

THE DISPOSAL

CHARACTERS

The CHAPLAIN
JESS, a young prisoner
ARCHIE, a young prisoner
LUKE, a middle-aged prisoner
A GUARD
MONA, Luke's wife
Jess's FATHER
JOE RUSELLI, a young prisoner
ANOTHER GUARD

35 min 3 m 3 F THE DISPOSAL

PROLOGUE

A priest, a man in his thirties, kneels in prayer. The light is dim.

CHAPLAIN. Dear God, one of the men on death row goes to the chair tonight. To die. I don't know how I can face him today. I don't know how I can face *any* of them. I go to them and feel my own guilt in watching them suffer. Their vile language would shock me if I didn't know what they know they are facing. Their personal morals in the prison, their crude disrespect of one another, the graffiti scrawled on the walls ... Still, I feel they are men more sacred than I, for they have felt the wrath of man, and the abuse of man as I have not, in ways in which I have been spared. So who am I, I must always ask myself, to try to bring faith into the hearts of men who have been used by life so badly? *You*, Holy Father, are but a joke to them, and *faith* a foolish myth. This particular young man has been on death row for two years, confined inside of a narrow cell — dear God, even a lion in a zoo has more freedom — that even cheats him of seeing the day. And hope! What a curse hope can be! I've had to watch him live through three promises of freedom when his lawyer sought to get his sentence changed ... and watch his hopes rise, only to fall again when the governor refused to recognize his appeal. We are not to torture them, the law states. But who would not rather take lashes or be maimed than to have to sit for two years and wait for death? The very waiting is the most cunning torture not even a devil could devise. Help me, Holy Father. I need courage to face this day before me. *(He gets to his feet and exits. Blackout.)*

Scene 1

Death Row in a state penitentiary in the Midwest. Three cells are shown onstage. In the center cell is a young man of about thirty who, despite his mature years, still acts like a boy, seems to us like a boy. His name is Jess. On his right is a fat, screechingly effeminate young man in his early twenties named Archie. On his left, a middle-aged man named Luke.

It is very early morning. The sun is just beginning to rise, but we can see only a glimpse of it through the tiny, rectangular window in Jess's cell, too high for him to look through unless he stands on his cot. Archie and Luke sleep soundly, snoringly. Jess sits on his cot, his head in his hands. He sits thus in total silence, in deep, troubled thought for several long moments. Then he stands on his cot and looks out of his window.

JESS. *(To himself, softly.)* Day. *(He stands thus several moments, looking out on the new day, trying to fill his lungs with the fresh air. Then he jumps down off his cot and rushes to the bars of his cell, calling loudly.)* Guard! Bring me m'breakfast. It's day! I want a cuppa coffee fer Christ's sake! Bring me m'coffee. I need m'coffee like a man needs his blood. It's day.

ARCHIE. *(Without rousing from his cot.)* Shut up.

LUKE. *(Same.)* Let a man get his sleep. *(Both Archie and Luke return to sleep, Luke snoring heavily.)*

JESS. *(To Luke, who sleeps on.)* I don't make as much noise talkin' as you do snoring. You snore like a goddamn buzz saw! There's nights when you kep' me awake all night with your goddamn snorin'. You got no right t'object if I holler for my breakfast.

ARCHIE. Shut up, you bitch!

LUKE. Go back to sleep.

JESS. *(To Archie.)* Don't call me a bitch, you faggot. A bitch is what you call a woman. You talk like everyone in the whole goddamn world was a woman. But I'm no woman, see?

ARCHIE. *(Still without rousing.)* Fuck you!

JESS. Fuck you, too. I may be a lotta things in this life, but I'm no goddamn faggot.

ARCHIE. Fuck you!

LUKE. *(Finally sitting up, speaking loud.)* Will you two kids stop hollerin' and let a man get his rest?

ARCHIE. See there? She wants her beauty sleep. You are interfering with Princess Lukemia's beauty sleep.

LUKE. *(With disgust.)* Oh shit! *(He lies back down and tries to return to sleep.)*

JESS. *(To Archie.)* Can't you ever call a man by his name, without calling him Princess this or Madame that? Do you have to make the whole world sound like faggots?

ARCHIE. Fuck you! *(He tries to return to sleep, huddling the covers around his shoulders.)*

JESS. *(To himself, dreamily.)* I always did like the early morning. When I was a kid back on the farm, Pa used to get me outta bed every morning at five o'clock. Yes sir. Five o'clock. Goddamn, some a those black winter mornings were cold as a bear's ass, and Pa 'n' I'd make our way out to the barn to begin the chores, with Ma behind in the warm kitchen, and it'd be so cold and black, sometimes with the stars still in the sky, sometimes a little sliver of moon'd still be there, and we couldn't see anything in front of us except our breath. Our breath looked like fog steamin' up off the ground, or smoke out of a chimney. And it'd be so fuckin' cold, our noses'd be numb by the time we got to the barn to do the milkin'.

ARCHIE. *(Half-asleep.)* Shut up.

JESS. But I remember spring mornings, too. Goddamn, they was pretty. After that long, freeze-ass winter, it was like Mama had taken you in her arms again, and smiled at you, and hugged you, when spring came again. And the sun came out early, and there'd just be a little chill in the air, enough to make you feel peppy 'n' glad to be alive. And then we'd see the trees begin to sprout green buds, and a few weeks later they'd be full of leaves. And the fields would look like a green ocean, and around the house, the flowers Ma had planted would bring little spots of pretty colors to the front yard. Jesus! The world looked pretty then.

ARCHIE. Shut up, girl. *(Now Jess goes suddenly wild with fear and panic and dread. He runs around his cell, shaking the bars, pounding them, as if he might contain the physical energy to break his way into freedom.)*

JESS. I don't wanna die. I don't wanna die. God, please! I don't wanna

die. Do something, God. Don't let 'em send me to the chair. Gimme a miracle or somethin', God! Make the governor decide to save me. Let him think of some of the good things I done in this life. I saved a little calf once. No shit. I saved its life when it was gonna die of pneumonia. I nursed that li'l calf every morning and kept her warm under her blankets, and made sure the vet gave me the right warm medicines for her, and I *saved* her. She got well. In another kind months, she was sassy and fat and Pa got a good price off her, when he sold her to ... *(He thinks.)* to be slaughtered. Jesus! After all that work I done savin' her life, Pa sold her to be slaughtered. *(He laughs cynically.)* Yah. That poor li'l calf grew up nice and fat finally and then they slaughtered her for veal chops. Jesus! What'd I go t'all that trouble for? Why'd I feel so proud at the time, proud of savin' her? When all they did was slaughter her? *(Screams.)* Christ! I wanna live! I wanna see more summer mornings. I wanna see the leaves come in leaf again. I wanna see the calves and lambs born and grow. And I want corn-on-the-cob again, and strawberries, and the smell of honeysuckle. I wanna feel a girl's soft boobs again 'n' get laid. I wanna see movies again, and eat ice cream. Christ! Let me into the world again. Please! *(Archie sits up in his cot, bristling with indignation.)*

ARCHIE. Look, *Mary!* Just because you're making your grand exit tonight is no sign the rest of us have to suffer the tortures of the damned.

JESS. Shut your dirty-sewer mouth, *Mary!* *(The guard appears with trays. He wears a black shirt and black trousers that are tucked inside his shiny black half-boots.)*

GUARD. *(Full voice.)* Breakfast!

JESS. It's about time. *(The guard sets a tray inside Luke's cell but Luke continues to sleep and snore. Then he gets to Jess's cell.)*

GUARD. How'd ya sleep?

JESS. How ya think? *(He grabs for his coffee.)* Coffee and a butt. Thass all I been cravin' for the past two hours. *(He starts gulping his coffee as the guard leaves a tray in Archie's cell.)*

ARCHIE. Bless you, Grosvenor, my good man. The duchess is ready for her *petit déjeuner*. *(Archie takes the coffee and rolls and sips and nibbles with some elegance.)*

GUARD. Pretty fancy talk for a guy that killed his mama and his grandma.

ARCHIE. Judge not lest ye be judged, Grosvenor, dear. After all, "there are crimes and crimes."

GUARD. Well, you committed your share.

ARCHIE. And I shall receive due punishment, too, just like *Miss Jess* is going to get tonight, at the stroke of ten.

GUARD. You sure will.

ARCHIE. Meanwhile, I intend to enjoy life to the utmost, within the confines allowed me in this morbid environment.

GUARD. You're still gettin' your kicks, huh?

ARCHIE. Fortunately, man has not yet discovered any means of imprisoning the imagination. I read, I have my fantasies, occasionally I hear some lovely music on my hi-fi, and I always have *you*, dear, to come stalking down the corridors to greet me every morning in those crazy boots.

GUARD. You *like* the boots, huh?

ARCHIE. Mad for them.

GUARD. If you're a good boy, I'll come around some time and let ya lick 'em.

ARCHIE. Promise? *(The guard laughs.)*

JESS. Hey, Guard! Any mail?

ARCHIE. Oh God! We're going to go through that routine again.

GUARD. You know it's not in yet, Jess.

JESS. No telegrams come during the night?

GUARD. Nope.

ARCHIE. Any *billet-doux* by carrier pigeon?

JESS. Don't pay no 'tention to him. You'll keep special watch for me, won't ya?

GUARD. I bring ya every bit of mail that comes with *your* name on it, Jess.

JESS. Goddamnit, there's gotta be a letter down there someplace.

GUARD. There's nothin' down there now.

JESS. *(Pulling a wrinkled postcard from his pocket.)* But the Ol' Man wrote me this, see? He wrote me this card from Spokane and said he'd get here to see me before it happened. Now, you may not know something about my old man, but *I* happen to know he's a man of his goddamned word, and if he says he's gonna get here, that means he's gonna get here.

GUARD. Sorry.

JESS. OK, then. Are ya sure there's been no telephone calls?

