DOOR YAWNS OPEN IN PROTEST.

THE LIGHTS REVEAL THE INSIDE OF A DECREPIT, UNSTAINED WOODEN DOOR. A 1920'S CLOTH UMBRELLA WITH WOODEN RIBBING HANGS FROM THE DOOR KNOB. THE UMBRELLA POINT IS DECORATED WITH SEVERAL PASTEL GLOBULES OF SPENT CHEWING GUM.

AN OLD FASHIONED DOME AND CLAPPER DOORBELL ATTACHED ABOVE THE DOOR JAMB JANGLES TWICE.

A CROAKING VOICE FROM ACROSS THE HOUSE ANSWERS...

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: (OFF) Comin'!

AFTER A MOMENT, THE SOUND OF MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S THICK LEATHER SOLES SCRAPING ACROSS THE FLOOR TO MEET THE MAILMAN IS HEARD.

TWO MORE QUICK TUGS ON THE DOORBELL.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK ENTERS SHUFFLING. SHE WEARS IMMACULATE DRESS WHITE EVENING GLOVES THAT END AT HER ELBOWS. HER LEGS ARE BOWLEGGED, HER RIGHT SHOULDER IS BENT CROOKED FROM BURSITIS.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK IS DRESSED IN A PLAID SKIRT AND A HEAVY WOOL SWEATER: CROCHETED ALPACA SHEEP PRANCE ACROSS HER BREASTS. HER SPIRIT IS STRONG. SHE IS NEVER HARSH NOR A SHREW.

FOR THE LAST THIRTY-FIVE OF HER FIFTY-FIVE YEARS, MOTHER VÜDLACEK HAS FOUND COMFORT AND TENDERNESS ONLY BETWEEN THE END PAGES OF A ROMANCE NOVEL. SHE WRAPS LONELINESS AND DESPAIR AROUND HER SHOULDERS LIKE A WINTER SHAWL: BUT THIS IS A SHAWL OF DESPAIR, IT CAN OFFER NOT COMFORT NOR WARMTH. SHE RITUALLY MOURNS THE LOSSES IN HER LIFE. SHE ACCEPTS WAFERS OF REGRET AND THE INTOXICATING WINE OF SELF-HATRED LIKE HOLY COMMUNION.

HER FACE IS A MAPPED CLUSTER OF VARICOSE VEINS LEADING TO THE CENTER PITS OF DARK HALF-MOONS UNDERLINING HER SUNKEN EYES. THOSE FAMOUS EYES ARE FROSTY GREEN BEHIND MODERN TRI-FOCALS. MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S ARMS BELIE THE MUSCLE BENEATH THE SKIN. HER THICK ARMS ARE DIMPLED WITH FAT. HER HANDS ARE PAINFULLY SWOLLEN BY ARTHRITIS.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: I'm right there!

THE MAIL SLOT CREAKS OPEN AND A SOLITARY NEWSPRINT FLIER OF GROCERY ADVERTISING IS SHOVED THROUGH THE SLOT AND FLOATS DOWN UNCEREMONIOUSLY TO THE UNVARNISHED HARDWOOD FLOOR.

THE MAIL SLOT CLANGS BACK IN POSITION AND THE SCREEN DOOR BANGS SHUT.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Here I am!

FOOTSTEPS TROMP AWAY ACROSS THE LAWN.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK ARRIVES AT THE DOOR. SHE STOPS, LOOKS DISGUSTEDLY DOWN AT HER SINGLE PIECE OF JUNK MAIL AND SIGHS. MOTHER VÜDLACEK UNWRAPS A STICK OF CHEWING GUM FROM HER PURSE AND CHEWS IT WITH ANGRY RELISH.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK GROANS AS SHE REACHES TO GRAB THE UMBRELLA. SHE USES THE POINT TO OPEN THE MAIL SLOT. SHE BENDS DOWN A BIT IN ORDER TO SHOUT AT THE MAILMAN THROUGH THE DOOR.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: (CHEWING AND YELLING) The Rubbish Man hauls all muh junk away on Tuesdee... then you deliver it all back t' me in daily pieces!

TWO QUICK HORN HONKS SOUND FROM THE MAILMAN'S JEEP. THE JEEP GRINDS INTO GEAR. THE TIRES SPIN OUT ON THE GRAVEL ROAD AS THE MAIL JEEP PUTTERS AWAY. MOTHER VÜDLACEK RESPONDS WITH A SNORT OF AIR THROUGH HER NOSE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK STICKS HER FRESHLY CHEWED BUBBLE GUM ON THE POINTED END OF THE UMBRELLA AND USES IT TO SNARE UP THE NEWSPAPER AD FROM THE FLOOR LIKE A PICADOR'S ROADSIDE LANCE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK PULLS OUT A PAIR OF USED PLASTIC HAIR DYEING GLOVES FROM HER PURSE AND PLACES THEM OVER HER GLOVED HANDS.

SHE PLUCKS THE NEWSPAPER AD FROM THE UMBRELLA AND HOLDS IT BETWEEN PINCHED THUMB AND FOREFINGER.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK PREPARES TO SET HERSELF MOVING AGAIN. STILL HOLDING THE NEWSPAPER, SHE HOOKS THE CROOK OF THE UMBRELLA HANDLE UNDER HER RIGHT KNEE AND PULLS HER LEG IN MOTION. SHE REPEATS THE PROCESS ON THE LEFT KNEE AND THE RIGHT AGAIN TOO, UNTIL HER LEGS BECOME AUTONOMOUS AND ARE ABLE TO SHUFFLE HER ALONG REPEATEDLY WITHOUT ASSISTANCE.

THE LIGHTS REVEAL AN UNFINISHED PINE ROCKING CHAIR.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK HOVERS HER RUMP OVER THE CHAIR AND SLOWLY EASES HERSELF DOWN. AT THE BREAKING POINT IN WHICH HER KNEES CAN NO LONGER SUPPORT HER WEIGHT, SHE INVOLUNTARILY LOSES CONTROL OF HER BODY AND FALLS HEAVILY IN THE ROCKING CHAIR.

HER MOMENTUM ROCKS THE CHAIR. MOTHER VÜDLACEK STOPS THE SWAYING ROCKER IMMEDIATELY.

SHE SITS MATTER-OF-FACTLY IN THE CHAIR LIKE A LIONESS SURVEYING HER KINGDOM.

MUFFLED FOOTSTEPS ARE HEARD PADDING ACROSS THE FRONT PORCH. MOTHER VÜDLACEK COCKS AN EAR TO THE DOOR.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Back again, hmm?

MOTHER VÜDLACEK METICULOUSLY FOLDS THE GROCERY ADS FOUR TIMES.

THE PORCH SCREEN DOOR CREAKS OPEN.

SHE TAKES THE USED DYEING GLOVE OFF OF HER RIGHT HAND AND PLACES IT BACK IN HER PURSE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Save a step and deliver it in trash bags.

ENTER WILLIE BAREFOOT THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR. HE CARRIES BLACK LOAFERS ON TWO HOOKED FINGERS.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Better yet, write me in care of the village dump!

MOTHER VÜDLACEK LAUGHS QUIETLY. A PAIR OF STAINLESS STEEL SURGICAL SCISSORS DANGLE FROM A LENGTH OF TWINE GRANNY KNOTTED AROUND HER NECK. WITH HER DRESS GLOVED, THOUGH NOW DE-PLASTICIZED RIGHT HAND, SHE CUTS OUT PAPER CHILDREN FROM THE FOLDED NEWSPRINT.

WILLIE: So we're finally movin' up in the world, huh?

WILLIE GRINS. MOTHER VÜDLACEK DOES NOT REACT. SHE CUTS. WILLIE CLOSES THE DOOR AND DROPS HIS OVERNIGHT BAG HEAVILY ON THE FLOOR. HE STANDS NERVOUSLY ERECT. WILLIE TAKES OFF HIS GLASSES, FOGS THEM, WIPES THEM ON HIS JEANS AND PLACES THEM BACK ON THE BRIDGE OF HIS NOSE.

STOOP-SHOULDERED AND POT-BELLIED, WILLIE STRUGGLES TO CATCH A DEEP BREATH. AT 25, WILLIE HAS LABORED TO SHRUG HIS MOTHER'S MEMORY OFF HIS SHOULDERS. ONCE BRIGHT WITH THE GLOW OF YOUTH, CONCERN AND FOREBODING NOW OBSCURE HIS INNOCENCE. HE IS DRESSED IN A NEW PANAMA HAT WITH THE BRIM BROKEN, RIPPED JEANS, AND A BLACK T-SHIRT. AN ORIGINAL HARRIS TWEED JACKET IS DRAPED ACROSS ONE SHOULDER.

WILLIE: Yeah. Well. (SEARCHING FOR A JOKE) I... guess I forgot how much... the air can back up across the Rockies. She won't move for a Hey Diddle. 'Nuf heat t' snap a rainbow right square in two, eh? Air hangs like a caught cow swingin' on a crescent moon... waitin' fuh the dish t' elope with the spoon.

SILENCE.

WILLIE: Hoo! Tough house.

WILLIE WIPES THE FLOP SWEAT FROM HIS FOREHEAD WITH THE TAIL OF HIS TEE SHIRT.

WILLIE: (LIGHTER) Yep. The Broken Bow Ocean: Humid, stagnant, rotting air. Nebraska air. So heavy with water, yuh gotta use a straw t' suck out the oxygen.

SILENCE.

WILLIE: Ma? I'm home.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK DOES NOT RESPOND.

WILLIE: Ma? It's me. Willie.

NO RESPONSE.

WILLIE: Your only begotten son.

NO RESPONSE.

WILLIE: Willie the Saint has come marchin' home.

NO RESPONSE.

A MOMENT.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: My son died eight years ago.

WILLIE: Ma. C'mon. Cut me a little slack in those apron strings, huh?

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Is it my fault that for eight years I got no postcard? It is my doing that I get no gift from New York on my birthday? Is it because a' a birth defect that muh arms ain't long enough t' reach Central Park so's I c'n pluck myself a flower for Mother's Day?

MOTHER VÜDLACEK STOPS CUTTING. THE SCISSORS DROP TO HER CHEST AND SWING LIKE A DEAD BODY ON THE TWINE NOOSE. MOTHER VÜDLACEK TAKES THE USED DYEING GLOVE FROM HER PURSE AGAIN AND SHEATHES HER RIGHT HAND WITH IT.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK UNFOLDS THE STRING OF TWENTY CONNECTED NEWSPRINT CHILDREN HOLDING HANDS.

WILLIE: I send home a hundred bucks a month.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK LOCKS HER EYES ON WILLIE FOR AN INTENSE SECOND.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Shame money. I never asked for a hand out or a hat pin from anyone.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK BREAKS EYE CONTACT WITH WILLIE AND CONTINUES UNFOLDING THE CHILDREN.

WILLIE: It's blood beneath the trestle.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Townsfolk never let me forget... "Ah, it'd be perfect if only Willie were here... if only he'd come back home again... then the whole town'd be healthy again."

MOTHER VÜDLACEK SYSTEMATICALLY TEARS THE HEAD OFF EACH CHILD AND LETS IT FLUTTER TO THE FLOOR.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Seven years and you can sue for divorce. Eighty-Four months and the courts'll let you get on with your life.

WILLIE: I couldn't come back. Not until I made it.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Eight years. I figure no court'n the world'd commit me. If I can get rid of a husband in seven... certainly... I can bury a son in eight.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK TEARS EACH PAPER CHILD APART FROM THE OTHER.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: There's his grave.

THE LIGHTS REVEAL AN OMINOUS WALL OF TWENTY-SEVEN CORRUGATED CARDBOARD BOXES STACKED BEHIND MOTHER VÜDLACEK.

WILLIE CROSSES TO THE BOXES AND OPENS ONE MARKED "TROPHIES." A LOOK OF DESPAIR TAKES WILLIE'S FACE AS HE DUMPS OUT THE CONTENTS OF THE BOX. MELTED CHUNKS OF BLACKENED METAL TUMBLE ACROSS THE FLOOR.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: I had part of him cremated.

WILLIE KNEELS AS IF HE WERE PRAYING. HE CARESSES THE BURNED TROPHIES. HE RUBS THE METAL AGAINST HIS CHEEK LOVINGLY AND KISSES IT SOFTLY.

WILLIE DROPS THE TROPHY AND STRUGGLES TO OPEN ANOTHER BOX MARKED "ORIGINAL ARTICLES." HE THRUSTS HIS HANDS INTO THE BOX AND PULLS OUT THIN STRIPS OF SHREDDED PAPER.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Some of him was decapitated for mulch.

WILLIE ANGRILY TOSSES THE SHREDDED PAPER IN THE AIR LIKE CONFETTI AND RIPS OPEN ANOTHER BOX MARKED "RAGS."

WILLIE OVERTURNS THE BOX AND FINDS HIS MOLDY AND CHILDHOOD TUXEDO, HIS HIGH SCHOOL LETTER JACKET DRENCHED WITH DRIED PAINT AND A RIPPED T-SHIRT THAT READS, "WILLIE WOOD: THE STRAIGHT ARROW FROM BROKEN BOW!"

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Others pieces were cannibalized for the Eucharist of the house.

WILLIE DROPS THE CLOTHES AND SLUMPS TO THE FLOOR, BEATEN, BREATHLESS AND GASPING.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK CRUMPLES EACH PAPER CHILD INTO A BALL AND TOSSES EACH ONE RHYTHMICALLY ON THE FLOOR.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: There are twenty-seven uses for a dead son.

SILENCE...

... EXCEPT FOR THE SOUND OF THE PAPER CHILDREN HITTING THE FLOOR...

... THEN....

WILLIE: You're right. Your son is dead. But he hasn't been buried for eight years. For the last twenty-five, he's been moldering in your womb.

SILENCE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK TAKES THE USED DYEING GLOVES OFF HER HANDS AND PLACES THEM BACK IN HER PURSE. SHE PULLS THE ENDS OF HER DRESS GLOVES BACK UP TO THE ELBOWS.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: I want you out of my house.

WILLIE RE-PACKS THE CARDBOARD BOXES.

WILLIE: (controlling his anger) For seventeen years I lugged along the vulgarity of living your life. For the last eight, I've lived only mine... shoved my life forward from behind on sweaty palms and scraped knees.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Did you hear me? I want you out! Go back to New York.

WILLIE CROSSES FROM THE BOXES TO FACE HIS MOTHER.

WILLIE: I'm not staying.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Good.

WILLIE: But first, before I leave, we're gonna be candid. For the first time in our lives, we're gonna stretch out the truth on the table and measure it for a tailor's fit.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Just remember that I don't take hints well. But then you're not famous for subtlety.

WILLIE: Item one.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK LOOKS WILLIE UP AND DOWN. HER PENETRATING GAZE SETTLES ON HIS STOMACH.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: You've put on.

WILLIE: I didn't leave you.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Even your face is swollen.

WILLIE: My father left you.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: You got fat.

WILLIE: I... I... never had the chance to be a son.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Is that a rabbit under your shirt?

WILLIE: I'm the second husband you forgot to divorce.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Or just the pout of your stomach?

WILLIE EXPLODES WITH ANGRY FRUSTRATION.

WILLIE: I am not fat!

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Your father was fat, too.

WILLIE YANKS UP HIS SHIRT AND PINCHES THE FAT CIRCLING HIS ABDOMEN.

WILLIE: This... this is beer suet residue! It's transient tissue... I can lose it... in two days tops... it's... it's



WILLIE STOPS AND COLLECTS HIMSELF. HE PATS HIS SHIRT SMOOTH AGAINST HIS STOMACH.

WILLIE: No, no. You're twisting the fabric. We're talking about you not me.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: I told you I didn't take hints well.

WILLIE: Ma, you can't divorce genetics. You lost a husband and then gained him back in your womb: me as a son.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK GLARES AT HIM OVER HER GLASSES.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: (SARCASTICALLY) Ach! So close. You were almost subtle.

WILLIE: (spewing) Why did I come back here?

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: What? The truth too tight a fit?

WILLIE: I... I... came home to steal back a piece of myself. I came back to filch a little happiness.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK LAUGHS UNCOMFORTABLY AS SHE MECHANICALLY WEDGES THE BUSINESS EDGE OF EACH PALM BETWEEN THE OPPOSITE WEBS OF EACH GLOVED FINGER TO PERFECT THE FIT OF HER GLOVES.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Happiness? Happiness. Never tasted it. If you find a speck, gimmie a nibble.

WILLIE CROSSES TO THE BOXES. AS HE WITHDRAWS EACH MEMORY, HE TOSSES THEM AT MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S FEET.

WILLIE: Aw, the flakes of happiness were here all right, once. Once it was stitched into the threads of my letter jacket... burnished into the shine of my bowling trophies.... soaked into the armpits of my confirmation suit.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Memories lie. We're cutting through the truth, remember?

WILLIE LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM AND SHUDDERS.

WILLIE: The comfort of a happy moment used to be thick here.

WILLIE KNEELS MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S FEET AND CLAPS HER HANDS IN HIS.

WILLIE: What happened, Mamma?

SILENCE.