GUARD. No telephone calls.

JESS. Look, maybe the telephone rang sometime when you guys in the office or wherever you hang out were too busy to notice.

GUARD. There's a woman on the switchboard, Jess. She gets every

call that comes in.

JESS. And there's been no call from my old man?

GUARD. Nope. No call from your old man.

JESS. OK.

GUARD. Wanna gimme your menu now, Jess?

JESS. Menu?

GUARD. Yah. The chef fixes ya anything ya want tonight. Remember?

JESS. Oh yeah.

GUARD. (*Pencil in hand.*) What'll it be?

JESS. I dunno. I don't feel hungry now. It's hard to think of what you're gonna wanna eat at night when ya don't feel hungry in the morning.

ARCHIE. Order the grandest spread you can imagine, *honey*. Make that lousy chef get off his ass and work a little.

GUARD. Whatta ya like best to eat? It's as simple as that. Whatever it is, the chef'll fix it.

JESS. Lemme think. I allus liked fried chicken. I can't think of anything I ever liked better'n fried chicken.

ARCHIE. What a dreary lack of imagination!

JESS. (*To Archie.*) OK, you tell me, *Duchess*. What's better'n fried chicken?

ARCHIE. Fried chicken, although I admit it can be succulent, is a peasant dish. Make the chef come through with a little *haute cuisine*.

JESS. I never had any *o kwizeen*. What's it taste like?

ARCHIE. *Haute cuisine* is not a dish. It is the highest form of culinary accomplishment. *Haute cuisine* raises cooking to an art.

JESS. Yah? Where'd you ever have any?

ARCHIE. I admit I have not traveled enough to enjoy the world's great restaurants, but I have read about them.

JESS. What are they like?

ARCHIE. Well ... if it were I ordering my last meal, I think I might ask for filet mignon with Béarnaise sauce.

JESS. I know what filet mignon is.

ARCHIE. The Duke de Guermantes in Proust discusses the Béarnaise sauce that was served him once on a trip from London. It had not been prepared to his liking. He complained, "Devil of a Béarnaise sauce," and it ruined his entire day.

JESS. Fuck that shit. What is it?

ARCHIE. Order it and find out.

JESS. Maybe I wouldn't like it.

ARCHIE. Somehow, I'm certain I would.

JESS. Suggest something else.

ARCHIE. Well ... there's always Lobster Thermidor. It's a tasty concoction.

JESS. I've had lobster tails down in Florida.

ARCHIE. *My dear girl*, lobster tails are not to be compared with cold-water lobster.

JESS. Yah?

ARCHIE. Of course not. Order Lobster Thermidor made with *Maine lobster*.

GUARD. Look. You gotta be reasonable. We don't have time to fly in any Maine lobster.

ARCHIE. Well, there's Chicken Tarragon, Salmon Mousse, *Pompano en Papillote*, Sole Marguery, *beef à la Stroganov*, *duck à l'Orange*, turkey stuffed with *pâté de foie gras* ...

JESS. I never heard of any of that shit.

ARCHIE. It's your last chance for a new "taste thrill."

JESS. OK, *Mary*. You order my dinner for me, you know so much.

ARCHIE. Are you serious?

JESS. Sure. Go ahead and order.

ARCHIE. Very well. Guard, are you ready?

GUARD. Shoot.

ARCHIE. I think he should have a fragrant cold soup for an appetizer. *Vichyssoise*? Or perhaps a cold curry soup. Yes. Tell the chef he will begin with a cold *Senegalaise* soup.

GUARD. Jesus!

ARCHIE. S-E-N-E-G-A-L-A-I-S-E soup. Cold.

GUARD. (*Writing it down.*) OK.

ARCHIE. And I think perhaps a light Mimosa Salad of limestone lettuce, chopped egg, and artichoke hearts. (*He discerns the guard's confusion.*) Mimosa. M-I-M-O-S-A. The recipe should be in any reputable cookbook.

GUARD. I'll write it down, but I'm not makin' any promises.

ARCHIE. And Chicken Paprikash on homemade noodles, remember. Homemade noodles make all the difference in the world.

GUARD. The chef knows how to make noodles.

ARCHIE. Chicken P-A-P-R-I-K-A-S-H. Got it?

GUARD. Got it. What's it mean?

ARCHIE. Paprika.

GUARD. Then why the fuck din ya say *paprika*?

ARCHIE. On proper menus, it's always listed *paprikash*.

GUARD. What else?
ARCHIE. Well ... I think some asparagus might be tasty.
GUARD. OK. Asparagus.
JESS. I don't like asparagus. I hate asparagus. It's the only vegetable I hate.
ARCHIE. Very well. Inasmuch as I was going to suggest a Hollandaise sauce with it, which really wouldn't go well with the rich paprika sauce, maybe we can dispense with the asparagus. *(To Jess.)* Would you like to express a preference of any kind?
JESS. I like hashbrowns.
ARCHIE. When you're already having rich noodles?
JESS. Yah. I want some hashbrowns.
ARCHIE. That's a lot of starch in one meal.
JESS. I don't have to watch my diet now.
ARCHIE. Very well, give *her* some hashbrowns, since she insists. And maybe some Brussels sprouts, in a light butter sauce.
GUARD. Brussels sprouts.
ARCHIE. That should make up the main course. Now for dessert. Let me think.
JESS. *(With a sudden idea.)* I know what I want for dessert. I want Cherries Jubilee.
ARCHIE. Where, pray tell, did you ever hear of *Cherries Jubilee*?
JESS. I had 'em once, when I was in the Navy. A restaurant in San Francisco.
ARCHIE. I was going to suggest a lemon soufflé with brandy sauce.
JESS. *I want Cherries Jubilee!*
ARCHIE. It's a very *bourgeois* dessert.
JESS. I don't care if it's *bourgeois*! I want it.
ARCHIE. *(To the Guard.)* Very well. Give *her* Cherries Jubilee.
GUARD. I got it.
JESS. And bring it to me flaming, so I can blow out the flame before I eat it.
GUARD. OK. Cherries Jubilee. Coffee?
JESS. Yah. Lotsa coffee.
ARCHIE. And I do hope you'll be able to spare him a bottle of champagne. Dom Pérignon '57.
GUARD. Sorry. No booze.
ARCHIE. But no meal is complete without a proper wine.
GUARD. You know the rules. No *booze*.
ARCHIE. Wine is not booze.

GUARD. It is in this hotel. That all, Jess?
JESS. I guess so.
GUARD. Cake? Macaroons?
JESS. Yah. Maybe some macaroons.
ARCHIE. Tell the chef to put a little almond flavoring in them. Otherwise, they're like wet straw.
GUARD. I'll take the menu to him. He'll do the best he can.
JESS. And watch for the mail, Guard. Or a telegram. The Ol' Man said he'd be here. I know I'll hear from him today.
GUARD. The mail don't come for another half-hour. If there's any messages, you'll get 'em. That's for sure. *(The guard starts off.)* Luke. Wake up. Your breakfast's gettin' cold. *(The guard goes off. Luke slowly comes to, rises to a sitting position, and finally gets out of bed to pick up his tray as Archie and Jess talk.)*
ARCHIE. You're too much. Honestly, you're a hoot. What makes you think your old man is gonna come to see you fry?
JESS. Because I got a card from him, see? *(He holds the card outside his bars.)* And he says on this card, he's gonna be here to see me before I ... *(He can't bring himself to say it.)*
ARCHIE. *(Sadistically.)* What's the matter? The cat got your tongue?
JESS. Shut up.
ARCHIE. *(Laughing maniacally.)* Before you fry. Why don't you say it? *(Jess is silent. He can't say it.)* Come on and say it. I dare you. "Before I fry."
JESS. Why should I?
ARCHIE. Because that's what you're gonna do, isn't it? *(Jess is silent.)* Isn't it?
JESS. ... I guess so ...
ARCHIE. *Guess so!* That's a hoot. You *know* so. *(Jess is silent.)* At least, you *should* know so. You don't honestly believe the governor is going to come through with a pardon, do you?
JESS. It's happened before.
ARCHIE. Oh shit, *Mary!* Sometimes you're too much. Sometimes I think you're a schizo. You believe things you see in movies. Quit trying to kid yourself, girl. You're gonna fry. And you're gonna crap your pants when they drag you off, just like the others.
JESS. Wanna bet?
ARCHIE. What?
JESS. That I don't crap my pants like the others.
ARCHIE. What's the use of betting? You won't be around to pay off.

JESS. Oh! I hadn't thought a ...
ARCHIE. You'll be *gone*, Mary.
JESS. Look, goddamnit! I'm not a girl. I'm a man, you fuckin' lousy faggot. And if you call me *Mary* once more, I swear to Christ, I'm gonna get a crack at you before they send me up and choke that sewer throat of yours ...
ARCHIE. My sewer throat! That's a vivid metaphor.
JESS. You're a disgrace to human nature, even if you do have brains.
ARCHIE. Brains alone are, if not a disgrace, certainly an embarrassment to human nature ...
JESS. I admit you're smart. But you're still a faggot.
ARCHIE. Yes. And I am also a realist.
JESS. Whatta ya mean?
ARCHIE. I can face what's ahead of me.
JESS. I can, too.
ARCHIE. I heard you ranting a while ago, praying for God or the governor to intervene and save you from frying tonight.
JESS. I suppose you're looking forward to when it happens to you?
ARCHIE. I'm really not very concerned.
JESS. That's because you're a goddamn psycho, on top of being a faggot, and you've got no human feelings about *anything*.
ARCHIE. What you call "human feelings" are only the product of centuries of conventional thinking that society has instilled in us in order to divert us from discovering the real crimes that they perform in the name of *law*.
JESS. I don't know what you're talking about.
ARCHIE. The world itself is the great criminal.
JESS. Bullshit!
ARCHIE. And we are like insects that got caught in the world's web, and had to commit some violent act to get out. I feel no guilt whatsoever for my supposed *crimes*. And I regard my rapidly approaching death philosophically.
JESS. You're a freak.
ARCHIE. Perhaps it takes a freak to face reality. For instance, just look at the freakish irony of our situation. If we had the forethought to *plan* our murders across the border in one of our neighboring states, we would not now be on death row, but serving life sentences, working contentedly at some usual craft or employment to keep our evil minds occupied.
JESS. A lotta good it does to think about that now.

ARCHIE. True. It's merely an idle thought that sheds some light upon the incongruities of human justice.
JESS. I wanna see my old man!
ARCHIE. Why can you not admit to yourself by this time that your old man is not going to show up, any more than Christ is going to appear out of the clouds with a band of angels and carry us all up to heaven?
JESS. I hate talk like that.
ARCHIE. You hate it because it's true.
JESS. *You* say it's true. But you don't know *everything*.
ARCHIE. Oh, I humbly admit that.
JESS. Then admit that you don't know whether my old man is coming or not.
ARCHIE. If he comes, I'll say a thousand Hail Marys! *(Pause.) Princess Lukemia!* Do you want to place a bet with me?
LUKE. What on?
ARCHIE. That *Miss Jessica* doesn't crap her pants tonight when they take her off to fry! *(Luke is silent for several long moments.)*
JESS. Take the sonuvabitch up on it, Luke, I'm not gonna. You can count on *that*!
LUKE. Sure. I'll take your bet ... *Dragon Lady.* *(Archie laughs.)*
How much do you wanna bet?
ARCHIE. Anything you say, *dearest*.
LUKE. I've got five bucks.
ARCHIE. It's a deal. I'll bet five bucks *she* does.
LUKE. OK.
JESS. *(Under his breath.)* Dirty...!
ARCHIE. What's that, *sweetie*?
JESS. You heard me.
ARCHIE. Mad?
JESS. I hate guys like you, think they know everything.
LUKE. *(Sitting on his cot, eating his breakfast with the calm of one who has accepted his fate.)* Pay no 'tention to him, Jess.
JESS. He riles me.
LUKE. That's all he wants to do. Don't give him the satisfaction of payin' any 'tention to him.
JESS. You're right, Luke.
ARCHIE. Holy Mother! All I'm trying to do is to drill an ounce or two of realism into your immature brain. It'll be so much easier tonight, when the guards come and lead you away ...

JESS. Shut up. God damn you!

ARCHIE. It'll be so much easier if you just admit that that's what's gonna happen, and neither the governor, nor God, nor Jesus, nor the Holy Virgin is going to come down and stop it.

JESS. Shut up, just shut up, will ya? That's all I ask, is just shut up!

ARCHIE. Very well.

JESS. I'll face ... whatever I've got to face ... in my own way.

ARCHIE. I never tried to kid myself. After I shot my old lady and Gran, I just sat down and said, "Well, I've done it. I had to do it some-

time. There's no point in running away because *Miss Lily Law* would catch up with me in time. So I'll call them and tell them." That's what I did. I picked up the telephone and called the sheriff's office and said:

"Mary, I've done it. Come on out and get me. And bring a couple of stretchers to carry them away in." And then I sat down and waited.

They could hardly believe I'd really done it, I'd always been known around home as such a goody-good. But I *had* done it. Finally, they

came to their senses and realized I wasn't kidding. Jesus! When they got a look at those bloody corpses in the kitchen, there was no denying

anything. (*He laughs.*) One of the cops was a young fellow, new on the force. He vomited when he saw them. Oh dear! I've never had much

patience with squeamish people.

JESS. You wanna know something. I wanna vomit, just listening to you talk.

LUKE. Me, too.

ARCHIE. Well! Forgive me for being here, please! I would gladly remove myself from your sensitive presence, but I'm afraid it's impossible under the circumstances.

LUKE. Pay no 'tention to him, Jess.

JESS. I won't.

LUKE. He's plain abnormal.

ARCHIE. *I'm* abnormal. *I* am. That's a hoot. (*He laughs uproariously.*) I suppose you two are 4-H club winners!

JESS. I was.

ARCHIE. It *can't* be.

JESS. I was a 4-H club winner when I was seventeen.

ARCHIE. Well, congratulations, *duckie!* It is very heartening to realize that a 4-H club winner had the guts to kill his young wife just

before she had a baby. That is the most delicious irony I've digested since reading Kafka. If I were in your cell, I would kiss both your cheeks for congratulations.

JESS. Which cheeks?

ARCHIE. (*Laughing even harder.*) Oh, that's marvelous! You're honestly showing a little wit before they take you off to fry. Thank God. I hate to see a man lose all sense of humor, regardless how sordid the situation.

JESS. (*Looking at his watch.*) The mail oughta be here.

LUKE. Relax, Jess.

JESS. There's *gotta* be a letter there. The old man *knows* this is the day.

LUKE. Look at it this way, Jess. His car may have stalled on the road. It's a long way 'tween here and Spokane. Yah. And he's gotta travel through the desert. He may be stalled some place where he can't even

get in touch with you.

JESS. I hadn't thought of that.

ARCHIE. He's stalled some place in a bar, so drunk he can't get a dime into a phone booth. That's where he's stalled.

LUKE. (*Sofily.*) Pay no 'tention.

JESS. I won't.

LUKE. Ya got a mother, Jess?

JESS. No. She died.

LUKE. Any other kin?

JESS. A sister somewhere.

LUKE. She know?

JESS. I dunno. I ain't seen her since I was a kid.

LUKE. Oh.

JESS. I don't see no reason to beat around the bush about it. She was a whore.

LUKE. Shit, when I was a kid, I used to watch my old lady screw every man that came to the house. The plumber, the ice man, the electrician ... Any man knocked on the door, she'd have him in bed in less time than it took her to put on her lipstick.

JESS. My old lady was very religious. I dunno which is worse. To have a mother that's a whore or one that's crazy religious. I think probly one's as bad as the other.

LUKE. My wife's real religious. I din wanna marry anyone like my old lady.

JESS. No, I didn't, either. Wanda's no whore but we both had played around some before we got married.

LUKE. All kids do, these days.

JESS. Yah.

LUKE. When I was a kid, I din lose my cherry till I was eighteen.

JESS. No shit?

LUKE. Yah. I was shy.

JESS. Jesus, I lost mine when I was twelve.

ARCHIE. I was *eight*. That was undoubtedly the happiest day of my life. You'd both be appalled to hear the details.

LUKE. Save them.

ARCHIE. On technical grounds, however, some would consider me still a virgin. *(Begins to quote.)*

"What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight that tap and sigh
Upon my glass and listen for reply,
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain ..."

JESS. Turn off, fer Christ sakes!

ARCHIE. I think it's a lovely poem.

JESS. From you, it *stinks*.

LUKE. From you, *anything* stinks.

ARCHIE. I can only admit that I am not admired in this company.

LUKE. *(In a serious voice.)* How ya feel, Jess?

JESS. You mean ... about tonight?

LUKE. Yah.

JESS. I ... I'm beginnin' to get scared, Luke.

LUKE. Yah.

JESS. Yah. I never really believed it till this morning. I went to sleep last night the same as any other night. But I woke up in an hour or two, and then I began to realize, this is *it*. This is really *it*. I couldn't kid myself any longer.

LUKE. I been wonderin' about that day. Wonderin' how I'll face it, myself.

JESS. My heart's been pounding ever since I woke up. I'm sweatin' like a stuck pig. My stomach's in knots. My throat's dry as sand. I wish it could happen now and I could get it over with.

LUKE. The way I look at it, Jess, death is just as ... *(He searches for the right word.)* as *ordinary* as anything else. I mean ... well, shit ... if you was free now, you could get killed tonight out on the freeways just as easy as in the chair, and ...

JESS. I know.

ARCHIE. Kierkegaard says that life itself is a prison and we all want to get out.

LUKE. What's *she* talkin' about?

JESS. I dunno.

ARCHIE. "Therefore, since the world has still much good, but much less good than ill ... I'd face it as a wise man would, and train for ill and not for good."

LUKE. That one's got a quotation for *everything*. Then you're never disappointed.

ARCHIE. Never expect anything good to happen. That's my motto. JESS. I hate t'admit it, but maybe the sonuvabitch is right.

LUKE. I hate faggots.

JESS. I knew one in reform school was a nice guy. Smart, too. Used to help me with my lessons.

LUKE. They're all smart.

JESS. I guess so.

LUKE. I allus bear the shit out of 'em when they came hangin' round me.

JESS. *(Reading his postcard.)* "Dear Son Jess. I'll be leaving Spokane tomorrow morning. It may take me five or six days to make the trip as my old car is pretty run down. But I'll get there or bust."

ARCHIE. He's busted. Send someone out to pick up the pieces.

LUKE. When did you get that, Jess?

JESS. Three weeks ago.

LUKE. And no word of any kind since?

JESS. No.

LUKE. Ya ask the warden to try to get in touch with him?

JESS. They looked all over Spokane. No one could find him.

LUKE. Too bad, kid, I know how ya feel. It'd be kinda nice to have your kin come see ya before it happens. On the other hand, sometimes they only make ya feel worse. Like my wife. Every time she comes to visit, I feel lower'n whale shit the rest a the day.

JESS. If I could just talk to *someone* that ... maybe cared something about me ... I'd feel better.

LUKE. Ya like your old man?

JESS. Yah. He was a great guy ... mosta the time.

LUKE. That's good.

JESS. He used to beat the hell outta me once in a while, but I got so I could give it back to him, good as I got.

LUKE. When's the last ya seen him?

JESS. 'Bout five years ago, when I left home.

LUKE. A man can change a lot in five years.

JESS. Wanda and I got married two years ago. We had a real nice letter from him when we wrote him we were gonna have a baby. He sent us ten bucks to put aside for the kid. Pretty nice of him, wasn't it?