WILLIE: Where did the happiness go?

MOTHER VÜDLACEK SWALLOWS HARD.

WILLIE: What did you do to my memories?

HER DEFENSES ARE DOWN.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: The... the smell... your smell. The leather in the jacket... the cedar in the trophies... the grass stain on the left knee of your suit. You were everywhere. But I couldn't touch you. Couldn't feel your brow for a fever. Or hold your hand in the dark. Or wipe milk from the corner of your mouth.

WILLIE: I'm here now, Mamma.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Useless. Your hand stayed in the cookie jar... your legs still swung across the front stoop...

MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S HAND TOUCHES HER CHEEK LIGHTLY AS SHE RE-LIVES THE MOMENT.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: ...Your lips lingering against my cheek. Even here...

MOTHER VÜDLACEK RIPS THE WHITE DRESS GLOVES FROM HER HANDS. SHE HOLDS HER BARE HANDS UP TO HER NOSE AND INHALES DEEPLY.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: ... You wouldn't come off.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK STRETCHES OUT HER PALMS TO WILLIE. HE KISSES THE HEEL OF EACH OPEN PALM. MOTHER VÜDLACEK RUNS HER FINGERS THROUGH HIS HAIR. SHE PULLS HIM CLOSE TO HER BREAST. HE HUGS HER TIGHTLY.

SILENCE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Eight years. Eight years without touching my baby.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK ROCKS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE CHAIR WITH WILLIE AT HER BREAST.

WILLIE: I'm here, Mamma. I'm home.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Don't ever leave me again. Never.

WILLIE: I won't. I won't leave you. I'm staying.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Oh, Will. Finally the boy I know. The son who loves his mother.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK BREAKS THE EMBRACE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: You're hungry. I have fresh kolaches. Your favorite: poppy seed. With Angel hair icing. You want milk?

WILLIE: Sure.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK POSITIONS HER HANDS ON THE ARMS OF THE ROCKING CHAIR AND PUSHES HERSELF UP UNTIL HER KNEES LOCK.

WILLIE: I can get it myself.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: No. Sit.

SHE USES THE UMBRELLA AGAIN TO START HER LEGS IN MOTION. WILLIE TAKES HER ELBOW.

WILLIE: Ma, lemme help you.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: I said, "no thank you." Sprinkle your pity on the unwashed.

SHE STARES AT HIM AND HE RELEASES HER ELBOW. SHE EXITS SLOWLY AND PROUDLY TO THE KITCHEN.

WILLIE SHAKES HIS HEAD AND SITS IN THE ROCKING CHAIR AND ROCKS. HE SURVEYS THE SURROUNDINGS AS HE SPEAKS TO MOTHER VÜDLACEK WHO IS OFF IN THE KITCHEN.

WILLIE: So much has changed, Ma. On the plane t' Omaha I saw swimmin' pools where the alfalfa fields used to be. Irrigation patterns've changed too. No more contour cultivation, huh? Erosion washed the land flatter'n a new bride's bundt cake. Shoot, and the drive up here? Who took out all the trees along I-80 to widen it three foot?! Main street's got no shoe store. Grocery store's lookin' a little dim. What's goin' on, eh? Even the old Curlie-Que Drive-In's a weed lot now.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK ENTERS SHUFFLING WITH A PLATE OF KOLACHES AND A COFFEE MUG OF MILK BALANCED ON THE PLATE. THE UMBRELLA IS HOOKED OVER HER FOREARM.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: All we got left is old debris like me. All the smart kids run off 't Lincoln, or Kansas City, or Minneapolis 't find a high payin' job. It ain't good 'nuf no more 't work the land with yuh parents. Naw. Farmin's too dirty for 'em. No respect in growin' corn. Land work's too... undignified... for virgin hands that caress a computer keyboard. Family farmin's gonna be family worm raisin' if we don't get some respect planted back in the soil.

WILLIE: That so?

MOTHER VÜDLACEK JERKS HER HEAD FOR WILLIE TO GET OUT OF HER CHAIR.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: You gonna help an old woman or you gonna sit there and expect me t' serve you like a judge?

WILLIE LEAPS TO HIS FEET AND TAKES THE PLATE FROM HER.

WILLIE: Sorry. So all my friends're gone?

WILLIE SITS ON HIS LUGGAGE AND EATS AND DRINKS RAVENOUSLY.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Not all. Some stay. Most work at bread mill.

WILLIE: Ugh.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK TAKES OUT HER HANDKERCHIEF, CORNERS IT, AND MOTIONS FOR WILLIE TO COME TO HER.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: The job ain't all bad. Pays one-sixty a week. Plus two weeks vacation... paid... in the summer. Plus all the dinner rolls you can stuff in yuh pockets. I think they're lookin' t' hire.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK SPITS ON THE KERCHIEF AND WIPES MILK FROM THE CORNER OF HIS MOUTH.

WILLIE: Ma. I'm not gonna wrap cellophane 'round hearth baked oatmeal-honey-crisp-raisin-bread for four smacks an hour. I'm better'n that! I been trained. I got pride.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Well if you're stayin' here, you're gonna get a job.

WILLIE: I got a job.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: A job with a paycheck and health benefits.

WILLIE: Writin's a job.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: But there are no benefits what-so-ever.

WILLIE: The benefits are...

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: (QUICK UPCUT) There's no benefits for writers here. Nebraska needs workers, not genius.

WILLIE: Look. Ma. I been out on my own for eight years. I can handle myself.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Mark The Broken Bow Archer off yuh list t' be handled. It folded.

WILLIE: Can't have a newspaper if there 're no stores left t' advertise in it.

WILLIE DOWNS HIS MILK AND LICKS OFF THE DRIBBLES FROM THE OUTSIDE OF THE GLASS.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: What will you do fuh money?

WILLIE: I... don't know. I... came back... because I'm tired.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: We're all weary, Will.

WILLIE: And... I feel lost, Ma. There's something missin' right here...

WILLIE TAPS THE EMPTY MILK MUG OVER HIS HEART.

WILLIE: And... when you misplace a parcel of yourself... the first place you gotta look to is home.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: You searched good. You found me.

WILLIE SMILES WEAKLY AND PULLS ON HIS LOAFERS.

WILLIE: (FEEBLY) Yeah. Thanks for the kolaches. My tastebuds have been resurrected outta the New York slime.

WILLIE STANDS AND STRETCHES... TENSION PAIN IN HIS RIGHT SHOULDER: HE WINCES AND ROTATES THE BALL AND SOCKET JOINT.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: I'll heal ya right up, boy. We'll get those hands strong with the earth again.

WILLIE: Sure. I'm goin' out. Take a look 'round and see if there's anything familiar left 'round here. Even the road stones have weathered away to sand.

WILLIE PULLS ON HIS SPORT COAT.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Before you go...

WILLIE TURNS FROM THE DOOR AND FACES HER.

WILLIE: What?

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Just once.

WILLIE: Ma... don't.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: The way we used to.

WILLIE: No.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Once.

WILLIE: It's beyond me.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Indulge an old woman.

SILENCE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK STARES AT WILLIE WITH YEARNING IN HER EYES. WILLIE BLINKS. HE SUCCUMBS TO HER DESIRE AND SITS HEAVILY ON THE FLOOR IN FRONT OF MOTHER VÜDLACEK. HIS WEIGHT IS BALANCED ON HIS ELBOWS.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Clean?

WILLIE SHRUGS.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Up.

WILLIE RELUCTANTLY LIFTS HIS LEFT LEG AND PLACES HIS FOOT SQUARELY ON HER LAP.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK GINGERLY REMOVES THE LOAFER. THE SOLE OF HIS FOOT IS BLACK WITH DIRT.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Dirt.

WILLIE: Nebraska dirt.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK TRIES TO DUST THE DIRT FROM HIS FOOT. SHE SNIFFS THE ARCH. SHE PICKS THE SOCK LINT FROM BETWEEN HIS TOES.

WILLIE: No debate! In New York, that foot'd be considered cleaner than a foot surgeon's scalpel.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK SLOWLY PUTS HER INDEX FINGER TO HER LIPS TO QUIET WILLIE.

WILLIE LEANS FLAT ON HIS BACK AND STARES AT THE CEILING.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK RAISES HIS FOOT AND HOLDS IT UP BY BALANCING THE ACHILLES TENDON ON HER THUMB.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Ready Achilles?

WILLIE: Dunk me in the river, Thetis.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK GRABS HIS BIG TOE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: This little piggy went to market.

WILLIE: Yuh know, Ma. Walkin' up here, I saw people dumber and less talented than me all 'round me. They had no newspaper column at age fourteen like me... but still... they're happy. They got no right to be. No money. No national fame. But still they walk the streets with genuine grins on their ruddy, sun-baked pussies; they don't got the drawn on kinda smile yuh see in New York. Their lives are without hope for a future of magnitude. They're not expected to be the next Brando. Or Fonda. Or Cather. Or Hayward. Or Carson. Or Cavett. Or McGuire. Or Meisner. Or Ford. Or Brokaw.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Or Starkweather.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK TICKLES THE NEXT TOE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: This little piggy stayed home.

WILLIE: Ma, I am haunted by expectation! I can't mend Broken Bow. The commerce and design of my day cannot be the resurrection of the empty stores along main street. But the anticipation... the demand for this town's survival has been tacked to my chest with tobacco spittle and communion candles. The pressure's suffocatin' me. There'll be no Warner Brothers movie folk to buy a hand saw from ugly Ernie at the hardware store. Hallis ain't gonna be servin' whole wheat toast to an interviewer from the People Magazine. And there's no way in heaven's wish that Budkin's gonna wear his chaps and spurs while Madonna soaps him up under the shower massage head.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Look who's a sorry lout! You have a brightness. A gift for swaying people. Yuh make 'em see your perspective on the world through their own eyes. You have the gift of making people love yuh. Yuh touch people and... yuh leave a hole everywhere when you're gone. You're yearned for and sought after, because yuh know how t' sell that smile and a handshake. And fuh the people who don't like their own lives, they can buy into a part'a yours. This town bet it's life savings on you, son. I know a boy needs more'n just a mother. I tried fuh twenty-five years t' be both. But son needs t' sit on his father's knee just once in his life and be rocked. I'm minimum wage. Your father was welfare. I dunno how yuh got t' be a nugget o' gold... the twenty-four carat kind. This town is 'n outstretched hand waitin' fuh yuh t' pull us up with you t' respectability. We don't want no Warner Brothers fame. Or the cover of People Magazine. We're beyond the spit shine. We just wanna be able t' look the world back in the eye.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK SQUEEZES THE NEXT TOE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: This little piggy ate roast beef.

WILLIE: I'm no ticket for fortune. I'm not gold plating: not even the ten carat kind! I'm no a savings account paying out respectability at twelve and a half percent!

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: You said you'd pay off at a hunnert an' fifty percent interest. Your glow's a little dim now. Maybe yuh lost a little sparkle of confidence in those smoky eyes... but you'll pop back up like rag weed in summer and score the sky!



WILLIE: I ain't goin' back to New York!

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Don't you dare! You'll do it all from here. You'll make Rainbow bread more valuable than a Czech resistor during the Bratislava insurrection. You'll make us rich beyond the station of our birth! You'll collect us a million o' them oil caskets when yuh whisper in an Arab Sheik's ear... sellin' him the secret ingredients t' a Broken Bow loaf a' bread!

WILLIE: Ma, I couldn't sell a yeast infection t' a whore.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK TWISTS THE NEXT TOE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: This little piggy had none.

WILLIE: Ma. You're ears're hearin' but yuh mind's not snappin' t' attention. I'm Willie Wood from Nebraska.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: You are Will Vüdlacek from Broken Bow.

WILLIE: I'm a nobody. Nothin' sacred. Nothin' intoxicatin'. Nothin' virginal. I'm a little fat, a little bald, and a little pitiful. I got chest pain! Right here where my heart used t' beat me warm! There's a new Yale study out. Says only children die younger. They have no social skills 'cause they're used t' doin' everythin' alone. They got high blood pressure 'cause they worry... constantly frettin'.... always wonderin'... if they're livin' up... t' family expectation.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Don't blame me... 'cause I'm the only family yuh got!

WILLIE: Understand me, Ma! If that Yale study were a Wanted poster: I'd be arrested and convicted without a trial!

MOTHER VÜDLACEK ARRIVES AT THE SMALLEST TOE AND KISSES IT SOFTLY.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: And this little piggy cried, "Wee, wee, wee" all the way home.

WILLIE JERKS BACK HIS FOOT, GRABS HIS SHOE AND HEADS FOR THE DOOR.

WILLIE: Enough.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK IS STARTLED AND HURT.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Will?

WILLIE STOPS AT THE DOOR. HE DOES NOT FACE HER.

WILLIE: I have to go.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Will. It's good to have you home again.  
This is where you belong. Please. Come here.

WILLIE: I have to go.

HE DOESN'T MOVE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Can't you kiss your mother, "Hello?"

WILLIE PAUSES. RELUCTANTLY CONSIDERS THE REQUEST, TURNS  
AND STIFFLY WALKS TO HER. SHE OFFERS HIM HER CHEEK.

WILLIE BENDS AT THE WAIST ONLY AND PUCKERS SLIGHTLY TO  
LIGHTLY KISS HER CHEEK.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK GRABS WILLIE'S HEAD AND DRAWS HIS LIPS TO  
HERS AND KISSES HIM HARD. WILLIE'S SHOULDERS TENSE... AND  
THEN RELAX. THE KISS CONTINUES....

BLACKOUT

ACT ONEScene Two

A TABLE WASHED IN CANDLELIGHT. WILLIE SITS ALONE IN THE CORNER OF A BAR. HE WIPES HIS LEFT "PIGGLY WIGGLY" FOOT CLEAN WITH A DIRTY BAR TOWEL. WILLIE PUTS THE LOAFER BACK ON THE FOOT AND TUCKS THE BAR TOWEL UNDER HIS CHIN FOR LIKE BIB.

SIX EMPTY AIRLINE WHISKEY BOTTLES AND SIX EMPTY BEER GLASSES DOT THE TABLE. THREE HALF-EATEN VARIETIES OF RAINBOW BREAD ARE OPEN ON THE TABLE: "BUTTER TOWN WHEAT", "STONE GROUND RED CLOUD CORNBREAD" AND "HUSKER FOOTBALL WHITE." WILLIE TAKES BITES FROM EACH PIECE OF BREAD.

THE INCANDESCENT STAINED GLASS BAR LAMPS REVEAL BUDKIN AND HALLIS: THE SINTEK TWINS. THEY SIT ON BAR STOOLS, FACING OUT. THEIR BACKS ARE TURNED TO WILLIE.

BUDKIN IS TWENTY-NINE AND BUILT LIKE A STEEL CORNER POST OFFICE MAILBOX: STOUT, IMMOBILE AND COOL. HE'S DRESSED IN A NAVY "RAINBOW BREAD" TRUCKER'S UNIFORM WITH CARDINAL BUTTONS, COLLAR AND CUFFS. "BUDKIN" IS SEWN OVER THE RIGHT BREAST POCKET. THE PANT CUFFS ARE TUCKED INTO BROWN WORK BOOTS. A "DEKALB CORN" FEED CAP IS PULLED DOWN OVER HIS BLOODSHOT EYES. HIS VOICE IS HOARSE FROM CHAIN SMOKING PALL MALL CIGARETTES.

BUDKIN: Tell yuh, brother. The world's changin' fastern' we c'n trace it in the lines wrinkl'n our nervous-wet palms.

HALLIS, THE OLDER TWIN AT TWENTY-NINE YEARS AND FIFTY ONE SECONDS, IS FLAGPOLE THIN. HE BRUSHES DANDRUFF FROM THE LIME COLORED EPAULETS ON HIS WHITE RAINBOW BREAD UNIFORM SHIRT. HIS PANTS ARE KHAKI AND PIPED WITH A SINGLE, TWO INCH WIDE, FLAXEN MILITARY STRIPE ON THE SIDE OF EACH LEG. AN AMBER GARRISON CAP WITH "HALLIS" SEWN ON THE SIDE TEETERS ON THE CROWN OF HIS HEAD. HIS FACE IS PURE AND UNWRINKLED, BUT AN UNDENIABLE SENSE OF DOOM DARKLY COLORS HIS EXPRESSIONS. HALLIS' VOICE IS TINNY AND SOFT.

HALLIS: Yup. When you an' me's growin' up and we went out lookin' fuh some Crack... it meant somethin' else.

BUDKIN AND HALLIS PUNCH EACH OTHER IN THE ARM. THEY SHAKE HANDS ONCE SNEERING AND LAUGHING THROUGH THEIR TEETH.

BUDKIN: Yuh shoulda seen the vertical mug I slurped from last night.

HALLIS: Good that one thing don't change.

BUDKIN: The only good thing.

BUDKIN PLACES THE BUTT END OF THE BOTTLES AGAINST HIS CHEST, ROUGHLY MEASURING THE SIZE WITH TWO NEAR EMPTY BEER BOTTLES.

BUDKIN: Big out t' here.