LUKE. Yah. Does he drink?

JESS. Sometimes.

LUKE. Every one drinks sometimes.

JESS. After he lost his farm, he started drinkin' pretty heavy. But he was depressed. He din know what he was gonna do. He still has a hard time makin' a living for hisself.

LUKE. I see.

JESS. But he's no alcoholic or anything. He's got too much strength a character fer that.

LUKE. Maybe he just don't have the guts to come see ya ... here on death row. Maybe he just couldn't bring hisself to face it.

JESS. Shit! My old man's not afraid a *anything*. Still it must be pretty hard to go talk with someone that's gonna fry. What could a person say? (*Eyes off left.*) Jesus! Here's the mail! (*Hollering.*) Bring me that letter, Guard! Let's have it now! (*The guard appears stage left, carrying a few pieces of mail.*)

GUARD. Here y'are, Luke.

LUKE. (*Taking the letter.*) Thanks.

JESS. (*Anxiously.*) Give it to me, Guard. I know ya got *something* there for me. Let's have it!

GUARD. Yah, here's *something*, but I don't know *what*. (*Passes a letter to Jess.*)

JESS. Le's see! Le's see ...

GUARD. (*To Archie.*) Nothing for you, *Gloria*.

ARCHIE. What? I didn't get a letter from Alain Delon? *Quel dommage!*

LUKE. What is it, Jess?

JESS. (*Ripping it up.*) An advertisement for a gas furnace.

ARCHIE. (*After a wild fit of laughter.*) A lot of need you'll have for a furnace where you're going!

LUKE. Sorry.

JESS. They forwarded it from the address Wanda and I lived at, two years ago. It got sent to two other addresses before it got here.

LUKE. One thing you can allus depend on in this life. The crap allus comes through.

JESS. Yah. The crap allus comes through. (*The chaplain appears stage right, dressed in a long black skirt.*)

CHAPLAIN. Good morning, Luke.

LUKE. Morning, Father.

CHAPLAIN. Good morning, Jess.

JESS. Hi!

CHAPLAIN. I'm sorry you didn't hear from your father.

JESS. It don't matter.

CHAPLAIN. I wish you felt like talking to *me*, son.

JESS. Don't call me son. You're not my father.

CHAPLAIN. Maybe I could be if you'd let me.

JESS. I don't understand that shit.

CHAPLAIN. You could look upon me as a father. You could talk to me as one.

JESS. But you *ain't* my father. What's the good of pretending?

CHAPLAIN. We all of us share the same Father, Jess. In heaven.

JESS. I want my father here on *earth*.

CHAPLAIN. I wish you'd reconsider me.

JESS. What for?

CHAPLAIN. Maybe I could give you confidence in what you have to face. Maybe I could make it easier. Maybe I could give you faith.

JESS. What in?

CHAPLAIN. The life everlasting.

JESS. I don't want the life everlasting. I want life *now*.

CHAPLAIN. I could help you accept death.

JESS. I don't *wanna* accept it. Death is an enemy. I hate it!

CHAPLAIN. I wish I could bring you solace.

JESS. Bring me what?

CHAPLAIN. Solace, peace.

JESS. Peace! When I know that in a few more hours I'll be in the chair? Do you expect me to feel peace when I know that?

CHAPLAIN. I could help you face death.

JESS. How?

CHAPLAIN. The true Father can forgive us any of our sins, and help us face death peacefully. (*Jess thinks it over.*)

JESS. I want my ol' man to forgive me. I want to tell him just how it was. Why I done what I done. I want to make him *understand*.

CHAPLAIN. Our heavenly Father can understand *all* our sins.

JESS. Well ... I want my earthly father to talk to. He's the only father I ever knowed.

CHAPLAIN. Sometimes those we love disappoint us, Jess.

JESS. What do you mean?

CHAPLAIN. Few humans can help us face eternity.

JESS. I still wanna talk to him!

CHAPLAIN. He has failed you. Our Holy Father never fails us.

JESS. Then why am I here?

CHAPLAIN. You transgressed.

JESS. So they're gonna kill *me* to make things right.

CHAPLAIN. That's *man's* law.

JESS. But it ain't right I should die.

CHAPLAIN. I cannot dispute that.

JESS. They could keep me here, couldn't they? And give me some kinda work to do. I wouldn't be no threat to anyone. Why do they have to treat me like a ... like a calf ... in a slaughterhouse?

CHAPLAIN. God can even help us to accept injustice, and still love those who would destroy us.

JESS. I can't see it that way. I just know it's not right I should have to die.

CHAPLAIN. We must abide by man's law, too, while we're on earth.

JESS. But man's law and God's law aren't the same. How can we abide by both when they're not the same?

CHAPLAIN. (*Gently.*) You committed a grievous sin.

JESS. I had reasons for doin' what I done. I ain't saying I was right to do it. I *wasn't* right. But it's not right to kill *me*, either. It's not gonna bring my wife and kid back to life for them to kill *me*, is it?

CHAPLAIN. I'm not here to argue the laws of man. We have to accept them as they are for the time being. I can only help you to face the fate that man has decreed for you, with courage and faith, and peace in your heart when that last moment comes.

JESS. What difference does it make? It don't take long, anyway. You walk into the room and sit down and in a few seconds, it's all over. So what difference does it make how I face it?

CHAPLAIN. The noblest thing man can do is to face his own death with faith and love in his heart.

JESS. I'm no hypocrite! I'm not gonna get down on my knees *now*, and say, "I'm sorry, God," when all my life I never done any praying, never paid any 'tention to God, din even know whether I believed in Him or not, and what's more, din even care. No. I'm not gonna be a goddamn hypocrite and start praying now!

CHAPLAIN. It wouldn't be hypocrisy if you could really find Him now, in your heart, and pray to Him. (*Pause; Jess listens.*) Some of us never find Him until we face death, or some other crisis. But He always welcomes us, no matter when we find Him, or how.

JESS. You're wasting your time, mister.

CHAPLAIN. Very well, Jess. I'll be back again this evening. Maybe you'll feel differently then. Would you like to talk to me, Luke?

LUKE. Not now, Father.

CHAPLAIN. Archibald?

ARCHIE. I'm getting along just beautifully, thank you, *dear*.

CHAPLAIN. Very well. Good day, men.

ALL. So long. Good day, Father. (*The chaplain goes off left.*)

ARCHIE. It's basic black for that *girl* every season. Why doesn't *she* liven up that *drag* with a few emeralds?

LUKE. You oughta call him *Father*, Jess.

JESS. Why?

LUKE. A body just does. Whether he's a Catholic or not.

JESS. But he *ain't* my father.

LUKE. It's just a sign of respect.

JESS. I'll call him *mister*. That's enough respect. He's just another man to me.

ARCHIE. You said death is an enemy. I'd say life was *my* enemy. I gave up my belief in God and all that hogwash the same time I gave up playing with dolls.

JESS. You don't b'lieve in nothin'.

ARCHIE. I suppose that's true.

JESS. You believe in God, Luke?

LUKE. Oh sure, Jess, I b'lieve in God.

JESS. I dunno if I do or not.

LUKE. I heard ya prayin' this morning.

JESS. Yah?

LUKE. Din you hear yourself?

JESS. I guess it's just habit, left over from childhood.

LUKE. I never think to pray like my wife's allus tellin' me to, but I *b'lieve*. Yes sir!

JESS. I guess I pray lots of times without knowing it. I allus prayed when I was a kid. Th'old lady brought me up that way. I find myself ...

sometimes ... just outta habit ... praying. Like, I'll say: "Dear God, please do this for me, or that." But I'm not too sure there's anyone up there listening.

LUKE. Oh, there's a God, all right, Jess. Course there is. I dunno if he's gonna do *me* any good, but he's *there*.

ARCHIE. (*Singing gaily.*) "Somebody up there *hates* me! Somebody up there *hates* me!"

JESS. A memory came to me this morning, Luke.
LUKE. Yah?

JESS. The time I nursed a sick calf back to health. The vet had told my old man there was no use tryin' to save her. But I din want her to die. I nursed her all night and all day and I saved her, Luke. No shit. I saved her life.

LUKE. (Touched.) Yah?

JESS. But they ... (He begins to choke up.) Jesus, what's the matter with me?

LUKE. You cryin'?

JESS. Yah. For *some* reason. I dunno why.

LUKE. Your feelings are on edge.

JESS. No. I know why I'm cryin'. They sent her to the slaughter-house that next spring.

LUKE. Oh!

JESS. I never realized how bad that made me feel, Luke. Jesus! I hated my old man then. I begged him to let me keep the calf after I'd nursed her the way I done. We got to be real friends, that calf 'n' me. She'd kiss me. No shit. I'd go out to the barn every morning bright 'n' early, 'n' help feed her, and she'd kiss me, like she knew I'd helped save her life.

ARCHIE. Was that your *first* girlfriend?

JESS. (Infuriated.) You really *are* a pervert! You got no human feelings. You can't let a decent thing exist in the whole damn world, can you?

No! You gotta make everything dirty. *Dirty!* Jesus, you disgust me!

ARCHIE. My! *She's* in a rage.

LUKE. Pay no 'tention, Jess.

JESS. (Pause; to Luke.) I remember now ... I brooded a long time after the old man sent her away. He tried to reason with me. "That's the way of life, my boy. Man kills to live." But I couldn't see it that way.

ARCHIE. Get you! *You* killed, didn't you?

JESS. (Slowly.) ... I admit it.

ARCHIE. You killed your wife when she was pregnant, for Christ's sake, and now you're carrying on like *Hecuba* because of a calf! The calf was killed for a reason. You killed your wife and unborn child for *no* reason.

JESS. How do *you* know?

ARCHIE. Oh, I heard about the testimony at the trial. You killed them with no reason at all. Then you tried to kill yourself and chickened out.