BUDKIN TAKES THE BOTTLES FROM HIS CHEST AND SWIRLS THE SWIG OF BEER REMAINING. BUDKIN DOWNS THE BEER FROM EACH BOTTLE.

BUDKIN: Them two little red wine corks sprouted t' the 'zact dimension 'n contour o' the radio push buttons on yuh sixty-seven Bird.

BUDKIN WIPES BEER FOAM RESIDUE FROM HIS MOUTH.

BUDKIN: Baby-neked bare. Candle wax tight. No lines. Don't like strings neither, so's I unplugged muh A T and T slimline, re-connected 'er t' the new outlet and direct dialed us up a hunnert puhcent long-distance-fiber-optical-white-shower-earthquake... all at the night rate.

HALLIS AND BUDKIN LAUGH RAUNCHILY.

WILLIE REACHES INTO HIS PANAMA HAT AND PULLS OUT ANOTHER BOTTLE OF AIRLINE WHISKEY. HE PUTS THE SCREW TOP IN HIS MOUTH AND HOLDS IT BETWEEN HIS TEETH.

BUDKIN RAISES HIS BEER BOTTLE. HALLIS DOES THE SAME.

BUDKIN: Here's t' creation! Let us pray it don't never evolve!

BUDKIN HALLIS CLANG THEIR BOTTLES TOGETHER AND QUICKLY DOWN THE BEER, ALMOST FINISHING IT OFF WHEN HALLIS STOPS DRINKING... HALLIS PRIES THE BOTTLE FROM BUDKIN'S LIPS.

HALLIS: Save one fuh us, brother! May Sintek Twins never change!

THEY GIVE A SHORT CHEER AND CLANG THE BOTTLES AGAINST EACH OTHER AGAIN AND GUZZLE THE BEER WITH RELISH.

THEY FIGHT OF BELCHES AS THE BEER BUBBLES EXPAND IN THEIR STOMACHS. THE ALCOHOL BUZZ IS SETTLING OVER THEM LIKE AN INVISIBLE VEIL.

HALLIS: Cuties're spendin' more'a our tax dollars on remedies that don't even cure the common cold. Clam-Eyes're buyin' up more'a our farms an' takin' all the ground water with it. Beanie bankers're burnin' more'a us alive daily with interest rates. Since the Wall tipped, the Black Booters'll march over here next, chop down our cotton woods, an' use the wood pulp t' write 'nuther declaration o' war against us.

WILLIE TURNS THE BOTTLE ITSELF TO UNSCREW THE CAP. HE SPITS THE BOTTLE CAP HIGH IN THE AIR.

BUDKIN: Least we'd have a body t' fight. Now all the killin's done in court. Whoever gots the biggest pile o' legal papers wins.

AS THE BOTTLE CAP ARCS, LANDS, AND ROLLS ACROSS BAR FLOOR, BUDKIN TRIES TO FOCUS HIS BLOODSHOT EYES ON THE ROLLING BOTTLE CAP.

BUDKIN: Gawdammit, that's the third Gawdamm screw cap someone's thrown at us.

AS BUDKIN TURNS TO FACE WILLIE, WE CAN READ FOR THE FIRST TIME, "SAVOR THE SKY: TASTE RAINBOW BREAD! BROKEN BOW, NEBRASKA" EMBROIDERED IN LARGE, GARISH, MULTI-COLORED THREAD ON THE BACK OF HIS UNIFORM. BUDKIN PICKS UP THE SCREW CAP FROM THE FLOOR.

BUDKIN: This' a coupon fuh a knuckle sandwich.

HALLIS SWALLOWS THE LAST FEW DRIBBLES FROM HIS LONG-NECKED BEER AND SMASHES THE BOTTOM AGAINST THE EDGE OF THE BAR. HALLIS HOLDS OUT THE NECK OF THE BOTTLE TO BUDKIN WITHOUT TURNING AROUND.

HALLIS: Don't fuhget the mustard.

BUDKIN GRABS THE BOTTLE AND CROSSES TO WILLIE. WILLIE POURS THE AIRLINE WHISKEY STRAIGHT INTO HIS GLASS OF BEER.

BUDKIN TOWERS OVER WILLIE AND CLEANS BENEATH HIS FINGERNAILS WITH THE BROKEN SHARDS OF THE BOTTLE.

BUDKIN: (SHORT TEETH WHISTLE) Heh! This here yuh invitation?

BUDKIN FLIPS THE BOTTLE CAP IN THE AIR AND CATCHES IT.

HALLIS CALLS OUT FROM ACROSS THE BAR.

HALLIS: R.S.V.P. it up his ass, Buddy!

BUDKIN TOSSES THE CAP IN THE AIR AND CATCHES IT AGAIN.

BUDKIN: Naw, Hally. I think I'll "regretfully decline" it directly up a nostril.

HALLIS AND BUDKIN LAUGH. WILLIE COCKS HIS HEAD BACK AND GUZZLES DOWN HIS IMPROVISED RUSTY NAIL CONCOCTION IN ONE SWALLOW. WILLIE KEEPS HIS HEAD COCKED BACK AS HE SLAMS THE GLASS DOWN HARD ON THE TABLE.

WILLIE: Hello, Bud-kin.

BUDKIN, RECOGNIZING HIS NAME, STOPS CLEANING HIS FINGERNAILS WITH THE BROKEN BOTTLE AND PEERS INTO WILLIE'S EYES.

BUDKIN: Hallis, c'mere.

WILLIE LAUGHS SOFTLY.

WILLIE: How's the bread business?

HALLIS TAKES A HANDFUL OF BITE-SIZED CHEESE CRACKERS FROM THE BAR, LEAPS OFF THE BAR STOOL AND CROSSES TO BUDKIN. FOR THE FIRST TIME WE SEE THE BACK OF HALLIS'S UNIFORM. LIKE THE BACK OF BUDKIN'S UNIFORM, HALLIS'S IS EMBROIDERED GARISHLY WITH AN ADVERTISEMENT IN MULTI-COLORED THREAD: "RAINBOW BREAD: A POT OF GOLD IN EV'RY BITE! BROKEN BOW, NEBRASKA"

HALLIS: Yuh need me t' hold 'em while ya redeem yuh coupon?

BUDKIN PULLS OUT A PALL MALL FROM BEHIND HIS EAR AND LIGHTS IT. BUDKIN TOSSES THE BROKEN BOTTLE OVER HIS SHOULDER AND SUCKS DEEPLY ON THE CIGARETTE.

BUDKIN: I din't like the snarl of his, "bread business."

BUDKIN GRABS THE TOP OF WILLIE'S HAIR AND PEERS INTO WILLIE'S BLOODSHOT EYES. BUDKIN BLOWS THE SMOKE FROM HIS LUNGS ACROSS WILLIE'S FACE.

BUDKIN: I think it's little Willie Vüdlacek.

HALLIS: Naw. He don't dare show his puss 'round here.

BUDKIN: He's three years past due.

HALLIS PEERS INTO WILLIE'S EYES TOO. HALLIS TAKES OFF HIS GARRISON BREAD CAP, SMOOTHS HIS LONG HAIR AND CHECKS THE REFLECTION OF HIMSELF IN WILLIE'S EYES AGAIN.

HALLIS: I need a haircut.

BUDKIN: If it is Little Willie, he sure got fat.

HALLIS: Got fat with the sweat from our balls.

WILLIE GRABS HALLIS'S HAT...

WILLIE: Too... much... bread....

WILLIE BENDS OVER UNDER THE TABLE AND MAKES THE SOUNDS OF VOMITING.

HALLIS: Budkin! Stop 'em! He's a Rainbowin' in muh work hat!

SILENCE AS WILLIE SITS UP AND WIPES OFF HIS MOUTH. USING BOTH HANDS HE BRINGS UP HALLIS'S HAT FROM BENEATH THE TABLE... BUDKIN AND HALLIS TAKE TWO GIANTS STEPS AWAY FROM HIM...

WILLIE: What? Ain't this how yuh get the dough?

WILLIE MASHES THE HAT DOWN ON HIS HEAD AND LAUGHS WHILE BUDKIN AND HALLIS WINCE.

WILLIE TAKES THE HAT OFF AND REVEALS THAT THERE'S NO VOMIT INSIDE. HE LAUGHS AGAIN. HALLIS GRABS BACK HIS HAT AND PUTS IT ON. BUDKIN LAUGHS.

BUDKIN: Yup. That's little Willie Vüdlacek, alright.

WILLIE: Wood. Willie Wood.

HALLIS: Well, Willie Vüd, too bad you cun'ta gotten funnier instead'a fatter.

WILLIE: Fatter? I can still whup yuh ass usin' a thumb only.

BUDKIN: Yuh still yuh humpin' mother?

WILLIE: Button up about her! C'mon! I'll whup yuh both with muh pinky only!

BUDKIN: Hey, look! Seems Little Willie got himself a new pair 'a nuts!

HALLIS: Yuh mean he finished suckin' the juice outta ours?

BUDKIN: Least now his mamma c'n finally feel a real man's swingin' ornaments betwixt huh wrinkled thighs!

HALLIS AND BUDKIN LAUGH WILDLY.

WILLIE PUSHES BACK FROM HIS CHAIR AND BOLTS TO HIS FEET AND TAKES A BOXER'S STANCE.

HALLIS MENACINGLY CIRCLES WILLIE.

HALLIS: C'mon, sissy-kid. Let's see if yuh still got the shit t' bronc ride. Or has New York milked it all outta yuh girlie titties?

WILLIE PUNCHES WILDLY IN THE AIR.

WILLIE: Stand still! I said I's gonna whup yuh!

WILLIE TRIES TO SWEEP KICK HALLIS. HALLIS DUCKS AND MANEUVERS BEHIND WILLIE AND WRAPS HIM UP IN A FULL NELSON.

HALLIS: Punch 'em one in the gut fuh me, Buddy!

WILLIE STRUGGLES, BUT CANNOT MOVE: HIS CHIN IS PRESSED AGAINST HIS CHEST. BUDKIN, WITH MASSIVE FISTS BOLTED TO HIS HIPS, MOVES IN STOMACH TO STOMACH WITH WILLIE. WILLIE STRUGGLES TO BREATHE.

BUDKIN: You ain't in no more New York, fat boy. We don't go by words or promises here. We judge on deed and punish with action. The muscles in yuh back 're worth more'n all the papers yuh ever signed yuh name t'. Take yuh waggin' tongue outta the sand, an' cough up a coin.



WILLIE: (INAUDIBLE) I don't got it.

BUDKIN: Let 'em loose a little, Hally. Yuh makin' 'em mumble.

HALLIS LOOSENS HIS STRANGLE HOLD. WILLIE COUGHS UP PHLEGM FROM THE CHOKE HOLD.

WILLIE: I said, "I ain't got it."

BUDKIN: Wrap 'em up again, Hally. I gotta check somethin'.

HALLIS TIES UP WILLIE AGAIN IN A FULL NELSON. WILLIE SHRIEKS WITH PAIN.

BUDKIN PULLS OUT A YELLOWED AND TATTERED SCRAP OF COCKTAIL NAPKIN FROM HIS BREAST POCKET. HE PICKS UP THE CANDLE FROM THE TABLE AND HOLDS IT NEXT TO THE NAPKIN. BUDKIN SQUINTS TO READ THE WRITING.

BUDKIN: (READING ALOUD WITH DIFFICULTY) I... promise to pay back Budkin's hunnert... at a hunnert and fit-ty percent'a innerrest... in five years... March 3, 1982. Hally? What's yuh caldenduh readin'?

HALLIS: It reads "Balance Due: Two-hunnert an' fitty greenleafs."

BUDKIN: He musta come t' belly up his share'a the bushel then, eh?

BUDKIN HOLDS THE PAPER UNDER WILLIE'S NOSE.

BUDKIN: This is yuh "Willie Vüdlacek," ain't it?

BUDKIN POINTS TO THE SIGNATURE. HALLIS LOOSENS HIS GRIP ON WILLIE. BUDKIN RAISES HIS VOICE.

BUDKIN: This is yuhs, ain't it?

WILLIE NODS.

BUDKIN: Okay, then. Let 'em up. He musta come t' settle.

HALLIS LETS WILLIE GO. WILLIE SLUMPS BACK INTO HIS CHAIR AND MASSAGES HIS NECK. BUDKIN AND HALLIS SIT ON EITHER SIDE OF HIM.

WILLIE: Twelve hundred a month rent. Thirty-six hundred for security and first and last month's rent. Sixty for gas. Twenty-five for electricity. Phone's seventy-five. Notice I ain't made mention a any food.

BUDKIN: Don't sound like he gots our money.

HALLIS: Nope. Clam-Eyes took it all in rent.

WILLIE TAKES HIS OLD NEW YORK BILLS FROM HIS BACK POCKET AND THROWS THEM ON THE TABLE. BUDKIN AND WILLIE LOOK AT THE BILLS AND WHISTLE.

WILLIE: I sucked up mouse lint from the floor fuh a snack.

SILENCE.

WILLIE: But if yuh can sell just one novel... two an' three quarter mil... minimum and yuh able t' pay back yuh debts five times over. High stakes gamble. Put up yuh self-worth as collateral.

HALLIS: Now the Beanie bankers c'n put flesh in debt too.

BUDKIN AND HALLIS STARE AT EACH OTHER.

BUDKIN: Yuh always thought you're bettern' us. You coulda stayed here. Coulda saved the newspaper. Coulda given somethin' back t' the town. Coulda at least brought us back us somethin' we can use: like the cable Tee-Vee. We believed them full page ads in The Archer: "Hunnert and fifty percent interest payable in five years! Invest in Willie Wood: The Straight Arrow from Broken Bow!"

HALLIS: I believed. I bought me ten shares at ten a pop.

WILLIE: Yuh believed in makin' a buck.

HALLIS: We believed in one of our own.

BUDKIN: We believed in a promise.

WILLIE: Yuh believed on ridin' the coattails of my dream... but yuh din't bet on fallin' off.

BUDKIN: Hey, I lose a hunnert bucks at the race track ev'ry weekend. I can mark off the money, but not the double dealin'!

HALLIS: We knew you's vo-la-tile... but we din't think you'd grind us unduh yuh heel like a Black Booter.

WILLIE: The city beat me! Windows painted black, doors dead bolted against me as I passed by, beggin' for a chance! How'd the road twist back 'round so wrong? The wind wouldn't even push me along. I knocked and clawed and chewed for a scrap of attention from anyone!

HALLIS: Ha! The Cuties'll pull their hand off their pud only long 'nuff t' grab our tax money. If one'a our kind needs help, they won't even shake hands.

BUDKIN: Get off yuh big butt 'n go back! Go back 'n get our money.

WILLIE: I went back 'n back! Believed in sneakin' in one lucky punch o' the old mid-west work ethic, eh? Well, hard work don't pay the rent, an' it sure don't wipe yuh bung when yuh outta toilet papuh. Sweat evaporates in the heat of opportunity. It's who yuh know, boys. Luck. Yuh buy a break with yuh billfold. It takes cash t' get one swipe at the rabbit's foot.

BUDKIN: You had our cash! We backed yuh! Seeded yuh with greenbacks!

WILLIE: You gimme two grand! Lasted twenty-seven days!

BUDKIN: Twenty-seven days?

HALLIS: Whadda yuh been doin' fuh eight years?

SILENCE.

WILLIE: Ev'ry day yuh think this's the day yuh'll stand on a street corner'n get offered a million dollars... 'stead'a gettin' shot through the brain with disappointment. But pretty soon you're owin' bank more shoe leather'n yuh blood's worth. What's a body valued at in today's market, eh, men? Guesses? Hmm? Estimates? Ten bucks alive. Ten bucks a pint for the red stuff three times a week. I judge my life with a needle and a length of rubber tubing... my survival's measured in plasma and leukocytes.

WILLIE ROLLS UP HIS SLEEVE AND SHOWS THEM A LARGE MOUND OF SCAR TISSUE IN THE CROOK OF HIS ARM.

WILLIE: Same vein. Each cut, 'n the scar grows more pointed. I'll be able t' pick muh nose with it in a month, I reckon. But hey, brothers. Lemme get a price quote on this... this... eye. Hmm? Hazel. Rare. How much? Hmm? Me? Twenty-five grand, no wait. Get some rich bitsy with glaucoma... hop the crosstown bus t' the upper East side 'tween Park and Fifth... and collect! A man can do a lot with twenty-five grand. Like pay off his friends... so's he c'n catch himself another breath... nickel and dime a piece of his life back... twenty-five grand 's a down payment on the rights t' reclaimin' the freedom God give yuh when yuhs only a dream in yuh mamma's mind. Who needs two eyes, anyway, huh? Pluck one out, wipe 'er off, turn 'er in fuh the dough, an' run. Yuh only need one eye t' help point the way... the legs'll follow one eye same as two.

BUDKIN: Well, I ain't pinchin' out yuh eyeball fuh collateral.

HALLIS: Time's past fuh repossessin' our kindness. I say we got a legal right t' get back our marbles by poundin' 'em back out through his mouth.

BUDKIN CHECKS THE GLOSS ON HIS FINGERNAILS. HE CHEWS ON THE MIDDLE NAIL.

BUDKIN: If we kill 'em now, we ain't got no opportunity t' see our money again, never.

BUDKIN WASHES THE SWEAT FROM HIS FACE WITH HIS BARE HANDS.

HALLIS: I say fuhget the eyeball. I say we cut out his liver an' have it fuh dinner. Least we'd get a little iron outta the golden goose.

BUDKIN: Naw. Gimme 'nuther napkin, Hally.

HALLIS GOES TO THE BAR AND TAKES A COCKTAIL NAPKIN FROM UNDER A WET GLASS.

BUDKIN: We're gonna sign up a new agreement before yuh turn tail back t' New York.

HALLIS WAVES THE NAPKIN IN THE AIR TO DRY IT AS HE CROSSES BACK TO THE TABLE.

HALLIS: It's whisky damp. Better not use a ball point.

HALLIS DRIES THE NAPKIN OVER THE CANDLE. WILLIE BLOWS OUT THE CANDLE.

WILLIE: I ain't goin' back t' New York!

BUDKIN: Okay, then. I'll talk t' muh foreman and get yuh a job on the bread line. Yuh can paint on the butter toppin' with a brush.

WILLIE: Listen up...

HALLIS SHAKES HIS HEAD.

HALLIS: (UPCUT) Words again!

BUDKIN: Hey, I explained that words're same's cow turds 'round here!

BUDKIN LUNGES FOR WILLIE. WILLIE DODGES HIS ATTACK AND CIRCLES AROUND THE TABLE.

HALLIS: Worth less. Yuh can heat the house with a cow turd.

BUDKIN: Words can't warm a boot.

WILLIE: If yuh whup the snot outta me, yuh got nothin' more'n a goobered up fist, right?

HALLIS: I say punch 'em, anyway, Buddy.

WILLIE: C'mon. Take a poke. Cut off a hunk a flesh, too, 'n take it home fuh hamburger.

HALLIS: He's mockin' yuh, Buddy. Screw 'em one real good. Smear that grin offa 'is lips.

BUDKIN: Okay, then.

BUDKIN LUNGES AGAIN. WILLIE QUICKLY REACHES AROUND HIS BACK AND PULLS OUT A LOADED GUN THAT WAS TUCKED INTO THE BACK OF HIS PANTS.

WILLIE: Boys... I'd like yuh t' meet muh permanently deferred payment plan.

WILLIE MOTIONS FOR BUDKIN TO GO AROUND THE TABLE AND SIT NEXT TO HALLIS. BUDKIN SITS NEXT TO HALLIS QUIETLY.

WILLIE TAKES ALTERNATE AIM BETWEEN HALLIS AND BUDKIN'S EYES.

WILLIE: Three-fifty-seven Mag. Stainless steel. Smith and Wesson. Two point seven pounds. She takes two hands fuh a steady aim. Brazilwood grips. Red Ramp sight layin' aim over a six inch swirl-bored barrel. Nine pounds o' pull pressure. Half-dozen jacketed hollow point ammo smilin' silver from six chambers. Hunnert an' ten grain spray. Bigger'n a man's hand. Sever a man's leg clean off at fifty feet. Kill a deer at a hunnert yards. Not much recoil when yuh squeeze her. Her retort's wittier than thunder clappin' 'cross a prairie-dry summer sky. She's a mannered lady.

WILLIE GRIPS THE GUN WITH BOTH HANDS. HIS ELBOWS AND KNEES ARE BENT. HE CLOSES ONE EYE AND TAKES DEAD AIM. HE'S READY TO DISCHARGE THE FIREARM.

WILLIE: Single action pin 'n hammer click.

THE SILENCE IS PUNCTUATED BY THE HAMMER LOCKING IN THE COCKED POSITION.

WILLIE: Once yuh cock? It's like shootin' yuh load. Too late for anythin' but prayin'. Better t' be judged by twelve than carried by six, eh? Hands an' knees!

BUDKIN AND HALLIS SLITHER DOWN TO THE FLOOR ON THEIR KNEES.

HALLIS: After all we done fuh him, he's gonna plug us clear away t' New York!

BUDKIN: Whadda yuh want, Willie? More money? You got it if yuh put down the gun.

WILLIE: Get up! I'm the one shrivin' fuh absolution, not you!

WILLIE DROPS DOWN HARD TO HIS KNEES.

WILLIE: Up! Up!

WILLIE MOTIONS BUDKIN AND HALLIS UP TO THEIR FEET WITH THE GUN.

WILLIE: Remember! Get e'nuf t' pay off the town. Save a little fuh muh Ma, but take yuhselfes a fair cut. Any change left after the interest's paid? Yuh buy back summa yuh land. Don't fuhget! No less than twenty-five for each eyeball. A kidney should fetch eleven. The heart? Hmm... gotta leave somethin' t' charity -- but a heart with a re-packed soul could fetch a good seventy-five thou. Aw, fuh charity... dump the other kidney inta' some jaundiced kid. The liver? Three and a half. Bone marrow, blood an' muscle'll be snatched up by them drug companies. Price'll depend on the market, so flirt fuh the highest bid at auction. Leftovers? Give 'em t' Ma t' burn 'n bury. She's practiced. But leave muh brain here... intact... scattered 'cross this pine bar floor. Then, with ev'ry quaff and swallow? We c'n remember each other.

WILLIE INSERTS THE GUN IN HIS MOUTH, CLOSES HIS EYES AND TILTS HIS HEAD BACK TO HEAVEN. HE USES BOTH HANDS TO STEADY THE GUN.

WILLIE: (GUN IN MOUTH) Forgive me, Ma.

HALLIS CREEPS CLOSER TO WILLIE.

HALLIS: (WHISPERING) What? What he say?

BUDKIN: Somethin' 'bout his Pa.

WILLIE DROPS HIS HEAD, OPENS HIS EYES, AND GIVES HALLIS A DEADLY STARE.

WILLIE: (GUN IN MOUTH) I'm talkin' t' muh Ma not you!

WILLIE TILTS HIS HEAD BACK AGAIN AND CLOSES HIS EYES.

BUDKIN MOVES CLOSER TO WILLIE.

HALLIS: (WHISPERING) I think he's tryin' t' tell us somethin', Buddy!

WILLIE: (GUN IN MOUTH) Answer my prayer.

HALLIS AND BUDKIN BOTH TAKE ANOTHER STEP NEARER WILLIE.

BUDKIN: (RAISING HIS VOICE) Willie! Fuh Gawdsakes! Take the gun outta yuh mouth! It's makin' yuh mumble!

WILLIE RIPS THE GUN FROM HIS MOUTH IN ANGER...

WILLIE: (QUICKLY OVER PRONUNCIATING) The mind. Knows before. The body. When the soul. Is expired!

...AND BEFORE WILLIE CAN FINISH HIS SENTENCE, HALLIS AND BUDKIN HAVE POUNCED ON HIM.

BUDKIN: Gawdammit, Willie! Leggo!

BUDKIN WRESTLES WITH WILLIE TO WRENCH THE GUN FROM HIS GRIP. HALLIS HOLDS WILLIE IN A HEADLOCK.

HALLIS: Hell, Buddy. He ain't worth the sweat.

WILLIE WIGGLES HIS HEAD FREE...

WILLIE: (SCREAMS) The sanctity of life is crimped in a brass-cased bullet!

HALLIS CLAMPS HIS HAND OVER WILLIE'S NOSE AND MOUTH.

HALLIS: (WHISPERING LOUDLY IN WILLIE'S EAR) It mebbe okay t' take a dump in the streets o' New York... but here yuh broke the golden rule: yuh peed on yuh friends.

BUDKIN TWISTS WILLIE'S WRIST TO FREE THE GUN.

BUDKIN: I'm a gonna take the butt 'a this gun an' beat the goobers outta his ungrateful, hairy, A-hole... B-hole... C-hole....

THE GUN DISCHARGES. THE RETORT IS EARDRUM PIERCING. THE LIGHTS FLICKER. **BLACKOUT.** THE LIGHTS HAVE BEEN SHOT OUT.

BUDKIN: Bingo!

SILENCE.

A MOMENT.

BUDKIN: Right in the fuse box!

HALLIS COUGHS ONCE.

ANOTHER MOMENT.

HALLIS COUGHS A SECOND TIME.

BUDKIN: Hally? You okay?



HALLIS WHEEZES.

HALLIS: (QUIET) Budkin?

BUDKIN BUMPS HIS CROTCH INTO THE TABLE CORNER AND GROANS.

BUDKIN: Aw, direct connect... t' muh slimline.

HALLIS: I can't... swallow.

BUDKIN: You're gonna be good, Hally.

HALLIS: (RISING) He shot muh hand off?

BUDKIN STOMPS HEAVILY OVER IN HALLIS'S DIRECTION.

BUDKIN: Keep talkin', son. I'm tracin' yuh voice.

HALLIS: (QUIET HYSTERIA) I'm a gonna kill 'em!

BUDKIN: I got muh Scripto.

HALLIS: I'll lose muh job. A cripple with a steel hook can't spin a three foot steerin' wheel an' push-grind a gear inta fifth.

BUDKIN: I'm right there with yuh.

HALLIS: Budkin? I can't see! Buddy! He shot off muh hand, killed the fuse box an' blinded muh all with the same shot! (AWESTRUCK) That son-fa-bish gots quite an aim!

BUDKIN SPARKS HIS SCRIPTO LIGHTER TO FLAME. HE RETRIEVED THE CANDLE FROM THE TABLE. HE LIGHTS THE CANDLE AND PUTS IT ON THE FLOOR IN FRONT ON HIM.

BUDKIN HOLDS THE GUN UP TO THE LIGHT.

BUDKIN: He din't shoot yuh, Hally. I did.

BUDKIN PUSHES OPEN THE CYLINDER LATCH AND THE CYLINDER FALLS TO THE SIDE.

HALLIS: Fuhgive muh fuh not shakin' yuh hand in thanks.

HALLIS IS WHIMPERING, KNEELING, AND ROCKING HIMSELF.

BUDKIN: Keep that humor flowin', brother-friend.

BUDKIN POKES BACK THE EJECTOR ROD AND CATCHES THE BULLETS IN HIS HAND.

HALLIS: Can't. See. Muh hand.

BUDKIN PICKS OUT ONE LIVE BULLET ROUND AND HOLDS THE CASE HEAD BETWEEN GRITTED TEETH. BUDKIN DROPS THE EMPTY CASING AND THE OTHER FOUR BULLETS CASUALLY OVER HIS SHOULDER AS IF CASTING SALT INTO THE DEVIL'S EYE.

THE CASING AND BULLETS FALL TO THE FLOOR WITH A SINGLE METALLIC PING AND FOUR DULL RAPS.

WILLIE, UNMOVING AND DEADLY SILENT, IS FLAT ON HIS BACK... AND SILHOUETTED BEHIND THEM.

BUDKIN: Hally? C'ud yuh gimme yuh hand? T' hold?

BUDKIN SITS INDIAN STYLE ON THE FLOOR NEXT TO HALLIS. BUDKIN TAKES HALLIS'S BLOODY HAND BETWEEN HIS LEGS AND SQUEEZES THE WRIST VISE-TIGHT BETWEEN HIS KNEES.

HALLIS: Buddy, where'd yuh go?

BUDKIN: I'm right here, Hally.

HALLIS: I... I can't feel muh hand.

SILENCE.

HALLIS: What if he's right, Buddy? What if we are worth more dead? What if we do total up more as spare parts? What's the goin' price fuh a bloody stump?

HALLIS CRANES HIS NECK TO LOOK AT HIS INJURED HAND. BUDKIN BLOCKS HALLIS'S VIEW WITH HIS SHOULDER.

BUDKIN: Nothin' here t' see. Recline yuh head on muh shoulder instead.

BUDKIN, KEEPING THE PRESSURE ON HALLIS'S WRIST, PULLS OFF ONE OF HIS WORK BOOTS.

HALLIS GASPS FOR AIR. HE RESTS HIS HEAD ON BUDKIN'S SHOULDER.

HALLIS: I'm scared, Buddy. Scared 'cause he's right. We're fifty-cents an hour stiff waitin' t' get old and fart and count the lima beans poppin' outta our bug hole. Can't give nuthin' t' our kids, 'cept a quick kick in the ass as on their way out the door.

BUDKIN: 'Ats better th'n bein' dead.

BUDKIN PULLS OFF HIS SWEATY SOCK FROM HIS FOOT AND WRAPS IT AROUND HALLIS'S WRIST AS A TOURNIQUET.

HALLIS: Gov'ment takes all our money so's any an' ev'ry minority c'n get an equal shot, right? It's the Christian way, huh? All that "Nation under God" pokeweed. But... what about us? Who gives us a break? Social Security'll be busted by th' time we hobble t' the front o' the line. Who's gonna look after us, huh Buddy?

BUDKIN: We look out fuh each other, Hally.

HALLIS: But we're a minority, too, ain't we? We got rights due us! Where's our equal opportunity? We're Bohunks!

BUDKIN: Gawddam right we're Bohunks.

HALLIS: But we don't even got rights t' the land we're sittin' on! We're both just fat, dumb Bohunks bandits whose gran'puppy swum the Moldau river ootta the Sudetenland, an' come o'er t' be freer t' bust his back workin' a new parcel o' land he din't own over here either! No matter whose name's stenciled 'top o' the mailbox... the address still belongs t' the Feather Heads, don't it, Budkin?

BUDKIN: That bullet sheared a little common sense right off the side uh yuh temple, Hally.

BUDKIN TWIST TIES THE TOURNIQUET WITH A BALL POINT PEN FROM HIS BREAST POCKET.

WILLIE: Check the towns 'round Custer County: Ogallala. Keya Paha. Red Willow. Red Cloud. Wahoo. Omaha. Osceola. Oconto. Weepin' Water. Indianola. Arapahoe. Naponee. Wolbacho. Niobrara. Iowa. Winnebago. Pawnee. Broken Bow. All War Paint names. Whole territory's a moccasin. Yuh know how 't pronounce "Flat Water" in Oto? (PRONOUNCING CAREFULLY) "Ne-bras-ka."

BUDKIN: Here, kid. Yuh bett'a chomp on this.

BUDKIN TAKES THE BULLET FROM HIS MOUTH AND TRIES TO POSITION IT BETWEEN HALLIS' TEETH. HALLIS WON'T ACCEPT THE BULLET. BUDKIN FIGHTS TO REGAIN CONTROL OF HALLIS'S HEAD.

HALLIS: I'm fifty-one seconds older'n you.. and...

HALLIS, WITH HIS GOOD HAND, HOLDS BACK BUDKIN'S HAND.

HALLIS: I'd like a moment of respect from yuh, baby brother, as I am prepared t' pass down a nugget of wisdom harvested from almost a full minute more o' livin' than you.

BUDKIN: Okay, then.

BUDKIN RAISES HIS EYEBROWS AND WAITS FOR HALLIS TO FINISH.

HALLIS: Only thing we c'n claim outright is our name, right son? Sintek. Now that name might not have the same street value as a needle-prick in th' arm or an empty eyeball socket. But it warms us when nothin' else will, eh? Heritage, I expect. Usin' only a "s, i" ah "n, t" ah "e" an' "k" as a guide, yuh can trace yuh roots. A name'll treat yuh right when no one else will. A name'll stay at yuh heel and follow yuh t' the end. Yuh can c'n bring back the sun on a cloudy day with it.

HALLIS INHALES SLOWLY AS HE FIGHTS OFF A HACKING COUGH.

HALLIS: At night, when we's kids sleepin' in tree house? I'd sometimes... after yuhs fell asleep... I'd... whisper our name out loud... (WHISPERING) "Sintek"... may God shear off muh leg too if I'm lyin'... a breeze'd follow the sound o' my voice... ridin' in right off the Platte River... and I'd be cooled on a tepid August night. If yuh lost? That Sintek name'll bring yuh right back here... here where the horizon is limited only by yuh posture... not by yuh stature. I reckon that's how little Willie Vüdlacek got lost. Ashamed o' the only tether he gots t' this earth: his Bohunk name. Sells off his Pioneer blood. Never'll admit out loud that his hands... was once....

HALLIS LOOKS AT HIS BLEEDING HAND FOR THE FIRST TIME.

HALLIS: (STRUGGLING TO CONTINUE) ...Never admit truly... that his hands was once... nursed and callused and blackened by the dirt. Frontier dirt. Czech dirt caught in the sole of gran-puppy's boot as he fled here from the homeland. God's dirt... I figure....

HALLIS IS UNABLE TO CONTINUE. HE STARES AT HIS HAND. HALLIS RELEASES BUDKIN'S HAND. BUDKIN PLACES THE BULLET BETWEEN HALLIS'S TEETH.

BUDKIN: I hear yuh, Hally. A man's calluses are proof of yuh communion with somethin' greater'n hisself. The pride of salvation is in... yuh.. uh... fist. A man... is defined... by his hand.

BUDKIN UNZIPS HIS UNIFORM, REACHES INSIDE, AND PULLS OUT A SMALL SILVER FLASK OF WHISKEY FROM HIS SHIRT POCKET. HE UNSCREWS THE CAP WITH USING HIS MOUTH.