JESS. Shut up!

ARCHIE. You even said you loved your wife.
JESS. I did.

ARCHIE. (In a singsong, mocking voice.)
"Yet each man kills the thing he loves
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a ..."

JESS. Maybe I had reasons I din wanna talk about.

ARCHIE. You call *me* a pervert, and say I've got no human feelings, while you're crying about a calf that gets slaughtered after you yourself slaughtered your wife and child. And the calf was slaughtered for a perfectly good reason. I happen to like veal, as do many other people. But you killed your wife and kid for no goddamn reason at all!

JESS. I had my reasons.

ARCHIE. All right, what were they?

JESS. You wouldn't understand.

ARCHIE. Dear boy! I happen to have an IQ of one hundred and forty-five. If I cannot understand, whom, pray tell, can you expect to?

JESS. Maybe no one. Whatta I care?

ARCHIE. If you could have come up with a reason for killing them, you might not be here today at the *Death Row Hilton*.

JESS. It's too late to worry 'bout that now. (There is a silence.)

LUKE. Why *did* you kill her, Jess? Do you know?

JESS. Maybe.

LUKE. Did you talk it over with the headshrinker here?

JESS. Yah.

LUKE. Ya figure it out?

JESS. Oh ... it's all kinda complicated. I ... I just don't wanna talk about it, Luke.

LUKE. To tell the truth, it allus puzzled *me* ... why you done it. I mean, I killed a man in an armed robbery. I had to kill him, or he'd kill me. There was never any two ways about it. I was scared shitless. That's th' oney reason I killed. But ... why would *you* come home one night and kill your wife just a few weeks before she was to have her kid? It beats me.

JESS. It beats me, too. I'm not sure I really know.

LUKE. You seem like a *nice* kid to *me*, in most ways. But I got a long record. I got a wife 'n' two kids. We din always get along too great, but I never wanted to kill 'em.

JESS. I dunno, Luke. I guess I just went off my nut when I done it. Ya wanna *know* something? I'd never planned to kill *them*, or

anyone else. It'd never even occurred to me. And then one night, I found myself doin' it. And I couldn't believe it when I found myself doin' it. I couldn't believe it.

ARCHIE. You were probably subconsciously afraid the kid would look like somebody else's kid. That's my guess.

JESS. Turn off, creep!

ARCHIE. You had to have *some* reason. No one kills without *some* reason. Even the *joy* of killing is a reason. Jesus! I enjoyed killing Granny and the old lady. I loved it! God, how I loved it. *(He gives an imitation of his mother and grandmother getting stabbed by him.)* "My God, Bess! Archie-boy is stabbing me. Oh! My God! Archie-boy! I'm your mother. Archie-boy! I'm your darling grandmother. I love you, Archie-boy. I love you!" *(He laughs like a fiend.)* Love. The more they used that horseshit word, the deeper I struck. Love. Those old crows, talking about *love*. Love is *shit*. Love is *shit*.

JESS. *(Quietly.)* I din enjoy killing.

LUKE. Howd ya do it, Jess?

JESS. I woke up one night. Wanda was sleeping beside me. Very sound. And I leaned over her and looked her full in the face, and I kissed her on the lips, and then ...

LUKE. Yah?

JESS. I put my hands around her throat and pressed the breath out of her. That's all.

LUKE. Simple as that, huh?

JESS. Simple as that. And then I kissed her again, and told her I was sorry. But she didn't hear.

LUKE. Hm m m m m m m m.

JESS. And then, like *Mary* says, I tried to kill myself and couldn't do it.

LUKE. Why?

JESS. I just couldn't do it. That's all.

LUKE. I mean, why did you intend to in the first place?

JESS. I was tired, trying to live.

LUKE. Yah.

JESS. It was hard.

LUKE. I know.

JESS. Ya know something? I was never *prepared* to live. I was green. No one ever told me what it was like when you were out on your own, with no way of making a living except ... with your hands. Labor. Common labor. That's all I was good for.

LUKE. I was trained as a mechanic, and I made a living that way. I shoulda trained to be a mechanic or something like that while I was in high school, but I spent all my time in sports, to make m' old man proud of me.

LUKE. I made a *purty* good living, but a man allus wants to do *better*. People look down on him if he's just a mechanic.

JESS. Yah. I felt like I had to make it *big*, for some goddamn reason. I felt I had to drive a Caddy, 'n' wear neat clothes, make people notice me.

LUKE. That's a bait we all swallow.

JESS. Jesus, I got to the place where I'd do *anything* fer money! Do things I din like doin', just to make out.

LUKE. Yah.

JESS. I used to hate m'self fer some a the things I done.

LUKE. Tell the truth, I never *had* to rob to make a living. But it seemed so easy, to get that extra bread and buy yourself some a the trimmings of life. Just to make yourself feel you're doin' as well as the

next fella.

JESS. Yah. I guess we're all that way.

ARCHIE. I never fell for that crap of making it *big*, and driving a Caddy. I killed because I hated. Pure and simple. I hated those hypo-

critical old biddies, and couldn't stand to be around them anymore. I wouldn't mind staying in prison forever, because it's a *man's* world, and you don't have to try and get along with women. I suppose what I should have done is go to Denmark and have one of those operations

and become a woman, myself. I had a friend in Chicago who did that. *She* came back from Denmark looking like *Brigitte Bardot*. Tits and everything! She had one man who wanted to marry her. Honestly!

LUKE. Yah, but could she have kids?

ARCHIE. Who cares? The world's most serious problem now is over-

population.

JESS. There's gonna be one less by tomorrow.

LUKE. But you said you *wanted* to die.

JESS. It's one thing for a man to kill hisself because he don't *wanna* live, and another thing entirely to have others kill you because they

don't think you got a right to live. That's what hurts most! Other men are making me die. And, I don't feel that's their right.

LUKE. I still can't unnerstand a young fella like *you* wantin' t' die.

JESS. To tell the truth, life didn't seem *worth* living to me at the time, Luke. The whole world looked so ugly to me then, I thought life wasn't worth the effort.

LUKE. Yah!

JESS. And after killing *them*, my wife and kid, I found out I didn't have the guts to kill myself. I turned out to be a real chickenshit after all. I was gonna do away with *all* of us, but didn't have the guts to kill myself. What a chicken-shit I turned out to be. What an A Number-One Chickenshit I was!

ARCHIE. I have no regrets at all. But I had no intention of killing myself. I'd do the same thing over again. I only wish I had the *chance* to do it over again. Too bad. You can have the pleasure of killing someone only once. I'd like nothing better than to kill those old bitches every day, and watch them moan, and cry, and holler about *love*. Love, love, love, love, love! *Shit!* *(The guard comes on from left, shouting.)*

GUARD. Shut up, *Duchess*. There's a real lady outside.

ARCHIE. Oh, of course! Let's not offend the *fair sex*.

GUARD. Your wife, Luke.

LUKE. Mona? Today? *(The guard returns off left.)*

ARCHIE. Oh Christ, it's *Pious Penelope*, come to bring us her blessings.

LUKE. You shut up, faggot! I happen to love and respect my wife.

ARCHIE. I was sure you *would*. *(The guard returns with Mona, a drab woman in her forties.)*

LUKE. Oh ... hi, Mona. Golly, this is a surprise. *(The guard unlocks the cell door and Mona enters. Throughout this scene, Archie listens and reacts with occasional grimaces.)*

GUARD. Twenty minutes, ma'am. *(The guard exits. Mona stands looking upon Luke with pious sweetness.)*

LUKE. I ... I wasn't expecting you today, Mona.

MONA. *(Somewhat too compassionate.)* Did you think I would let a week go by without coming to see my husband?

LUKE. No, but you usually come on Thursday afternoons, so I ...

MONA. This Thursday, I'm meeting Mama at the airport. She's coming to visit. So I decided to come see you today.

LUKE. Oh, well that's *great*. Yah! It sure is good to see you, Mona.

MONA. You know you can always count on *me*, Luke. I'm not the kind of wife who deserts her husband in a time of need.

LUKE. Yah. Well ... thanks, Mona. Uh ... you're very thoughtful.

MONA. And I still pray for you every night, Luke.

LUKE. *(More and more uncomfortable.)* Thanks.

MONA. We may have had our disagreements at times, Luke, and there may have been many times when I disapproved of your life, but I'm not one to hold grudges now.

LUKE. *(Offering a chair.)* Here, Mona. If you're gonna stay a while, ya might as well sit down and be comfortable.

MONA. *(Sitting.)* Thank you, Luke.

LUKE. How are the kids?

MONA. Oh, they're fine. They send you their love, of course.

LUKE. That's nice. Tell 'em I think of 'em.

MONA. Of course.

LUKE. Uh ... Mona, I ... I never ast ya, but I've been wondering all this time ... Do the kids look down on me? You know how I

mean.

MONA. *(Stoically.)* I have told them they must *still* honor their father, like the Bible says.

LUKE. Oh ... thanks.

MONA. Of course, it's not easy. Some of the other schoolchildren look down on them.

LUKE. Yah ... I suppose. *(He appears mournful.)* I'm sorry.

MONA. It's hard for them.

LUKE. Yah.

MONA. I wish I could bring them with me some time, but somehow I don't feel it's right for them to see you here.

LUKE. No. I don't want them to see me.

MONA. Now let's talk about something more cheerful, shall we?

LUKE. *(Delayed reaction.)* Oh sure ... anything you say.

MONA. I saw the sweetest movie last night. A Walt Disney, about three pet animals — the cutest little dog, and a Siamese cat, and a tame raccoon — and they made their way all through miles of forest to find their master. It was *so* dear. I went with Jeanette and we both sat there and cried and cried.

LUKE. I saw a good show on TV the other night. An old Cagney film. One I'd missed before. It was great.

MONA. I always liked Spencer Tracy.