HALLIS POINTS TO THE BLOODY STUMP OF WHAT WAS ONCE HIS HAND.

HALLIS: (PAINFULLY) Life is deep-creased in the palm. If I still had a hand, I'd show yuh right here where yuh pushed me outta the tree house an' I almost cut off one uh only two opposable thumbs on the chain saw. Over here's the time the railroad tie ripped muh knuckles clean t' the bone as I tried rescuin' yuh from a forty foot fall off the Holdredge station trestle. Muh first marriage's singed into the whorl a muh middle finger s' well. Vanished. All gone and splattered 'cross the barroom floor.

BUDKIN: Naw.

BUDKIN HOLDS HIS HAND UP TO HALLIS' FACE, TWISTING THE WRIST BACK AND FORTH, SHOWING OFF EVERY PART.

BUDKIN: See? Your life's right here. Sweaty-wet an' safe with mine.

BUDKIN POINTS TO THE CREASES IN HIS PALM.

BUDKIN: See? The tree house caught me square with a finishin' nail in the web here. The railroad? Right there, where I permanently lost the third fingernail on muh writin' hand. See them dimples 'cross the knuckle? Them 's buckshot pocks from yuh ex-wife's twenty-two.

HALLIS STARES AT BUDKIN'S PALM AND KISSES THE HEART LINE.

HALLIS: We sprouted from the same dirt. Our lives are parallel scars.

HALLIS HOLDS BUDKIN'S HAND AND WONDERS AT THE SHAPES AND SIZES OF THE LINES. HE LOOKS UP WITH TEARS IN HIS EYES.

HALLIS: I love yuh, brother man.

BUDKIN: Same. This might gnaw a bit big chum, s' bite 'er hard right back.

BUDKIN POURS THE WHISKEY ON HALLIS'S WOUNDED HAND.

HALLIS BITES DOWN HARD ON THE BULLET, STIFLING A SCREAM.

HALLIS'S HEAD DROOPS AS BUDKIN TIES THE TOURNIQUET KNOT TIGHTER.

BUDKIN: Hally? Yuh gotta stay with me, Hally boy. Gotta keep yuhself alert. Yuh don't see me givin' up do yuh? No gun in my mouth. Naw... yuh just gotta move. Keep dodgin'. Don't think, just breathe fuh those kids'a yuhs. Maybe they'll do somethin' more 'n'portant 'n the both o' us put together. But kids take time. A patient man bets with hope. Yuh bet smart! Yuh put the big money on yuh own bloodline. Yuh know it's pure. Yuh bet short on the now, and go long on the big future payday. Yuh with me still, brother son?

HALLIS DOESN'T RESPOND.

BUDKIN: Hallis!

STILL NO RESPONSE. BUDKIN POUNDS THE EDGE OF HIS FIST ONTO INTO HALLIS'S WOUND. HALLIS WAKES UP SCREAMING IN PAIN.

BUDKIN: Okay, then. So keep a' bringin' in's many 's yuh can. And work t' keep 'em fed. Keep their spine straight. Then... yuh gots t' wait. And that's what the un-ed-u-cated bettor misses: the sugar-cube nectar. He fuhgets t' lick at the dribblin' honey of... anticipation... neglects... the sweetness of hoofbeat... followin... hoofbeat. Now, that's movement, Hally! That there's the progress others miss! Them ignorant ones are unable... t' wonder... at the maple-sweet miracle of a foal... one a yuh own... flyin'... without you.... on fetlocks thinner'n yuh own wrist.

HALLIS: I... I can't keep muh lids up, Buddy-man.

BUDKIN RELEASES HALLIS'S HAND FROM BEING SQUEEZED BETWEEN HIS LEGS.

BUDKIN: Keep yuh stump above yuh heart.

HALLIS STRUGGLES TO KEEP HIS ARM IN THE AIR. BUDKIN'S BACK CRACKS AS HE STRUGGLES TO STAND UPRIGHT.

BUDKIN: Remember... that in between time's most important. Yuh just sit. Wait. An pray against a handicap.

BUDKIN GRABS HALLIS AND FLINGS HIM UP OVER ONE SHOULDER IN A FIREMAN'S CARRY.

BUDKIN: Durin' the wait, yuh rub them sweaty hands t'gether, an' hope that the future yuh bred'll come in hard 'round backstretch. And yuh yearn t' be able t' see 'em all come a leadin' int'a the homestretch... carryin' little futures o' their own.

EVEN THOUGH HALLIS'S HEAD IS BOUNCING OFF BUDKIN'S BACK, HE MANAGES TO KEEP HIS INJURED HAND HIGH IN THE AIR.

HALLIS: Poor little Willie Vüdlacek. His mamma's only baby. Growed up alone. Soon's he could... he grabbed himself a sword... and cut off the only thing 'a value his Poppa give 'em. His name. Little Willie Vüdlacek picked up a pencil, and X-ed out fiftuh puhcent o' himself... an' his hand went blank.

BUDKIN AND HALLIS MOVE FROM THE LIGHT OF THE TABLE CANDLE INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE BAR.

BUDKIN: Yea. Who need's 'em? Muh kids're mor'n importunt t' brood about than him. Let 'em stay and snivel. We jus' won' let 'em relax with calm.

WILLIE SITS UP AND LISTENS TO BUDKIN'S FOOTSTEPS CROSSING THE BAR FLOOR. HE FEELS THE WELT ON HIS JAW.

HALLIS: Paid up his debt wit' his hand. The palm. Turned soft.

THE FOOTSTEPS HAVE FADED. BUDKIN AND HALLIS ARE GONE.

A MOMENT.

THE CANDLE FLICKERS.

WILLIE TRIES TO STAND, BUT BECOMES FAINT AND FALLS TO HIS KNEES. WILLIE KNEELS IN THE CANDLELIGHT AND INSPECTS HIS PALMS.

HE RUBS THEM TOGETHER AND TRIES TO TRACE EACH PALM WITH HIS FINGERS.

WILLIE HOLD EACH HAND OVER THE CANDLE. HE KEEPS THEM HOVERING OVER THE FLAME AS LONG AS HE CAN BEAR THE PAIN. HE YANKS THEM FROM THE HEAT, UNBURNED AND STILL PINK AND SOFT.

WILLIE LOOKS AT HIS PALMS AGAIN.

WILLIE BEATS A FIST INTO EACH PALM.

HE ANGRILY SLAPS HIS HANDS AGAINST HIS CHEST.

IN A FURY, WILLIE CRAWLS ACROSS THE FLOOR ON HANDS AND KNEES.

HE SLIDES HIS PALMS ROUGHLY AGAINST THE HARDWOOD BAR FLOOR...

... AND HITS THE BULLETS AND EMPTY SLUG CASING WITH HIS HAND. THE SPENT CASING SINGS METALLICALLY AS IT ROLLS ACROSS THE FLOOR.

WILLIE STOPS AND FOLLOWS THE ROLLING BULLETS WITH A COCKED EAR.

HE CAREFULLY SEARCHES THE FLOOR WITH HIS FINGERTIPS...

... AND FINDS A LIVE BULLET.

WILLIE PICKS UP THE BULLET AND TESTS THE WEIGHT OF IT BETWEEN HIS PINCHED FINGERS.

WILLIE DROPS THE BULLET INTO THE PALM OF HIS LEFT HAND.

THAT HAND... AS IF GIFTED WITH A MIND OF ITS OWN...

SLOWLY TIGHTENS INVOLUNTARILY TO A FIST AROUND THE BULLET...

AND SHAKES MIGHTILY IN THE CANDLELIGHT.

BLACKOUT



ACT TWOScene One

THE LIGHTS REVEAL THE INSIDE OF MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S WEATHERED FRONT DOOR.

WILLIE ENTERS TRYING TO OPEN THE CREAKING DOOR QUIETLY. HIS LEFT ARM IS STIFFLY CONTRACTED; THE LIVE BULLET IS STILL CLENCHED IN HIS FIST.

IN HIS RIGHT HAND IS THE COCKTAIL TABLE CANDLE FROM THE BAR. THE .357 MAGNUM IS TUCKED INTO THE FRONT OF HIS PANTS.

THE LIGHTS REVEAL THE RAW PINE ROCKING CHAIR.

WILLIE CROSSES TO THE CHAIR AND SITS DOWN HEAVILY.

WE SEE HIM WASHED IN MOONLIGHT POURING THROUGH THE LACE-CURTAINED FRONT WINDOW. THE MOON CASTS A DULL, BLUISH GLOW AGAINST HIS CITY-WHITE SKIN.

FROM A DISTANT STRETCH OF THE HOUSE... A GRANDFATHER CLOCK CHIMES THRICE.

THE FRONT DOOR DISAPPEARS BEHIND.

WILLIE ROCKS VIOLENTLY: THE ROCKING CHAIR MOANS WILDLY IN PROTEST. WILLIE'S EVERY TORSO MUSCLE FLEXES AND RELAXES IN AN ATTEMPT TO ACHIEVE A MOMENTARY SENSE OF PERPETUAL MOTION.

WILLIE STOPS THRASHING. THE ROCKING CHAIR SLOWS TO A FULL STOP.

WILLIE UNCLENCHES HIS FIST AND, USING HIS PALM AS A CATAPULT, POPS THE BULLET INTO HIS MOUTH LIKE AN ASPIRIN.

WILLIE, USING A FIRM TONGUE, MOVES THE BULLET TO EACH SIDE OF HIS MOUTH, WASHING IT CLEAN WITH HIS SALIVA.

WILLIE PULLS OUT THE GUN, PUSHES OPEN THE CYLINDER LATCH, AND SPINS THE EMPTY CYLINDER FREELY.

WILLIE HUNGRILY SUCKS THE BULLET WITH SOLEMN DELIGHT AS IF HE WERE ONCE AGAIN A SUCKLING INFANT AT HIS MOTHER'S GARNET-HARD NIPPLE.

WILLIE PULLS THE BULLET FROM HIS MOUTH. HIS HAND SHAKES AS HE INSERTS IT INTO ONE OF THE SIX EMPTY CYLINDER CHAMBERS.

WILLIE, USING HIS FINGERTIPS, SNAPS THE CYLINDER INTO PLACE, THEN SPINS IT RUSSIAN ROULETTE STYLE.

WILLIE PLUGS HIS PINKY INTO THE MUZZLE, CLOSES HIS EYES AND PULLS THE TRIGGER. THE FIRING PIN STRIKES AN EMPTY CHAMBER.

WILLIE SPINS THE CHAMBER AGAIN. WILLIE CUPS HIS HAND OVER THE MUZZLE AND PULLS THE TRIGGER. THE FIRING PIN STRIKES A SECOND EMPTY CHAMBER.

WILLIE WIPES SWEAT FROM HIS BROW WITH THE BACK OF THE HAND HOLDING THE GUN. WILLIE INSPECTS HIS OTHER HAND FOR ANY MARK OF LIFE: HE SEES NOTHING BUT A VACANT, BLANK PALM.

WILLIE SPINS THE CHAMBER A THIRD TIME. WILLIE POSITIONS THE PALM HEAD EDGE OF HIS FIFTH METACARPAL ACROSS THE MUZZLE. WILLIE BEGINS TO TIGHTEN HIS FINGER ON THE TRIGGER.

FROM THE DARKNESS OF STAGE LEFT, A VOICE...

MILLARD: Heh.

WILLIE, STARTLED, POINTS THE GUN INTO THE DARKNESS.

WILLIE: Who? Who's there?

MILLARD, A SQUAT, RUMPLED BUT NOT SLOVENLY SIXTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD MAN, SPARKS A WOODEN MATCH TO LIGHT.

A HALF-INFLATED, TATTERED LEATHER FOOTBALL RESTS ON THE FLOOR BETWEEN MILLARD'S FEET. THE BALL IS BUFFED TO A SLIPPERY SHINE BY A GENERATION OF SWEATY, CLINGING, HANDS THAT LOVINGLY PLUCKED IT FROM THE SWEET AUTUMN AIR FOR A TOUCHDOWN.

THE FLICKERING DANCE OF SHADOW AND FIRE SKIP ACROSS MILLARD'S DISTENDED FAYE-VINCENT-LIKE FACE. MILLARD SITS IN THE MIDDLE OF A RED VELVET LOVE SEAT.

MILLARD: When a slug's concerned...

MILLARD PAUSES TO LIGHT A STUBBY CIGAR.

MILLARD: ...Yuh wanna be careful the third time...

BLUE SMOKE SWIRLS FROM MILLARD'S NOSTRILS AS THE MATCH BURNS FOR THE SECOND TIME: FIRST TO EMBER, THEN TO A TENDRIL OF WHITE SMOKE, AND FINALLY TO BENT ASH.

MILLARD: ...There's a charm factor involved.

MILLARD'S OFFENSE, DEFENSE AND STANDSTILL-SOLACE IS DARKNESS. HE HOVERS IN SHADOWY CORNERS LIKE AN APPARITION FRIGHTENED OF DISCOVERY.

WILLIE: Yuh twitch, an' I shoot!

MILLARD: I got a nervous condition: muh hands shake. Muh eyelid jitters: too much coffee. Do them count?

WILLIE: My finger's got a caffeine itch, too. Can't say I ain't warned yuh if this here trigger scratches muh twitch. I said, "Who are you?!"

MILLARD: A friend'uh yuh mamma.

WILLIE: (UPCUT) My Ma don't got no friends...

MILLARD: (UPCUT) Maybe so now.

WILLIE: (UPCUT) ...She only gots me.

MILLARD: (UPCUT) But once there's a time... before yuh wus a pup... that yuh mamma had a shaker full uh friends.

WILLIE: (UPCUT) Where is she?

MILLARD: (BORED) Dead-hard asleep. It's quarter past three.

WILLIE: (UPCUT) What're you doin' here?

MILLARD TAKES A LONG, JUICY SUCK FROM HIS CIGAR. RIPPLES OF SMOKE OOZE FROM BETWEEN HIS LIPS.

MILLARD: Holster that revolver, an' I'll tell yuh.

WILLIE: As a local livin' in New York, I learned two things: keep yuh friends at yuh back, and shoot ever'thin' else.

MILLARD: At's one good rule.

WILLIE: Second rule? The man with the gun gets an answer t' his question.

MILLARD: 'Ats another good rule.

WILLIE STANDS AND TAKES A STEP TOWARD MILLARD. HE MOTIONS WITH THE GUN TOWARD THE DOOR. MILLARD DOESN'T MOVE.

WILLIE: Speak up, or get out old man. Do it quick, before I lose muh New York manners by snatchin' up a little Nebraska-style frontier justice, an' spray yuh clear through with lead fuh trespassin'.

MILLARD: I'm goin'. I'm a goin.

MILLARD TENSES HIS ARMS AS IF HE'S READY TO PUSH HIMSELF OFF THE LOVE SEAT. BUT HE DOESN'T MOVE.

MILLARD: But, uh, first, yuh gotta know that yuh mamma give herself up fuh yuh. She din't offer her soul up t' God... no... no, she sacrificed herself o'er t' the church... o' believing. Fuhget the right an' wrong o' it... but yuh need t' remember that she took refuge in the religion o' raisin' a son... she averted the eyes of God and... now looks t' you for the judgement on 'er life.

WILLIE: Why're you shillin' fuh her?

MILLARD: Yuh can't blame 'er fuh raisin' yuh up alone. Life ain't treated her fair.

WILLIE: Fair? Fair? Justice is pledged to the American flag, not my mother.

MILLARD: She done up a good job. Be proud. Yuh turned out... okay.

WILLIE: Okay? Okay isn't enough! I want to be Fermi! Matthew! Galahad! I'd settle for David Cassidy!

MILLARD: Who's stoppin' yuh?

WILLIE POINTS TO HIS HEART WITH THE GUN.

WILLIE: Here. This here's holdin' me back. I wanted t' be raised up... whole. An' here I am... punctured and stabbed by a stake I din't claim.

MILLARD: And what... exactly... would that be?

WILLIE: It would be... that blank line on my birth certificate where muh father's name 's supposed to go.

SILENCE.

MILLARD CONTEMPLATIVELY PICKS BITS OF SALIVA-WET TOBACCO FROM HIS TONGUE AND WIPES THEM ON HIS KNEE.

MILLARD CLEARS HIS THROAT UNEASILY AND CHANGES TO TOPIC.

MILLARD: Yessir. Yuh mamma give up huh friends. An' took t' the religion of believin' instead.

WILLIE WIPES NERVE SWEAT FROM HIS UPPER LIP AND LAUGHS.

WILLIE: Where'd she pluck you up? The penny candy jar at the dime store? They havin' a nickel sale on head shrinkers?

MILLARD: I know yuh mamma's no Virgin Mary. But t' her? Yuh the baby Jesus.

WILLIE: I don't wash feet.

MILLARD: If yuh can't accept 'er... least try understandin' 'er.

WILLIE: Oh, I understand... I just can't redeem 'er for a life a sacrifice.

MILLARD: Yuh could with gratitude.

WILLIE: Ha! Now you're the one who don't unner'stand.

MILLARD: We all know sufferin. When's the last time yuh told 'er yuh loved 'er?

WILLIE: Love ain't enough. She wants devotion.

MILLARD: Offer it up!

WILLIE: Can't.

MILLARD: She's all yuh got!

WILLIE: I got nuthin' to give!

MILLARD: Least... be charitable... let 'er know she won't wrong in puttin...' all her faith... into yuh. Can yuh do that?

WILLIE: No.

MILLARD: Can't or won't?

WILLIE: Either and both.

MILLARD: Why yuh punishin' yuh own blood?!

WILLIE: I don't even have 'nuf faith fuh myself!

MILLARD STANDS TO LEAVE.

MILLARD: Yuh mamma wun't wrong t' worship somthin' greater 'n herself. Mistake is... she picked a imperfect, icon: her only misbegotten son.

WILLIE STEPS INTO THE SHADOWS WITH MILLARD.

SILENCE.

WILLIE: Mistake she made... was t' spread 'er thighs... fuh the likes a you: the tempter of mankind.

MILLARD SPITS HIS WET CIGAR BUTT ON WILLIE.

MILLARD: How'd you feel if yuh baby Jesus spit on you s'if yuh's a sidewalk?

THE SOUND OF WILLIE CLICKING THE HAMMER INTO PLACE PEPPERS THE SILENCE.

WILLIE: (SLOW, LOW, GROWL) I wonder... who you could be?

MILLARD: Who do yuh want me t' be?

WILLIE: I'd always hoped you'd be John F. Kennedy.

WILLIE PRESSES THE MUZZLE AGAINST THE END OF MILLARD'S NOSE.

WILLIE: But, so much for the dimwitted ornaments of youth. Now, I hope yuh a priest, 'cause yuh lack o' manners' gonna...

MILLARD RAISES HIS HANDS IN THE AIR.

SILENCE.

WILLIE'S HAND SHAKES.

WILLIE: ...Yuh lack 'a respect's gonna... cost yuh a cigar box o' prayers t' get the Hell... outta here.

MILLARD: Can't kill a man twice.

WILLIE: You're already dead, too?

MILLARD: We're corpses in a common grave.

THE MUSCLES IN WILLIE'S ARMS RELAX FOR AN INSTANT.

A MOMENT.

ANOTHER MOMENT.

SILENCE.

MILLARD SLOWLY REACHES UP AND GRABS THE BARREL OF THE GUN. HE TAKES THE GUN FROM WILLIE.

MILLARD: I know what it's like. Yuh gotta figure it all out on alone on yuh own.

MILLARD LIGHTS ANOTHER WOODEN MATCH AND BLOWS IT OUT QUICKLY. HE STUFFS THE UNBURNED END INTO THE FIRING PIN APERTURE OF THE GUN.

MILLARD: Teach yuhself the man things: the secret o' scrapin' 'round yuh chin without leavin' a nick when yuh shave fuh the first time.

MILLARD AIMS THE GUN AT THE FLOOR AND FIRES THE PISTOL. THE HAMMER STRIKES THE MATCH AND BREAKS IT IN TWO.

MILLARD: Gotta learn how t' shake yuh Rooster dry, so when yuh zip yuh pants up, a little extra cock-a-leekie don't sprinkle down yuh leg later.

THE FIRING PIN IS STOPPED FROM MARRYING THE BULLET PRIMER: THE GUN DOES NOT FIRE.

MILLARD: Only a Pa c'n unner'stand that particular an-atom-uh-cal fullness grabbin' yuh down here when a girl in shorts up 't there sashays by.

MILLARD CAREFULLY PULLS BACK THE HAMMER JUST FAR ENOUGH BACK TO PULL OUT THE MATCH.

MILLARD: So yuh gotta figure out, on yuh own, that if this hand combines with that Wee-Willie-Winkie, that heaviness 'll take care'a herself. A tip: yuh wanna ask a chickpea out? Drain the oil cans first. Then, after that... yuh still feel like a callin' 'her up? Yuh know it's true love. But ninety-nine point one-six o' the time... it ain't love makin' yuh ask 'er out... it's just yuh casters squealin' fuh a de-greasin' job.

MILLARD OPENS THE CYLINDER LOCK, POKES OUT THE CYLINDER AND CHECKS THE POSITION OF THE BULLET.

MILLARD: I'll be damned: first time a prayer fuh dumb luck worked.

MILLARD CROSSES HIMSELF WITH THE MATCH STICK AND JABS UP THE EJECTOR ROD.

MILLARD: Hmph... brazilwood grips. Nice.

THE BULLET POPS OUT AND FALLS SILENTLY INTO HIS SWEATING PALM.

MILLARD: Here...

MILLARD TOSSES THE BULLET TO WILLIE.

MILLARD: Give it t' yuh gran-kids. Show 'em yuh got scientific proof there is a God.

WILLIE CATCHES THE BULLET AND HOLDS IT IN HIS CLENCHED LEFT FIST.

MILLARD: This, I keep, t' insure yuh actually collect them gran-kids.

MILLARD TUCKS THE GUN INTO THE POCKET OF HIS BLACK BLAZER AND PICKS UP THE FOOTBALL AND USES IT AS A BASEBALL IN THE FOLLOWING DEMONSTRATION.

MILLARD: I understand what it's like growin' up alone. Had t' do it muhself, really. Yuh learn how t' play by yuhself. Toss a baseball in the air... pitch's a low sinker away... an' yuh snap the swing -- makin' sure the wrists break just like the big leaguer's -- like so... and ev'ry hit's a clothesline-game-winnin'-grand-slam-home-run. Yuh got a better daily av'rage than Teddy Williams in a pennant race. But when yuh go home... there's no one there t' cheer yuh on. Yuh a team and a fan unto yuhself. Never gotta play defense, though. Every touch o' the football yuh score. Ev'ry basket wins the championship at the buzzer.



MILLARD TOSSES THE FOOTBALL BETWEEN BOTH HANDS AND ACTS OUT HIS CHILDHOOD MEMORY.

MILLARD: So... yuh wanna keep up the magic. Yuh chase down the baseball... pick 'er outta the gutter... an' again... yuh give yuhself a full count... there's Mays prancin' offa third... Clay-men-tay with a jump-steal lead offa first... and there's the Babe... fat an' snookered, lock-kneed an' arms crossed... standin' top a second... either too lazy an' too fat t' take a one step lead off the bag... or he gots faith... he believes yuh gonna swing one clear away 'cross the stadium wall... right t' the kids waitin' in the street with gloves, hopin' t' snag a souvenir. Pitch's up... cock the stick... left arm locked straight... and eyeball them spinnin' ruby threads... careful... curve... outside an' high... smile... snap-break the wrists... watch it... North Carolina ash closin' in on leather... easy... easy... kiss the knotty sugar spot.. an'... Crack! Fuh a moment, yuh not alone.

MILLARD BECOMES THE BASEBALL.

MILLARD: Yuh arching high 'cross a summer sky, see, blinkin' down at the ground that captured you. Yuh free... free t' sail 'cross the sun... and surprisin'ly? It don't matter yuh never had nobody. Who needs a Pa anyways? As the treetops wave yuh home 'round third, it don't seem so bad havin' t' be yuh own best friend. 'Cause no matter what... yuh got yuhself. And fuh a second, yuh never needed anybody. Yuh try t' convince yuhself that t' want someone else is to be weak... yuh c'n do ev'ry task alone... all on yuh own. Then... Oooo... ouch! Yuh hit the ground hard. Yuh roll a bit. An' wait... fuh someone t' pick yuh up... someone t' ask if yuh okay... someone t' hold yuh tight in their hand as if yuh's life had a little weight. But nobody comes. So yuh pick yuhself up. An' yuh take yuh glove, and yuh bat an' yuh walk home alone. Make yuhself dinner. Tuck yuhself inta bed and pray t' die.

MILLARD IS LOST IN THE WORLD OF HIS YOUTH.

MILLARD: An' as yuh try t' convince yuhself that yuh life'll never come up in spades, you'll never make the funny papers, you'll never be a caption in a magazine... a little salty trickle o' water leaks down yuh cheek... and against the darkness o' yuh life... durin' the shank o' the night... yuh obliged t' admit... that the wetness on yuh cheek... no matter how small... is yuh only mark... of bein' alive.

MILLARD COMES BACK TO REALITY AND SHAKES OFF THE COLD PAST.

MILLARD: And so yuh wipe dry the eye, wink 'er closed... an' use that leg t' rock yuhself t' sleep while the cold air falls around yuh... an' soon... yuh begin t' fly again... in yuh dream... yuh begin t' a find strength in the air... comfort from the sky in a way an only child can unner'stand... yuh warmed t' know that no matter what happens... yuh always got at least one friend: yuh tears.

MILLARD TOSSES THE FOOTBALL AT WILLIE. WILLIE STRUGGLES TO CATCH THE BALL.

MILLARD: There ain't much I unner'stand. But there's one thing I know better'n' a mistress in the mornin': a boy needs t' know... that his Pa cried them same tears. A boy needs t' know that his Pa cried fuh the same reason... A boy need t' know that his Pa... loved him.

WILLIE: You're too late.

MILLARD: Never too late t' make an honest start. I used t' stand outside yuh bedroom window at night. Standin' there, smokin' a cigar fuh eight hours... stealin' back a bit a the son I left behind. An' yuh Mamma would watch me watchin' you through the kitchen window. She din't think I knew... but I did. We both stood watch over yuh as yuh dreamt of a better life. There we was... the three of us... almost a real family. Each of us yearning in the night to touch each other... separated only by a window pane o' leaded glass. If... only one a us'd been brave e'nuf... dared e'nuf... t' cut a wrist reaching out... maybe it'd all be dif'ernt... maybe we'd be free... stead'a captured by despair... trapped forever in a prison by iron bars thinner an' weaker than an Embalmer's syringe.

MILLARD MOTIONS FOR WILLIE TO THROW HIM THE FOOTBALL.

MILLARD: C'mon. Toss 'er over. Show me a little form.

WILLIE THROWS IT BACK UNDERHANDED.

MILLARD: That's a football, kid, not a basketball. No Rick Barry granny shots, now. Space the fingers 'cross the laces. Cock it back behind the ear, and throw with your shoulder.

MILLARD THROWS THE BALL TO WILLIE. THE PASS IS WOBBLY AND WEAK AS IF HE WERE PASSING TO A LITTLE GIRL.

MILLARD: Let 'er roll flat off the fingertips, then curl 'em right as the nails dig intuh the pigskin as she leaves.

WILLIE CATCHES THE BALL AND ANGRILY THROWS IT BACK TO MILLARD. HIS PASS IS HARD, STRONG, AND HAS A PERFECT PRO-STYLE SPIRAL.

WILLIE: Why does it take twenty-five years for a Pa tell his son he loves 'em?

THE FOOTBALL HITS MILLARD HARD ON THE BREASTBONE. MILLARD LOSES HIS BALANCE FOR A MOMENT. HE LOOKS TO WILLIE WITH HURT IN HIS EYES. MILLARD RUBS HIS SORE CHEST AND PICKS UP THE FOOTBALL FROM THE FLOOR.

MILLARD LIGHTLY TOSSES THE BALL BACK TO WILLIE UNDERHAND STYLE. WILLIE MAKES NO EFFORT TO CATCH THE BALL: IT LANDS AT WILLIE'S FEET.

MILLARD: (MEEKLY) Keep the ball. When you toss 'er 'round... maybe she'll remind yuh o' me.

MILLARD OPENS THE DOOR TO LEAVE. WILLIE BLOCKS THE DOOR WITH HIS BODY.

WILLIE: I asked you, "Why does it take a father twenty-five years to tell his son that he loves him?!"

A SILENT MOMENT.

MILLARD LOOKS WILLIE HARD IN THE EYE.

MILLARD: There's a thousand "Whys?"

WILLIE STEPS AWAY FROM THE DOOR.

WILLIE: I'm only askin'... fuh one.

WE HEAR BOTH WILLIE AND MILLARD TRYING TO CATCH THEIR BREATH.

ANOTHER MOMENT.

WILLIE: (SOFT) Why?

MILLARD SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS.

WILLIE TURNS AWAY, CHOKING BACK TEARS.

MILLARD STANDS UNEASILY WITH HIS HAND ON THE DOORKNOB. HE SEARCHES FOR SOMETHING TO SAY...

MILLARD: Hey, kid. So far, yuh done better not knowin' me. But I heard you's in trouble. So... a father... gets a feelin here...

MILLARD TAPS HIS HEART WITH HIS INDEX FINGER.

MILLARD: Right here... that makes yuh wonder... if maybe yuh could help... maybe yuh could... say you're sorry... that maybe after a lifetime of sayin' good-bye... it ain't too late... even after twenty-five years it ain't too late... fuh yuh t' say hello... fuh yuh t' hold yuh only boy....

MILLARD WAITS FOR WILLIE TO ANSWER. WILLIE DOES NOT TURN AROUND. WILLIE HOLDS HIMSELF AND FIGHTS BACK TEARS.

MILLARD TAKES A STEP TOWARD WILLIE. MILLARD PULLS OUT THE MOST UGLY AND CRUMPLED GREEN AND YELLOW HANDKERCHIEF FROM HIS POCKET.

MILLARD: Here... uh... yuh got so many friends.... they're drippin' off yuh chin.

MILLARD OFFERS THE HANDKERCHIEF TO WILLIE.

MILLARD: They'll keep safe in here.

MILLARD PUTS A STRONG HAND ON WILLIE'S SHOULDER AND AWKWARDLY WIPES THE TEARS FROM WILLIE'S FACE.

WILLIE DOESN'T MOVE.

MILLARD: ...But then... I guess... there's some holes... that'll never fill up... no matter how many friends yuh got.

MILLARD TUCKS THE HANDKERCHIEF BACK INTO HIS POCKET AND TURNS TO LEAVE.

WILLIE TURNS HIS HEAD SLIGHTLY TO WATCH MILLARD LEAVE. WILLIE TAKES IN A DEEP BREATH.

WILLIE: Dad?

MILLARD STOPS... TURNS BACK TO WILLIE.

MILLARD: Yeah... son?

WILLIE: Nothin'. Nothin'. I... just wanted t' see how it feels sayin' it out loud.

MILLARD TAKES A CAUTIOUS STEP BACK TO WILLIE.

MILLARD: How does it feel?

WILLIE FACES MILLARD FOR THE FIRST TIME. HE WIPES THE TEARS FROM HIS EYES WITH THE HEELS OF HIS HANDS.

WILLIE HOLDS HIS PALMS UP IN FRONT OF HIS FACE. THEY ARE GLISTENING WITH TEARS.

WILLIE SMILES BROADLY FOR THE FIRST TIME.

WILLIE TURNS HANDS OUT TO SHOW MILLARD.

WILLIE: It feels... wet.

MILLARD QUICKLY SMILES BACK AND TAKES OUT HIS HANDKERCHIEF AGAIN AND WIPES WILLIE'S RIGHT PALM DRY.

AS MILLARD NOW DRIES WILLIE'S LEFT PALM, WILLIE WIPES MORE TEARS FROM HIS FACE WITH HIS NOW DRY RIGHT PALM.

WILLIE GIVES MILLARD HIS RIGHT PALM TO MILLARD FOR DRYING, AND WILLIE WIPES OFF TEARS WITH HIS NOW DRY LEFT PALM...

...AS THE BUSINESS OF STORING FRIENDS CONTINUES, BOTH MILLARD AND WILLIE GET MIXED UP IN THE PROCESS OF WETTING AND DRYING...

...AND IN A JUMBLE OF MEETING PALMS, THEY HOLD HANDS...

...THEIR EYES MEET FOR AN INSTANT.

MILLARD GRABS WILLIE'S HEAD AND PULLS IS DOWN TO REST ON HIS SHOULDER...

...CLUMSILY THEY EACH WRAP THEIR ARMS AROUND ONE ANOTHER.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF HURT AND LONELINESS BEGIN TO DIM IN THIS MOMENT: THE DEFINING LINE BETWEEN STRANGERS BECOMES FAINTER AS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FATHER AND SON IS DRAWN BOLDER.

...THE MOONLIGHT FADES, AS THEIR EMBRACE TIGHTENS LIKE A RECEIVER'S HANDS AROUND THE GAME WINNING HAIL MARY TOUCHDOWN PASS...

BLACKOUT

ACT TWOScene Two

BLACKOUT.

THE SOUND OF A WOOD-FRAMED WINDOW BEING PULLED UP AND OPEN.

BEHIND THE BED, A HIGH INTENSITY, EIGHT BATTERY PIN-FOCUSED HALOGEN MAG-LITE, SCANS THE INSIDE OF THE ROOM AND RESTS ON...

A BED...

THE FLASHLIGHT SHINES DOWN THE LENGTH OF THE BED... HIGHLIGHTING A LUMPY FORM HIDDEN UNDERNEATH A HANDMADE QUILT...

THE LIGHT RESTS ON A LEFT FOOT STICKING OUT FROM UNDER THE COVERS...

THE FOOT IS WILLIE'S.