LUKE. Yah! He was great, too. *(There is a long, uncomfortable silence between them now; both of them search their minds desperately for conversation material.)*

MONA. Lorna had her first date the other night.

LUKE. Oh, that right?

ARCHIE. *(Under his breath.)* How *sweet!*

MONA. Yes. I hesitated to let her. Only *fourteen*. But other girls her age are dating now. And I don't want to be too strict with her.

LUKE. No. Course not.

ARCHIE. (*Very sotto voce.*) Of course not! Let her get laid like all the other little darlings.

MONA. (*After another uncomfortable pause.*) Children are growing up awfully fast today.

LUKE. Yah. Sure are.

ARCHIE. Yes, they sure are! They're growing up fast enough to know what a bitch *you* are.

MONA. Junior is smoking.

ARCHIE. Pot or hashish?

MONA. He denies it, but I always smell it on him.

LUKE. Sorry to hear that.

MONA. I just pray to God that they stay away from that marijuana and LSD. They're having lots of trouble with some of the children in school with things like that.

LUKE. Yah. You tell 'em to keep away from things like that.

MONA. I do my best with them, Luke. You can depend on that.

LUKE. Sure. Of course ya do, Mona. I'm not worried 'bout that.

MONA. But it's not easy.

LUKE. I s'pose not.

MONA. They feel they have something to live *down* now.

LUKE. Yah. I s'pose I've been a bad influence.

MONA. Oh, I don't look at it that way, I tell myself we all have our crosses to bear.

LUKE. Yah. I guess we do.

MONA. (*Suddenly.*) Oh! (*Begins looking through her handbag.*) I brought you a little booklet. Here it is. Jeanette gave me a copy and I just live by it. *A Prayer to Greet the Day With*. I can't tell you what a blessing this little book has been to me. So I got one for you, too.

LUKE. A different prayer for every day of the year. Now if you'll read one of these each morning just as soon as you awaken, it's going to help you get through the day. I just know it will. Here, dear.

LUKE. (*Accepting the little booklet.*) Thank you.

MONA. Well, I ... suppose I may as well be going now.

LUKE. Well ... no need to rush off.

ARCHIE. No. Just get on that broom and start flying pronto!

MONA. My twenty minutes is about up, anyway.

LUKE. OK.

MONA. I just wanted you to know that I still care.

LUKE. Yeah ... thanks, Mona.

MONA. And you can bet, I'm still holding my head high when

I go out anywhere, Luke. I'm not going to let anyone think I'm ashamed.

LUKE. Yeah ... that's fine.

MONA. There are some people in town who won't speak to me anymore, but I know that their lives are not without fault, either.

LUKE. You bet.

MONA. There are lots of people in that town who ... who've done things just as bad as ... as bad as anyone else ... who are in no position to criticize *anyone*.

LUKE. Yeah. Sure.

MONA. "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." That's the attitude I take.

LUKE. Yeah.

MONA. So I still hold my head high when I walk down the aisle at church, and keep a smile on my face just to show people that I still have my pride.

LUKE. Yeah. Good for you, Mona.

MONA. Well ... goodbye, dear. (*She stands. Luke kisses her on the cheek.*)

LUKE. Bye, Mona.

MONA. And I'll be back again next week. You can depend on that. I'm not going to let my husband down.

ARCHIE. Bring him some dirty pictures, honey, and we'll *all* have fun.

LUKE. Yeah. Fine, Mona. See ya next week. Fine. (*Calling.*) Guard! (*The guard hurries on, unlocking the door.*)

MONA. Next week, I'll bring you some brownies. I didn't have time to make any for today.

LUKE. Yeah. They allus taste good. (*Mona walks out of the cell.*)

MONA. Goodbye!

LUKE. Bye, Mona! (*She is off. Luke remains motionless.*)

ARCHIE. My god, what a *ghoul*!

LUKE. (*Suddenly fierce.*) You shut up, you dirty faggot! My wife's a fine woman!

ARCHIE. Sorry. (*Luke sits now with his hands over his face. We hear him begin to sob softly.*)

JESS. Whatsa matter, Luke?

LUKE. She talks to me ... like I was already dead. (*The lights fade.*)

Scene 2

Night. Jess sits on his bunk, his head in his hands. Archie is finishing up the splendid repast that he ordered for Jess. Luke sits idly, an expression on his face of one who has given up all hope.

ARCHIE. A splendid repast. I shall recommend the chef to St. Peter, after I have my turn in the chair. I am most grateful to you, Jess.

JESS. You're welcome.

ARCHIE. There are few things in life more gratifying than a good meal.

JESS. I couldn't touch it.

ARCHIE. If only you hadn't insisted on those *hashbrowns*! I feel bloated.

LUKE. Very hospitable of them, ain't it? The day you're gonna die, they fix you a grand meal, and who can enjoy it, knowing it's his last? Why don't they give us better grub when we can enjoy it?

ARCHIE. One man's loss is another's gain. "Devil of a *Béarnaise* sauce!" I relished every morsel. The *Mimosa Salad* was from heaven!

LUKE. Why did you give it to *him*? The pig.

JESS. You din want it.

LUKE. No. That rich food never agreed with me.

JESS. I din want it to go to waste. I hate to see things go to waste.

LUKE. I wouldn't feed horse turds to that freak.

JESS. *She* enjoyed it.

ARCHIE. Indeed I did. It was a *Lucullan* feast. Now I should like to spend the evening out. Maybe the theatre. Yes. It would be pleasant now to see a lovely performance of *Swan Lake*, or attend an elegant masquerade ball at the *Plaza*, dancing with all the *haut monde* of society.

LUKE. (To Jess.) That one can sure dream up big ideas.

ARCHIE. But, under the circumstances, I suppose I shall remain in tonight. Besides, the weather is a little inclement. I'll read a little Nietzsche, perhaps, until *Miss Jessica* takes her leave of us, and then curl up in bed with some delicious dirty fantasies, and fall into a deep slumber. (To Jess.) I'll miss you in the morning, *Jessica dear*.

JESS. I won't miss you.

ARCHIE. Sorry!

LUKE. That's one thing you got to be thankful for, Jess. You won't be waking up anymore with that morphadite beside you.

ARCHIE. *Princess Lukemia*, I hate to trouble the shallow waters of your ignorance, but I am *not* a morphadite.

LUKE. Whatever the hell you call yourself, you're not made like other men.

ARCHIE. You are inferring then that all men are made *alike*?

LUKE. Yes.

ARCHIE. That's medieval.

LUKE. It's *what*?

ARCHIE. Medieval. It's the kind of thinking that belongs in the Dark Ages.

LUKE. Thanks for telling me.

ARCHIE. There are no two men on the face of the earth who are made *exactly* alike. Think of it! It's almost incredible, isn't it? You'd think that, out of accident if nothing else, it would happen sometimes that two people were identical.

LUKE. I just hope there's no more like you, *dearie*.

ARCHIE. I'm sure there isn't.

LUKE. It's men like you that cause all the trouble in the world. You with all your smart-ass thinking. You make all kinds of trouble. You're a morphadite and a Red.

ARCHIE. *What*?

LUKE. You heard me!

ARCHIE. Why do you assume that because I'm a faggot I'm a Communist?

LUKE. The two go together.

ARCHIE. (To himself.) To think that I have to endure the society of such *primitive* mentalities.

LUKE. Well, maybe you're not a Red, but I know damn well you're a *morphadite*.

ARCHIE. I assure you, I am made just as other men, even though, as I said before, no two of us are identical.

LUKE. I don't believe you've got a cock and balls like other men. You couldn't and talk and act the way you do.

ARCHIE. But I do. More's the pity. For the little good they do me here.

LUKE. Well, I know this much. There's something wrong with you *somewhere*. I may not know where. But *somewhere*, there's something very wrong about the way you're made.

ARCHIE. My physical examination showed me to be normally made and in excellent health.

LUKE. Maybe on the outside, but I bet that *inside* your organs are all mixed up somehow, and you've got a vagina stuck away somewhere up in your esophagus.

ARCHIE. Oh dear, I should give anything to find it.

JESS. Cut out this kinda talk a while, will ya, fellas? (*Silence.*) It's makin' me kinda sick ...

ARCHIE. Pity!

JESS. I'd like to be kinda silent for a while, if ya don't mind.

LUKE. Sure, Jess.

JESS. I'm just tryin' to get used to the fact that ... in another hour or so ... I'll be gone.

LUKE. Yah. I think about it, too.

JESS. I never thought I'd be so scared ... until this morning, when I woke up and knew the day was here.

LUKE. I guess no one knows exactly how he's gonna feel about death, until he faces it.

JESS. Jesus, I'm scared, Luke!

LUKE. I don't blame ya, kid.

JESS. Are ya sure it don't hurt much, Luke?

LUKE. It ain't happened to me yet, Jess, but they say it just lasts a few minutes, and then you're gone.

JESS. Gone. (*He thinks a moment.*) Gone where?

LUKE. That's something I never figured out, Jess.

JESS. Ya s'pose people like us really go down to hell and burn ... *forever*?

LUKE. I dunno, Jess.

ARCHIE. Hell! That's a hoot. Why don't you boys bring your minds up to date? There's no more *hell* than there is a *heaven*.

JESS. My old lady was allus filling me and my sis with stories about *hellfire-and-damnation*. She went nuts on that religious shit, though! They finally had to take her away to the asylum.

ARCHIE. She'd have to be nuts to believe it in the first place.

JESS. I just wonder ... if I *have* got a soul ... where's it goin'?

ARCHIE. No place, *honey*. This is the end of the line.

JESS. I can't help wondering.

LUKE. Why don't you talk to the priest, Jess?

JESS. What for?

LUKE. He might help you to feel better about it.

JESS. He can't stop it from happening.

LUKE. No. But he can give ya a li'l courage, maybe.

JESS. How?