THE FLASHLIGHT BEAM RANDOMLY FLUTTERS ACROSS THE ROOM, AS A SHADOWY FIGURE STRUGGLES TO CLIMB OVER THE WINDOW JAMB INTO THE BEDROOM.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE GOES TO THE FOOT OF THE BED, SITS DOWN GENTLY ON THE EDGE OF THE MATTRESS AND RE-FOCUSES THE WHITE LIGHT ON WILLIE'S FOOT FROM PIN SPOT TO FLOOD.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE TICKLES WILLIE'S BIG TOE: THE COMBINATION OF HAND AND FOOT BEING ILLUMINATED BY FLASHLIGHT CREATES A GIANT SHADOW PUPPET SHOW ON THE BEDROOM'S FAR WALL.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE IS LITHE, QUIET, AND DISCREET.

SHADOWY FIGURE: (DISGUISED) This little piggy loves a back massage.

WILLIE, GROGGY WITH SLEEP, TRIES TO JERK HIS FOOT AWAY.

WILLIE: Please.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE LASSOS'S WILLIE FOOT BACK AND FONDLES HIS SECOND TOE.

SHADOWY FIGURE: (DISGUISED) This little piggy loves to cum.

WILLIE: Ma...

WILLIE PULLS HIS FOOT BACK UNDER THE COVER OF THE QUILT. THE SHADOWY FIGURE CAREFULLY PEELS BACK THE QUILT AND FIRMLY GRIPS HIS LEFT ANKLE.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE THEN GENTLY PUSHES DOWN ON WILLIE'S BENT LEFT KNEE WITH THE LENS END OF THE FLASHLIGHT, AND PULLS WILLIE'S FOOT BACK OUT FROM UNDER THE COVER.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE SOFTLY SQUEEZES WILLIE'S THIRD TOE.

SHADOWY FIGURE: (DISGUISED) This little piggy licks roast beef.

WILLIE: It's five in the mornin'.

WILLIE FIGHTS TO TWIST HIS FOOT FROM THE SHADOWY FIGURE'S GRIP. THE SHADOWY FIGURE LEAPS ON THE BED, STRADDLES WILLIE'S LEG AND SITS ON HIS KNEECAP.

THIS SHADOW PUPPET PERFORMANCE IS REFOCUSED ON THE DOWNSTAGE BEDROOM FLOOR.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE FLICKS WILLIE'S FOURTH TOE AS IF IT WERE A FLY ON A PIECE OF RHUBARB PIE.

SHADOWY FIGURE: (DISGUISED) This little piggy got none.

WILLIE JERKS HIS ENTIRE LEG TO FREE HIMSELF FROM THE SHADOWY FIGURE'S GRASP. DISCREET AND QUIET NO LONGER, THE SHADOWY FIGURE PINCHES WILLIE'S LITTLEST TOE HARD.

WILLIE: Ow!

THE SHADOWY FIGURE TICKLES THE BOTTOM OF WILLIE'S FEET WITH A SHARP-FILED FINGERNAIL.

WILLIE: (LAUGHING) No! Ha! Stop!

THE SHADOWY FIGURE TWISTS WILLIE'S LITTLE TOE AWAY FROM THE OTHER TOES.



SHADOWY FIGURE: (LOUDER, STILL DISGUISED) And this little piggy cried, "Hee, hee, hee... look how far I've run!"

WILLIE BOLTS UPRIGHT FROM THE BED. THE SHADOWY FIGURE SHINES THE HARSH LIGHT ON WILLIE'S LOGY FACE.

WILLIE: Mee?!

WILLIE KICKS MEE, FORMERLY THE "SHADOWY FIGURE," OFF THE BED WITH HIS FREE LEG. MEE TUMBLES TO THE FLOOR. THE FLASHLIGHT ROLLS ACROSS THE FLOOR, BLINKING LIKE A LIGHTHOUSE BEACON ACROSS A DARK BAY.

WILLIE STRIKES A MATCH AND LIGHTS THE MANTLE OF A KEROSENE CAMPING LANTERN NEXT TO HIS BED.

THE BEDROOM IS ILLUMINATED BY THE SOFT, FLICKERING FLAME.

WILLIE: How did you find me?

MEE, WILLIE'S NINETEEN YEAR OLD EX-WIFE, IS REVEALED IN THE LIGHT. SHE'S A HANDSOME CAMBODIAN WOMAN DRESSED IN A CRIMSON JUMP SUIT. HER ONCE MINK BLACK HAIR HAS BEEN PEROXIDE DYED TO A BURNT OCHER. HER LONG HAIR HAS BEEN FORCEFULLY TWISTED AND DRAWN BACK INTO A CHIGNON. A KISS CURL DANGLES ACROSS HER FOREHEAD. ALTHOUGH SHE IS DIMINUTIVE IN SIZE, HER LEGS AND ARMS ARE FIRM AND LISSOME.

MEE: You leave a bloody trail.

WILLIE: What do you want?

MEE: I came for you!

WILLIE, BUTT-NAKED, BUT ONLY HIS HAIRY CHEST IS REVEALED, CLIMBS OUT OF BED AND WRAPS THE QUILT AROUND HIM LIKE A ROBE.

HE TRIES TO KNOCK THE DEMON OF SLEEP OUT OF HIS HEAD THROUGH HIS EARS.

WILLIE: Who... how... did you get in here?

MEE: If I can crawl out of Cambodia on my stomach and scrape across three hundred miles of Thailand jungle with only my fingernails to pull me; hunting you down to Broken Bow, Nebraska is... how do you say? Simpler than losing a baked bean fart in the wind.

MEE PICKS UP HER MAG-LITE FLASHLIGHT AND WIELDS IT LIKE A CUDGEL. SHE MAKES THE BEAM DANCE ACROSS THE BEDROOM LIKE MARS LIGHTS ON A FIRE ENGINE.

WILLIE: Rent check bounced, eh?

MEE: You are a whitening bone under the Phnom Penh sun. Skinned your kneecap as you raced away home down a thefited road. The Nebraska plains cannot begin to mask the wound to your honor.

WILLIE: Okay, already. Okay.

WILLIE, PEELS OPEN HIS MAKESHIFT ROBE AND FLASHES MEE.

WILLIE: Here.

WILLIE MOTIONS FOR HER TO COME TO HIM.

WILLIE: It's all I have left.

MEE TAKES A WARY STEP AWAY FROM WILLIE. HE MOTIONS WITH HIS HEAD AND HAND FOR HER TO COME NEARER.

WILLIE: Heal my integrity. Come, come.

WILLIE STEPS BOLDLY TOWARD MEE.

WILLIE: Take it. Only one left.

MEE, USING THE FLASHLIGHT AS A SWORD FOR PROTECTION, INCHES AWAY FROM HIM.

WILLIE: (SMILING) Down to my... last embrace.

WILLIE LAUGHS, WHIPS OFF HIS HEAVY QUILT AND TWIRLS IT LIKE A BULL FIGHTER'S CAPE IN THE AIR. HIS NUDE BODY JIGGLES WITH FAT IN THE LAMP LIGHT.

MEE LETS OUT A SCREAM.

MEE: Ahh! You got fat!

WILLIE WRAPS THE QUILT AROUND MEE, COMPLETELY ENCOMPASSING HER SMALL BODY.

WILLIE LIFTS HER UP AS IF SHE WERE A NEW BRIDE AND FLINGS HER UNCEREMONIOUSLY ON THE BED.

MEE FIGHTS TO ESCAPE.

WILLIE FALLS ON THE BED LAUGHING.

MEE'S HEAD POKES OUT OF THE QUILT... THEN ONE HAND. HER CHIGNON HAS FALLEN. SHE WIGGLES HER SHOULDERS LOOSE, AND TICKLES WILLIE IN THE RIBS.

WILLIE AND MEE RELAX WITH MARVELOUS LAUGHTER.

MEE: Do you ever think about me?

WILLIE: Never!

WILLIE LAUGHS HYSTERICALLY. MEE STOPS TICKLING AND GRABS HIS CROTCH THROUGH THE SHEET. WILLIE FREEZES.

MEE: (WITH RELISH) Do you miss me?

WILLIE: Yes.

MEE: I know.

MEE'S STRANGLE HOLD ON WILLIE'S CROTCH CHANGES TO A LOVE CARESS. SHE KISSES HIM PASSIONATELY ON THE MOUTH.

WILLIE: Mee... I... do care... really.... fact is... I gotta know... is it a...

MEE LIFTS HER HAND FROM HIS CROTCH AND PLACES HER TINY, OPEN PALM ACROSS HIS MOUTH.

MEE: Later.

WILLIE: No... it's been three months... I gotta know...

MEE TRIES TO KISS WILLIE. HE PUSHES HER GENTLY AWAY.

MEE: You don't want to kiss me?

WILLIE: I do. I do.

MEE: Then come back here.

WILLIE WRAPS THE SHEET AROUND HIM AND CRAWLS OUT OF BED.

WILLIE: First... I gotta know... if you changed your mind... I need to know... if it's a...

MEE: (UPCUT) Stop pushing.

WILLIE: How can I push from over here?

MEE: That pout on your lips has a long reach.

WILLIE STRETCHES HIS LIPS OVER HIS TEETH AND BITES HIS LIPS.

WILLIE: (THROUGH A SEMI-CLENCHED MOUTH) If you don't want to be pushed... then don't kiss me.

MEE: I enjoy kissing you: it's the in-between time... when our lips are apart... that I can't stand you.

WILLIE: Well. We kissed. Now what?

AN UNEASY MOMENT. THEY SMILE AND SAY...

MEE: The torment.

WILLIE: The torment.

WILLIE: It's what we do best.

MEE: You want to start, or should I?

WILLIE: Why break a bad habit now? Go ahead.

LIKE AN OLD DRAGNET ROUTINE, MEE AND WILLIE CALMLY GO THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF THEIR ARGUMENTATIVE, COMBATIVE, HEATED RELATIONSHIP WITH QUICK RETORTS AND FAST CUES.

THEIR BODIES TENSE. THEY MOVE CHEST TO CHEST.

EACH OF THE THE FOLLOWING THREE ARGUMENTS ARE SPOKEN IN A SINGLE SPOUT OF BREATH BY MEE AND WILLIE.

ROUND ONE!

MEE: How long have you been here?

WILLIE: Less than a day.

MEE: And the eighty-nine days before that?

WILLIE, LIKE HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM, SIMPLY SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS.

MEE: Where's the rent money?

WILLIE: I used it to buy a plane ticket.

MEE: When will you pay me back?

WILLIE: Never.

MEE: You don't have a job?

WILLIE: No.

MEE: Why are you here, then?

WILLIE: I don't know.

MEE: Will you go back with me?

WILLIE: No.

MEE: Why not?

WILLIE: Because I'm tired.

MEE: Tired?

WILLIE: Tired of chiseling a grin on my face.

MEE: Then don't.

WILLIE: I can't survive without that stone smile.

MEE: You never smiled at me.

WILLIE: I could be myself with you.

MEE: I wish you were a little more shy with me.

WILLIE: Ditto.

MEE: Oh?

WILLIE: You're filled with the same self-hating deception.

MEE: Really.

WILLIE: Dyed hair. New York accent. No trace of a Cambodian hill flower painted across your face.

MEE: It's called surviving.

WILLIE: I call it lying.

THEIR BODIES RELAX: WILLIE AND MEE BOTH STOP AND GASP FOR A LUNGSFUL OF AIR. THEY SIT ON THE BED.

WILLIE LOOKS AT MEE TENTATIVELY.

WILLIE: Finished? Now will you answer me? Is it a...

MEE: (UPCUT) Maybe a little more.

WILLIE RELENTS... NODS HE'S READY.

WILLIE: Go ahead.

THEY BOTH TAKE AS MUCH AIR INTO THEIR LUNGS AS POSSIBLE. THEIR BODIES TENSE AS THEY BEGIN ROUND TWO IN THE IDENTICAL MANNER OF ROUND ONE.

THEY FACE OFF CHEST TO CHEST AGAIN.

MEE: Who are you?

WILLIE: A red-necked Bohunk.

MEE: That sounds primordial.

WILLIE: I'm sprouting legs and leaping away.

MEE: Evolutionary!

WILLIE: Can't hide in the sea anymore.

MEE: Who asked you to?

WILLIE: Me. I pleaded. With myself.

MEE: At least you listen to someone.

WILLIE: I misplaced myself.

MEE: Where did you get put?

WILLIE: Here.

WILLIE HOLDS OUT HIS HAND TO MEE.

WILLIE: Feel.

MEE STIFFLY HOLDS WILLIE'S HAND.

WILLIE: Well?

MEE: Cold.

WILLIE: Numb.

MEE: Clammy, actually.

WILLIE: That's all of me.

MEE: Not all.

WILLIE: Most.

MEE: Under half.

WILLIE: Where's the warmth?

MEE: Somewhere in there.

WILLIE: No. I already looked.

MEE: Keep looking. I will.

AGAIN, MEE AND WILLIE ARE OUT OF BREATH. THEY GASP FOR AIR. THEIR BODIES RELAX AS THEY INDIVIDUALLY DROP NESTEA-PLUNGE-STYLE ONTO THE BED.

WILLIE: I'm done.

MEE: Same.

WILLIE: Take 'er home?

MEE: Finish 'er off.

MEE AND WILLIE PULL THEMSELVES UP AGAIN. THEY LEAN ON EACH OTHER TO FACE OFF CHEST TO CHEST FOR ROUND THREE. THEY EACH BEGRUDGINGLY SUCK IN A FINAL DEEP BREATH OF AIR.

MEE: How was it?

WILLIE: Gruesome.

MEE: Same.

WILLIE: Then it felt good?

MEE: Yes.

WILLIE: Yes.

MEE: I don't ever want to do this again.

WILLIE: Never.

MEE: At least we do one thing well.

WILLIE: Yes.

MEE: We hate each other with a passion.

WILLIE: Definitely yes.

WITH THE FINAL OUNCE OF AIR ASPIRATED FROM THEIR BRONCHIOLES, WILLIE AND MEE COLLAPSE INTO EACH OTHERS ARMS.

TOGETHER, THEY FALL ON THE BED IN A PRIZE FIGHTER'S END-OF-THE-FIFTEENTH-ROUND CLENCHING EMBRACE.

A MOMENT...

AS THEY CATCH THEIR BREATH.

MEE PULLS HER FINGERS THROUGH THE HAIR ON WILLIE'S CHEST. WILLIE, FLAT ON HIS BACK, LOOKS AT THE CEILING FROM THE BED.

WILLIE: I lost the secret to daydreaming. Where do I rediscover the clouds of my youth and wish upon them once again for happiness? Can I fight the fate of my friends, the legacy in pioneer blood? They all work sixty hour weeks sniffing yeast and lickin' up bread crumbs. For what? For what. You think when they were young and dreamed on a cloud, they imagined endin' up workin' a bread line? You think across that blue sky, they envisioned themselves floating by in a factory stampin' "Out of Date" tags on a plastic wrapper? Never. Never. Somehow they... misplaced their ability to wonder. So instead of searching for what they lost, they turned their head from the heavens and laid a skinned nose down on a grinding stone. They dismantled the sky for the canon of kilowatt hours, a two-line princess telephone and eighty percent coverage on a health insurance plan.

WILLIE LAUGHS SADLY AND INCREDULOUSLY.



WILLIE: They dis-imagined the marvelous tenets of their youth... and created a kid of their own. Sacrificed happiness for perennial rubella, chicken pox pit marks, and the waterfall runny nose. They leapt phfumpering from the clouds... and before they could ground their feet, they were swiftly blown back out to sea by the swirling trade winds of misery: drowned forever betwixt n' between the northern colt latitudes and the doldrums.

WILLIE SITS UP AND LOOKS MEE IN THE EYE.

WILLIE: What's the secret?! How does a kid learn to dream, when there's no such thing?

MEE: Dreams aren't taught: they steal in during the night on their own.

A LONG, AWKWARD MOMENT AS WILLIE CALLS UP HIS LAST STOCKPILE OF COURAGE.

WILLIE: Me... please? I... I know I don't deserve t' know... but... I gotta know... if it's a boy... or a... ah girl?

MEE GIVES HIM A COLD LOOK PURPOSEFULLY SHRUGS HER SHOULDERS LIKE MILLARD AND WILLIE BEFORE HER.

WILLIE: Please... it's taken me... three months to ask.

MEE: With a hungry mother, homeless and alone... makes you think it even lived?

WILLIE: It's alive because I was strong enough to leave.

MEE LAUGHS WICKEDLY AT HIS FOOLISHNESS.

MEE: You give yourself too much credit!

WILLIE: Forget I asked.

MEE: He's this long. This wide. And weighs as much as a bag of charcoal briquettes. He's probably asleep on granmama's shoulder. His name is...

WILLIE BOLTS UP FROM THE BED AND COVERS HIS EARS.

WILLIE: (UPCUT) No! No particulars! No date of birth. No eye color. Nothing to remember...

MEE STOPS LAUGHING.

MEE: (SOFTLY INTERCUT) To live is to remember.

WILLIE PACES FRENETICALLY ACROSS THE BEDROOM FLOOR.