LUKE. I dunno, but ...

JESS. The oney thing that'd help would be to talk to m' old man a little while.

LUKE. It don't look like he's gonna make it now, Jess. Ya may as well try the priest.

JESS. I don't see the point.

LUKE. You can't lose anything by tryin'.

ARCHIE. Any kind of talk about God absolutely gives me the creeps.

LUKE. Try it, Jess.

JESS. Well ... shit! I don't mind talkin' to him. But if he expects me to get down and pray, and make believe like I was holy or somethin', it's no good.

LUKE. He don't expect ya to say anything you don't believe.

JESS. I don't have anything against the guy, but I wanna talk to my *own father*. That's who I really wanna talk to!

LUKE. He's not gonna make it, Jess.

ARCHIE. (*Singing.*)

Fare thee well,

Daddy's gone goodbye.

No need to sigh.

No need to cry ...

LUKE. Shut up, faggot!

ARCHIE. Jesus, the last person in the world I'd ever wanna talk to would be *my old man*!

JESS. You'n I are two *different* people!

ARCHIE. He was a total stranger around the house. I never could believe he was really my father. We never had two words to say to each other. Whenever he did come home, he'd look at me like I was something that had been dropped down the chimney by a *flamingo*.

JESS. My ol' man and me used to fight sometimes, but he liked me. I know he did.

ARCHIE. When I was twelve years old, my old man took one look at me, with red nail polish on and mascara, and said, "Jesus Christ! Is that what I brought into the world?" And then he took off and never came back. (*Laughs.*) What a hoot!

LUKE. I don't blame him!

JESS. I made my ol' man proud of me ... two or three times. I was

a good basketball player ... and once I won the broad jump in the all-state track meet.

ARCHIE. How many *broads* did you jump, *honey*?

LUKE. A guy can't even make an ordinary kind of remark without him twistin' it into somethin' dirty!

ARCHIE. So sorry, *Princess Lukemia*, if I have offended your sensibilities again.

JESS. My ol' man was awful proud a me then. He went all over town braggin' about "my son's a champ." On th' other hand, though, he sure could gimme hell when I done something bad. Jesus, he beat the shit outta me when I stole a motorcycle once! Damn near killed me! He knocked three teeth out. And one eye was swollen shut for about a month afterwards. He sure had a temper, my ol' man.

LUKE. Look at it this way, Jess. What good would it do if he did come see you now?

JESS. I'd like to talk to him.

LUKE. What'd ya talk about?

JESS. I'd like to tell him ... how it happened.

LUKE. Yah?

JESS. I'd like to tell him ... I'm sorry.

LUKE. Then what?

JESS. I just think I'd feel better. That's all.

LUKE. You could tell that to the priest.

JESS. But he ain't my *father*!

LUKE. You could pretend he was.

JESS. No, I couldn't. That priest is nothin' like my ol' man. Nothin' at all.

ARCHIE. (*Looking off left.*) Well, here she comes now in *full drag*, so be prepared to tell her something, or she's gonna be awful disappointed.

LUKE. Try to talk to him, Jess. *Try.* (*The chaplain comes on hurriedly, accompanied by a guard. They stop before Jess's cell.*)

CHAPLAIN. (*Enthusied.*) I've wonderful news for you, Jess.

JESS. Yah?

CHAPLAIN. Your father has arrived.

JESS. (*Almost dumb.*) Huh?

CHAPLAIN. Your father finally came. He's just outside now. I wanted to come and prepare you first. (*Jess becomes very excited, jumping up and down, shouting.*)

JESS. Then show him in, fer Chris' sakes! Show him in!

CHAPLAIN. Just a minute, Jess. Let me say a few words first.

JESS. What for? My old man is *here*. I wanna see him!

CHAPLAIN. Quiet for a minute, Jess. Please.

JESS. (*Puzzled.*) What's the matter?

CHAPLAIN. Remember my warning.

JESS. What about?

CHAPLAIN. Humans sometimes don't live up to all we expect of them.

JESS. (*Very excited.*) To hell with all that! My old man is *here*. I wanna see him!!

CHAPLAIN. Very well, Jess. (*He signals left.*)

JESS. Jesus, I can't believe it!

CHAPLAIN. You'll have ten minutes with him, Jess.

ARCHIE. Hail, Mary! Hail, Mary! Hail, Mary! Hail, Mary! [... etc.] (*Archie's voice slowly fades as the guard leads on a tired, bedraggled-looking middle-aged man. The man appears intimidated by the environment, and frightened, too. Obviously he has fortified himself with liquor in order to face this situation, and now his steps are uncertain. The guard brings him before Jess's cell, and father and son stare at each other silently while the guard unlocks Jess's cell.*)

FATHER. (*Finally, in a very meek voice.*) Hi, Jess!

JESS. Pa!

GUARD. (*Admitting the man into the cell.*) You have ten minutes, mister.

FATHER. Thanks. (*Chaplain and guard exit left. Jess grabs his father in an embrace.*)

JESS. Pa! You made it! (*The father is too awed and frightened to be able to respond to Jess's great emotional need of him. He feels awkward in Jess's embrace.*)

FATHER. (*Trying to affect a little laugh to show good nature.*) Yah ... I made it.

JESS. (*Eagerly.*) Sit down, Pa. (*The father sits.*) Jesus, I'm glad you came, Pa!

FATHER. Yah, well I ... I wasn't gonna let ya down, Jess. No sir. I wasn't gonna let ya down. (*But he looks about him fearfully, uncomfortably.*)

JESS. Jesus, Pa ... there was so much I wanted to say to ya and ... now you're here, I ... I can't think of what it was.

FATHER. Yah ... Well, I feel the same, Jess. All the way here, I kept thinkin' of all the things I'd say to ya, and now ... Well, I guess they're all gone.

JESS. Yah.

FATHER. Just lemme say this, though, Jess. I'da got here sooner but the old car, she kep' breakin' down.

JESS. Yah.

FATHER. I'll get me a good job soon and get me a new car.

JESS. Pa?

FATHER. ... Yah, Jess?

JESS. Pa, are ya ... very mad at me?

FATHER. No. I'm not mad at ya, Jess. I'm not mad. *I know ya never done what they accused ya of. Course ya never. Don't worry, Jess. (He pats Jess's knee feebly.) I know you're innocent. (There is a long silence. Jess does not know how to respond to his father's inability to face the truth.)*

JESS. Pa!

FATHER. *(After a few moments.)* Yah, Jess?

JESS. Pa ... I ain't innocent.

FATHER. *(Trying to laugh it off.)* Aw now, come on, Jess-boy, I'm your old man. You can't expect me to believe you're guilty. No siree. I tol' all my friends how it was. That gal you married was a chippie, Jess. I knowed that the first time I laid eyes on her. She had some other fella with her when it happened and you jest wanta protect her 'cause you ...

JESS. *(This is his most hopeless moment.)* Pa! *(A long silence.)* Wanda wasn't no chippie. Wanda was OK. I done it, Pa. I done it! *(There is another long silence. The father squirms and clears his throat.)*

FATHER. *(Finally.)* Now, Jess, you know what I think? I think they've had ya in here so long you're wrought up. Sure. Thass all's the matter with you now. They just got you thinkin' you done ... you done what they say you done 'cause ...

JESS. *(Crying out in despair.)* Pa! *I'm guilty!* Can't ya unnerstand? I did do it! *I'm guilty!* *(Another long silence.)*

FATHER. Well now, Jess, I'm your pa. And I'm not gonna believe you done what they say you done. I'm not gonna believe it. No use in tryin' to make me, 'cause I jest won't believe it.

JESS. Pa, you've got to b'lieve it! You've got to! You've got to try to unnerstand.

FATHER. Like I said, Jess, you're jest overwrought.

JESS. *(Crying out.)* I'm guilty!

FATHER. You're jest overwrought.

JESS. *(Subsiding now.)* No ... I'm guilty.

FATHER. No you ain't, Jess. No you ain't.

JESS. *(A soft, unconscious prayer of helplessness.)* Oh God!

FATHER. You're my son and I'll never believe you're guilty. No siree. And I'll stand up for ya to my friends as long as I live. You can bet your boots on that.

JESS. *(Giving up.)* Holy Christ!

FATHER. *(Looks at his watch.)* I think I better be goin' now, Jess.

JESS. *(Humbly.)* Pa ... I'm guilty.

FATHER. *(Ignoring Jess.)* I ... I guess I better not try to stay for ... any longer 'cause I gotta go t' another town to find myself a place to stay. These motels around here cost too much. I ... I better be goin' now, Jess.

JESS. *(A cry for help.)* Pa!

FATHER. And jest remember, I'll never believe anything else 'cept my boy was innocent.

JESS. *(Crying out.)* Pa! Help me face my guilt! Help me, Pa! Help me!

FATHER. I gotta go, Jess.

JESS. Help me! Help me!

FATHER. Uh ... Jess, do ya think I could pick up your belongings now? *(Jess looks at his father dumbly.)* Whatever you ... got you're having to leave behind. Personal things, and ...

JESS. Everything's down there in your name.

FATHER. Is there any ... money there, Jess?

JESS. Some.

FATHER. I can use it, Jess. Uh ... 'bout how much money d'ya think is there, Jess?

JESS. 'Bout sixty bucks.

FATHER. That'll sure come in handy.

JESS. It's all yours.

FATHER. It may seem mean of me to ask ya, Jess ... but ... I still gotta live and as long as a person lives, a person's gotta think about money.

JESS. I understand, Pa.

FATHER. Thank you, Jess.

JESS. No need to thank me. I got no one else to leave it to.

FATHER. Uh ... how do I get outta here now? *(Calling.)* Guard! *(The guard appears immediately and unlocks the cell door.)* Well ... g'bye, son.

JESS. G'bye! *(The guard escorts Jess's father out, the father walking faster and faster to get away from the atmosphere of death. Jess sits for several moments, looking totally desolate. Then he cries out in need.)* Guard! *(Pause.)* Guard! Tell the chaplain to come here. Please! *(The*

chaplain comes on briskly, followed by a guard.)

CHAPLAIN. I'm here, Jess.

JESS. Talk to me! Will ya talk to me?

CHAPLAIN. That's what I'm here for. *(The guard unlocks the cell door and admits the chaplain.)* What is it, Jess?

JESS. Talk to me like a man! Talk to me like another human being! Tell me you understand why I done it ...

CHAPLAIN. I'm only a priest, Jess. I can only *help* you to face your sins. I can't face them *for* you.

JESS. *(Thinking.)* Yeah. That's right. What you said this morning was right.

CHAPLAIN. How do you mean?

JESS. Sometimes ... people ... disappoint us.

CHAPLAIN. Yes.

JESS. My ol' man drove all that distance ... and it was no use.

CHAPLAIN. I'm sorry. Still ... it was good of him to make the effort.

JESS. Yah. Maybe I was expectin' *too much*. After all, I guess there's some things we have to face *alone*.

CHAPLAIN. There are some things we can face only with *God*.

JESS. Don't talk to me about God now! I'm so scared, I feel like I'm gonna puke ... my knees are bucklin' so bad, I don't see how I can even walk.

CHAPLAIN. I implore you, let me help you find peace before they take you away.

JESS. I never felt any peace while I was living. Why should I feel any now?

CHAPLAIN. Because you need it now to face what's ahead of you.

LUKE. Just tell him you're sorry, Jess. That's *all* he's askin'.

JESS. *(In a full voice.)* Of course I'm sorry. Who wouldn't be sorry?

I din wanna kill my wife 'n' kid. I don't even know what made me do it. I just went wild for a minute, because I was so scared. I din

wanna *see* my kid. Can't anyone understand that? I was scared to

look at him after he was born. I didn't have the guts to look at any

life that came from *me*. Because you wanna know something? *(He*

becomes louder and more violent.) I'm a *no-good sonuvabitch* and I

know it! Is that what God wants to hear me say? OK! I've said it! It's

true. So how could I look at a kid I brought into the world? How

could I believe that anything good could ever come outta *me*?

CHAPLAIN. What makes you think so poorly of yourself? And call yourself such a vile name?

JESS. I've robbed. I've lied. I've stolen. I've pushed dope. I've murdered. I've committed *every* sin in the book!

CHAPLAIN. God can *still* forgive you. JESS. I've already said I'm sorry ...

CHAPLAIN. Say it to *Him*.

JESS. I don't even know who He is.

CHAPLAIN. He is your true Father. It is only He who can understand all that is in your heart.

JESS. How can I believe in a heavenly Father when I never knewed one on earth?

CHAPLAIN. If man has destroyed God's name for you, can you bring yourself to believe in some positive force out there in the void?

Some universal spirit so much greater than ourselves that all our transgressions are absolved, and blended into the elements, which may be neither good nor bad, but only vital to existence.

JESS. That talk's too deep for *me*.

CHAPLAIN. If you cut your finger, the wound heals, doesn't it? JESS. ... Sometimes.

CHAPLAIN. Our wounded souls heal, too, Jess. If you can believe in that great healing power, you needn't be afraid.

JESS. I don't have the faith that anything's *ever* gonna heal.

CHAPLAIN. I'm sorry. *(He looks at the clock.)* The time has come now, Jess. *(Jess is silent. The chaplain steps out and signals to the two*

guards, who appear immediately, unlocking the cell. Jess steps out first.)

JESS. So long, Luke. *(He tosses Luke a pack of cigarettes.)* I guess I've had my last butt. I guess you're not afraid of a little thing like cancer.

(Luke cannot face Jess. He waves goodbye to him and turns away.) So long, Archie.

ARCHIE. Save a nice warm seat for *me, girl*. *(The two guards flank Jess.)*

CHAPLAIN. Have you anything final to say?

JESS. Yah. I got all kinds of feelings inside me I'd like the world to know about.

CHAPLAIN. *(After a pause.)* I'm ready to hear them.

JESS. *(After a hopeless struggle.)* ... I guess I just can't find the words to explain them.

CHAPLAIN. Very well. God have mercy on you, Jess!

ARCHIE. *(To himself.)* Mercy! That's a hoot.

CHAPLAIN. We must go now, Jess.

JESS. *(Suddenly violent.)* No! I don't wanna die! I wanna find some piece a heaven here on earth before I die! I wanna find some little

piece of happiness in *this* life before I look for it in another! (The two guards have seized Jess by the arms now, beginning to carry off his kicking, protesting body as the chaplain offers a prayer. Jess loses control of his bowels. Archie holds his nose and moves to the back of his cell, away from the bad odor.)

ARCHIE. Pee-u! He did the same as all the others.

JESS. (Violently.) Git away from me you sons a bitches! Get away! Ya got no right to make me die! You ain't no rightful judge a anything I done. Take your hands off me, ya dirty motherfuckers! I hate your goddamn guts! I hate all of you! I got enough hate inside me now to rile up heaven forever! I got hate enough now to turn heaven into hell!

CHAPLAIN. (As Jess is speaking.) Deliver me, O Lord,

From eternal death
In that awful day
When Heaven and Earth
shall be moved,
When Thou shall come to judge
The world by fire.
Full of terror am I
And I fear the trial
and wrath to come.
That day shall be a day
of wrath,
Of calamity and misery;
That day shall be a
mighty one,
And exceedingly bitter.
Grant them eternal rest,
O Lord,
And let perpetual light
shine on them.
Deliver me, O Lord,
deliver me.
Amen.

(We can still hear Jess's wildly protesting voice after the procession has disappeared. There is a long silence on the stage. Finally, Archie speaks.)

ARCHIE. When the chaplain comes around to me, I'm just gonna say, "Look, girl, save your wind to fart with. I'm gonna die. Let's get it over with."

LUKE. You fuckin' fairy, you don't know what you'll say. You'll

probably shit your pants like everyone else!
ARCHIE. ... Maybe you're right. Who knows? Maybe I'll bawl. You wanna know something? I've never cried in my *entire* life. Never! Not even one tiny, salty little teardrop. I just never learned *how*, I guess. (He laughs.)

LUKE. You're a fucking psychopath! I don't care if ya got an IQ of fifty thousand.

ARCHIE. Why should *you* want to live?

LUKE. I don't know whether I do or not. All this time, I've been feelin' resigned to what's gonna happen. But who knows *how* I'll feel when they come and get me?

ARCHIE. Anyway, I won my bet. You pay me tomorrow at recreation.

LUKE. OK. You know where you can stuff it ... (Archie laughs. Another guard brings in a new prisoner, Joe, a young man about Jess's age, and puts him in Jess's cell.)

ARCHIE. Oh, you're cute. Wanna share my cell, honey?

JOE. (Takes one look at Archie.) Not with you in it.

ARCHIE. You'd come to like me ... in time. (The guard locks Joe in Jess's cell and departs, taking Jess's few remaining personal belongings with him.)

LUKE. My name's Luke.

ARCHIE. I'm Archie.

JOE. I'm Joe.

ARCHIE. Oh, are you Joe Ruselli?

JOE. Right.

ARCHIE. Oh, this is a big moment! Do you remember, *Princess Lukemia*? He's the one who entered a sorority house and raped three girls and killed almost a dozen. Oh, I think you're *divine*!

JOE. Save the compliments! (Suddenly the lights dim. The three prisoners hold an awed silence until the lights come on again in full force.)

ARCHIE. I guess that means the end for *Miss Jessica*.

LUKE. ... Hard to believe, isn't it? That just a few minutes ago he was here, alive and screaming his lungs out.

ARCHIE. She's quiet now. (The two guards who took Jess to the chair return now, passing before the cells, going off left.) They've done their duty now. Bless their black hearts.

JOE. Was this Jess's cell?

LUKE. Yah.

ARCHIE. Did you know Jess?

JOE. Yah. We worked together in the machine shop before they brought him up here.

ARCHIE. She was a nice *girl*, but I guess we won't be seeing *her* anymore.

LUKE. How long ya got here, Joe?

JOE. Maybe a year. How 'bout you?

LUKE. Six months.

ARCHIE. I'm next. I go a week from tomorrow. You know something? I never think about it. I'm like Scarlett O'Hara. I never worry about tomorrow. I just let tomorrow take care of itself ... *(He laughs. Now the chaplain appears, coming from the scene of Jess's death. His head hangs down. He looks grieved. His pace is slow and ponderous. The men in their cells watch him silently. When he gets as far as Luke's cell, Luke speaks.)*

LUKE. How'd he finally take it, Father?

CHAPLAIN. Like a man.

LUKE. That's good.

CHAPLAIN. Maybe I don't mean what you think I mean, Luke.

LUKE. Huh?

CHAPLAIN. I said, he took it like a man. He shook, and screamed, and defecated. He was unconscious with terror when they finally had to strap him into the death chair.

ARCHIE. *(Satanically.)* O God that madest this hideous earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy demons? *(He laughs.)*

CHAPLAIN. What do we expect of man? To accept our reckless judgment of him willingly and glad? No. It is *man's* judgment that makes us cower. Not God's. I am proud of the boy that he behaved as he did. We have waited too long for heroes. Let us love man as he is, with his weaknesses and fears. I am sick of the world's cynics and detractors. I am proud that men are as good as they *are*, and have come as far as they have from their humble origin. No. Jess took his destruction as any man might ... *(As he turns to go.)* Good night, men. God bless us all! *(The chaplain exits quickly. Curtain.)*

End of Play

PROPERTY LIST

3 breakfast trays (with coffee, rolls, etc)

Postcard

Paper and pencil

Letters

Keys

Pack of cigarettes

A few personal belongings such as one might have in a prison cell