WILLIE: (IGNORING HER AND CONTINUING) ...Good, good. I haven't killed him... not yet. Difficult trip to the hospital? Any brain damage during labor? Yolk stock dropped yet? Don't tell me! I don't wanna know! A kid needs a father he can look up to! A success! A little fame! Someone he can brag about on the playground as he runs the base path on his way to a stand-up double! Hmm. The world doesn't need another middle class dad flattening out the bell curve even more... even the clapper's crushed flat! Naw. We gotta place him on the ringing tip of the high end. How? How? Do you think he's dreaming yet? Hmm.

WILLIE RACES TO MEE, TRYING TO PROVE HIS POINT AS IF HE WERE IN A COURT OF LAW.

WILLIE: See? I know nothing about being a dad. I've proved my point punctiliously! Should've gone to law school. That boy already knows the failure in his father! Yes... did him a favor! Renounced my short-term happiness for his prospective well-being. You know there's a new Yale Study out? It's been proven scientifically that even a kid at three months can die from a disappointed heart.

MEE CUTS HIM OFF.

MEE: (PROUD PLEADING) Will you please come back with me? I.. I don't want to raise him alone.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK, LIGHTED ONLY BY A VOTIVE CANDLE SHE CARRIES IN HER HAND, ENTERS THE BEDROOM. SHE IS WEARING HER WHITE ELBOW-LENGTH DRESS GLOVES.

WILLIE: I warned you. I begged you. I made the solution appointment. And then... you ran... you... left me for... him... for... that... that pro... pro... protuberance in your womb!

MEE, PICKS UP HER FLASHLIGHT AND STANDS RESOLUTELY.

MEE: Willie, I crossed an ocean of headstones. I escaped from a land of fresh graves. Here... I refuse to chisel a new gravestone or dig another tomb... for any one.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Will?

WILLIE WHIRLS AROUND TO FACE MOTHER VÜDLACEK.

WILLIE: Ma?

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: I heard voices and thought you were mumblin' for me in your dreams again.

WILLIE: Ma!

MEE GOES TO MOTHER VÜDLACEK AND EXTENDS HER HAND.

MEE: It is my delight to finally greet you, Ms. Wood.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK STARES DUMBLY AT MEE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: It's Mother Vüdlacek.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK LOOKS TO WILLIE AND THEN BACK TO MEE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Have we met?

MEE, EMBARRASSED, PULLS BACK HER EXTENDED HAND.

WILLIE: She doesn't know?

WILLIE: I... some... other things came up.

MEE: You didn't tell her.

WILLIE: Ma. This is Mee. My wife.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Wife?

MEE: Ex-wife.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Ex-wife? Well... least he's not Gay.

MEE: If you'll pardon me, I'll say, "good-bye."

MOTHER VÜDLACEK PLACES HER CANDLE ON A SMALL TABLE, TAKES A PLASTIC HAIR DYEING GLOVE FROM HER TERRY CLOTH BATHROBE AND SLIPS IT OVER HER RIGHT HAND LIKE A CONDOM.

MEE: I'm going home.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK EXTENDS HER HAND TO MEE AND SMILES WEAKLY.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Where will you catch a Chinese junk in Nebraska?

MEE RELUCTANTLY SHAKES MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S HAND ONCE.

MEE: There's a port in Omaha.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Have a nice trip.

MEE TURNS TO LEAVE OUT THE BEDROOM WINDOW. MOTHER VÜDLACEK TAKES OFF HER DYEING GLOVE, FOLDS IT NEATLY, AND PLACES IT BACK IN THE POCKET OF HER BATHROBE.

MEE, STRADDLING THE WOODEN WINDOW FRAME, FOCUSES HER MAG-LITE INTO THE DARK NIGHT. SHE LOOKS OVER HER SHOULDER AT WILLIE. THEY SPEAK IN HUSHED VOICES SO MOTHER VÜDLACEK CANNOT HEAR THEM CLEARLY.

MEE: Willie?

WILLIE: Yeah?

MEE: His name is Charlie. Six pounds. Three and a fifth ounces. June sixth. Brown eyes with green flecks: like the reeds that lap at the mouth of the Mekong river. And... he already has your gut.

WILLIE GOES TO MEE. BEFORE HE REACHES HER, SHE TURNS AWAY AND LEAPS FROM THE BEDROOM WINDOW.

WILLIE PICKS UP THE FOOTBALL MILLARD GAVE HIM AND RUNS HIS FINGERS ACROSS THE SEAM.

SILENCE AS WILLIE WATCHES MEE CROSS THE LAWN.

WILLIE: (TO HIMSELF) Charlie Wood.

WILLIE TOSSES THE FOOTBALL IN THE AIR TWICE.

WILLIE: Little Charlie Vüdlacek... from New York City.

WILLIE RESOLUTELY PLACES THE FOOTBALL ON HIS BED. WILLIE CANNOT LOOK AT MOTHER VÜDLACEK.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: I thought she'd never leave. What do you want for breakfast?

WILLIE STARES OUT AT THE MOON.

WILLIE: Something quick.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Quick? No reason to rush 'round here anymore. son. You're not in New York.

WILLIE: I will be soon. I'm leaving.

WILLIE DROPS HIS SHEET AND BEGINS TO DRESS: HE PULLS ON HIS PANTS AND SHIRT AND FLINGS HIS UNDERWEAR AND SHOES INTO HIS BAG. HE IS FILLED WITH ENERGY AND SUBSTANCE FOR THE FIRST TIME: HE FOUND HIMSELF. WILLIE WOOD HAS ONCE AGAIN BECOME THE CHARISMATIC STRAIGHT ARROW FROM BROKEN BOW.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Leaving? You just got here.

WILLIE: I have to catch Mee.

WILLIE GRABS HIS PANAMA HAT FROM THE BEDPOST, BREAKS THE BRIM AND PLOPS IT ON HIS HEAD.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Why? You got out! She's your Ex! Yuh showed yuh got intellect! Your marriage... it... she... never happened.

WILLIE: Ma. That... little guy Charlie... Mee was... talkin' about... uh... well... yuh got a... he's... your gran-baby. He's... uh... he's my son.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Will. She's desperate. She's made up this drum n' puppet show t' pull yuh back t' New York by the hairs on yuh neck! She'll do anything t' win a prize like you.

WILLIE PICKS UP THE FOOTBALL AGAIN. WILLIE HOLDS THE BALL OUT TO MOTHER VÜDLACEK. SHE DOESN'T TAKE IT.

WILLIE: I leave because of this. Communion between father and son on a Sunday afternoon.

WILLIE TOSSES THE FOOTBALL OUT THE WINDOW WITH A PERFECT SPIRAL AND YELLS OUT THE WINDOW.

WILLIE: (SHOUTING) E're yuh go, kid! Run fuh the bleachers!

WILLIE GRABS HIS BAG AND FLINGS IT OUT THE WINDOW.

WILLIE: I leave because I know I got no clue where to find happiness, but I can at least tell muh boy where not to look. I leave because you taught me t' always do good: told me t' leave the world a little better'n I found it.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Will, why you holdin' me t' somthin' I said fifteen years ago? I don't know a mound o' beans from a shoe shine. But I know you. And you're not ready. You're frightened, Willie. You've started shivering. The same tremens that have shook me fuh twenty-five years.

WILLIE GOES TO THE WINDOW AND STRADDLES THE FRAME.  
HE YELLS OUT THE WINDOW TO MEE.

WILLIE: (CALLING) Mee! I'm comin! Wait fuh me!

WILLIE TURNS BACK, EXCITED AND SHORT ON TIME. BUT WILLIE IS DESPERATE FOR MOTHER VÜDLACEK TO UNDERSTAND.

WILLIE: Ma! Be happy for me! He's got muh gut! That proves it! I ain't got a weight problem! It's a genetic condition!

MOTHER VÜDLACEK CROSSES TO WILLIE AND GRABS FACE AND MAKES HIM LOOK AT HER.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: He'll piss in your eye! He'll piss in your eye the same way you did in mine!

WILLIE: I'll wear goggles.

WILLIE KISSES HER QUICKLY ON THE END OF THE NOSE. SHE DOES NOT LET GO OF HIS FACE. SHE TURNS HIS HEAD DOWN TO LOOK AT HER CROTCH.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: You popped outta here... right here... with all yuh fingers and eyes... I wiped yuh clean when no one else would... we only have each other, Will... always and only... each other... and instead of thanking me daily... yuh beat me down with disrespect and leaving!

WILLIE: Ma. I love you.

WILLIE TAKES HER HANDS IN HIS AND HOLDS THEM TIGHT.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: If you love me, then... stay. Yuh said good-bye t' me more times than yuh father!

TEARS RUN DOWN MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S FACE. WILLIE TAKES OUT THE UNMISTAKABLE UGLY GREEN AND YELLOW HANDKERCHIEF MILLARD GAVE HIM, AND USES IT TO LOVINGLY WIPE AWAY THE TEARS FROM HER CHEEK.

WILLIE: Ma, there's a kid with muh name on it waitin' t' meet me back home. In the night, he'll cry fuh me, without even knowin' muh name. And I will go to my only boy, and I'll hold his hand. He could get along okay without me, sure. But... if holdin' his hand... could maybe... make him... feel a little less alone... then that's a dream come true... ain't it? One dream come true outta a thousand... that's more'n most people get outta a lifetime, right?

MOTHER VÜDLACEK GRABS HIS HAND AND STOPS HIM FROM WIPING AWAY HER TEARS.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Yuh hands 're fever hot!

WILLIE TAKES HER HANDS AND PRESSES THEM AGAINST HIS CHEEKS.

WILLIE: Yeah, Ma! See? The whole yellin' match 's... been right... under muh sniffer... right... here... beneath muh poundin' heart... all along... right here in muh palm... one hand... touchin' another's: bliss. Joy... right there! Happiness... here... between the fingers! Who'd a thought that rapture'd have a particular... size... and weight... and warmth?!

WILLIE SWINGS HIS OTHER LEG THE WINDOW FRAME AND TURNS TO SAY GOODBYE.

WILLIE: I gotta go, Ma.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK WRAPS HER ARMS AROUND WILLIE AND BURIES HER HEAD INTO HIS CHEST.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: Don't... don't leave me again.

WILLIE GENTLY TAKES HER BY THE ELBOWS AND PRIES LOOSE HER GRIP ON HIS SHOULDERS. HE TAKES HER HEAD FROM HIS CHEST AND MAKES HER LOOK AT HIM.

WILLIE: (SOFTLY) I love yuh, Ma. We done good. We'll turn out okay. Thanks.

WILLIE KISSES HER GENTLY ON THE FOREHEAD.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK RIPS OFF HER WHITE DRESS GLOVES AND THROWS THEM VIOLENTLY OUT THE WINDOW.

SHE STARES AT HER HANDS. SHE SPREADS THE FINGERS ON EACH HAND. SHE LOOKS AT WILLIE WITH FIRE IN HER EYES. SHE ROUGHLY GRABS HIS HEAD AND RUNS HER FINGERS THROUGH HIS HAIR. HIS PANAMA HAT FALLS OFF.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK RUNS HER HANDS REPEATEDLY THROUGH HIS HAIR AS IF SHE WERE TRYING TO SQUEEZE A FOURTH WISH FROM ALADDIN'S LAMP.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK: (HOARSE AND MUTED) Will... indulge an old woman... kiss yuh mother good-bye.

SHE OPENS HER MOUTH AND TRIES TO KISS WILLIE FULL ON THE LIPS.

WILLIE DEFIANTLY AND WITH SLOW DELIBERATION... MOVES HIS HEAD AND OFFERS HER ONLY HIS CHEEK.

SHE MISSES HIS MOUTH AND BLINDLY KISSES THE STUBBLE ON HIS CHIN.

SHE QUICKLY BREAKS HER STRANGLE HOLD ON WILLIE.

LIKE AN UNTAMED, STARVING ANIMAL UNWILLING TO SHARE HER PREY, MOTHER VÜDLACEK TAKES THREE STEPS AWAY FROM WILLIE AND TURNS HER SHOULDER TO HIM. SHE DOESN'T TAKE HER EYES FROM WILLIE'S CAPTURED SCENT ON HER NAKED, OUTSTRETCHED HANDS...

MOTHER VÜDLACEK CLOSES HER EYES TIGHT.

WILLIE PROFFERS HIS GOOD-BYE BY TIPPING HIS PANAMA HAT TO MOTHER VÜDLACEK. WILLIE PRESSES THE HAT FIRMLY ON HIS HEAD WITH A BRISK SNAP OF THE WRIST.

AS WILLIE SMELLS THE TEAR-SOAKED HANDKERCHIEF AND SMILES... MOTHER VÜDLACEK SIMULTANEOUSLY BRINGS HER SHAKING HANDS UP TO HER NOSE... AND INHALES DEEPLY.

TEARS DRIP FROM HER EYES AND STREAK HER POWDERY FACE AS THE SCENT OF HER SON ON HER PALMS FILLS HER LUNGS. WILLIE TUCKS THE HANDKERCHIEF DOWN HIS SHIRT.

WILLIE REACHES OVER AND EXTINGUISHES THE KEROSENE LANTERN.



BASKING NOW ONLY IN THE LIGHT OF MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S VOTIVE CANDLE, WILLIE KISSES THE PALM OF HIS LEFT HAND, AND TOSSES HER THE KISS AS IF HE WERE CASTING BREAD CRUMBS UPON THE WATER TO FEED A HUNGRY SWAN.

WILLIE LEAPS TO THE GROUND FROM THE WINDOW.

WILLIE IS GONE FOREVER.

ALONE AGAIN, AND WITH EYES STILL CLOSED TIGHT, MOTHER VÜDLACEK DIGS THE HEEL OF EACH PALM INTO HER EYES, TRYING TO STOP THE FLOW OF TEARS.

SHE CANNOT... MOTHER VÜDLACEK COVERS HER FACE WITH HER HANDS IN A VAIN ATTEMPT TO STIFLE HER UNCONTROLLABLE SOBS.

MILLARD APPEARS OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM WINDOW. THE BURNING EMBER OF HIS STUBBY CIGAR GLOWS EERILY IN THE DARK.

MILLARD, WITH HANDS CLASPED BEHIND HIS BACK, WATCHES OVER MOTHER VÜDLACEK LIKE A SENTRY: SILENT, STRONG AND STATIC. CIGAR SMOKE SWIRLS AROUND HIM.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK TILTS BACK HER HEAD TO HEAVEN... AND LETS HER BODY RELAX AS THE INTOXICATING SCENT OF HER ONLY SON COARSENS THROUGH HER BODY.

MILLARD SILENTLY CRAWLS IN THROUGH THE WINDOW. HE TOSSES HIS CIGAR BUTT OUT THE WINDOW.

THE SCENE IS NOW ENTIRELY LIGHTED BY MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S DYING VOTIVE CANDLE.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK, QUIETLY WEEPING ALOUD, REACHES HER HANDS OUT TO GOD ABOVE AS SHE FALLS TO HER KNEES.

SHE REMAINS FROZEN IN THIS STYLIZED PRAYER POSITION UNTIL THE END.

MILLARD LICKS HIS CRACKED-DRY LIPS, AND LIKE WILLIE BEFORE HIM, HE RUNS THE BACK OF HIS HAND ACROSS HIS SWEATING BROW.

MILLARD PULLS OUT MOTHER VÜDLACEK'S WHITE DRESS GLOVES FROM HIS BACK POCKET AND STARES AT THEM AS IF THEY WERE A PASSAGE RIPPED FROM THE PAGES OF ISAIAH.

MILLARD LOOKS TO MOTHER VÜDLACEK AND TAKES A SILENT, TENTATIVE STEP TOWARD HER.

MILLARD KNEELS ON ONE KNEE NEXT TO HER...

...EXTENDS HIS CLENCHED HAND HOLDING THE GLOVES...

AND DRAPES THE GLOVES ACROSS HIS FOREARM LIKE A WAITER PRESENTING A BOTTLE OF FINE CHAMPAGNE FOR INSPECTION.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK SLIGHTLY OPENS HER WET EYES...

AND TURNS HER HEAD TO LOCK EYES WITH MILLARD.

MILLARD SMILES SHEEPISHLY.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK REACHES OUT A TREMBLING HAND TO MILLARD...

SHE TAKES THE DRESS GLOVES... AND LETS THEM FALL INNOCUOUSLY TO THE FLOOR.

MOTHER VÜDLACEK REACHES OUT TO MILLARD WITH AN OPEN PALM...

MOTHER VÜDLACEK SMILES.

MILLARD IN TURN, EXTENDS HIS OPEN PALM TO HER.

THE VOTIVE CANDLE FLICKERS AS MILLARD AND MOTHER VÜDLACEK REACH OUT...

...INCHING CLOSER TO GRASPING EACH OTHER'S HAND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS.

ON THIS TABLEAU...

THE INSTANT THEIR HANDS CLASP AND THE WARMTH OF HAPPINESS THROBS ACROSS THEIR PALMS... THE VOTIVE CANDLE DIES.

BLACKOUT

Final Curtain.